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# The New Story of Creation: A Trinitarian Perspective

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Much recent religious thought on the environment proceeds from the assumption that the "Old Story" of Christian orthodoxy has been exhausted, at least in its relevance for our relationship to the planet. Many thoughtful people are saying that if we are to learn to live in harmony with the earth, we must understand that Old Story within the "New Story" of the cosmos as it is being told, with increasing clarity, by physics, astronomy, and evolutionary biology. Thus we are witnessing an attempt to remake Christian theology in which old understandings are discarded and reinterpreted in a process of salvage and reconstruction.

This reconstruction proceeds from the highest motives, both in its reaction against the earth-denying obtuseness of many ostensibly Christian attitudes, and in its earnest questing (often ranging eclectically over the world's faiths) for Something Better. A recent issue of *ARC* (1994, Vol 22) provides a good introduction to this attempt to create a new kind of environmentally-friendly religion. The theme of the issue was "Ecology, Cosmology, and Religion." In it, several writers, assuming the environmental shortcomings of orthodox Christianity, suggest reinterpretations or substitutions which are more suitable for the contemporary understanding of cosmology and ecology.

My thesis in what follows is that most of these attempts to reinterpret Christian orthodoxy are flawed in two ways. First, they are hampered by the paradox that the more they invoke the flow of a self-generating cosmic process as the only basis for human selfhood, the more they undercut personality and selfhood, and thus remove any basis for significant action in care of the earth. Thus it is contradictory for many of the same people who are calling for environmentally responsible human action also to criticize the concept of “stewardship.” Second, and more fundamentally, these attempts to move beyond the Old Story of Christian orthodoxy are critiquing an understanding of the relationship of Creator and creation that is itself a product of the Enlightenment. The narrative of Christian orthodoxy is far more spacious than that Enlightenment caricature, though tragically often Christendom continues to warp, curtail, misunderstand, and misuse that narrative. I conclude that trinitarian Christian orthodoxy provides us with a more adequate framework for the care of creation than any of the variations of monism now being prescribed.

Before proceeding further let me make plain that it is not at all my intention to question the vastly expanded picture of the universe—expanded in space, and in the intricacy of its relationships—which is emerging from careful study of the cosmos. Through science we are learning more and more about the majesty of creation, and one of the tragedies of our time is that some defenders of creation have been so committed to a narrow time scale and a science-text reading of Genesis 1 that they have been unable to learn from the other text, creation itself. Thus the very concept of “creation” has been trivialized. I agree with the main features of the New Story of creation, but I wish to question whether it—or the science on which it is based—can stand apart from the main features of the Old Story.

A brief summary of the recent *ARC* articles illustrates this widespread trend towards a rethinking of Christianity—and religion in general—within the framework provided by contemporary biology, physics, and cosmology.

Perhaps the most consistent voice for this reconstruction is Catholic priest Thomas Berry, who draws heavily on the thinking of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. It is thus appropriate that the *ARC* issue began with a brief but eloquent statement, by Berry himself, of his position: “ultimately, everything in the universe finds its context of interpretation within the universe. Within the phenomenal world, only the universe itself is a self-referent, a text without context” (Berry 1994, 7).

After a thoughtful summary of the awe produced by an open-eyed understanding of the earth’s cosmic and evolutionary history, Berry

observes, "This is our sacred story. It is our way of dealing with the ultimate mystery whence all things come into being" (1994, 13). He concludes with the declaration that this picture of the appearance and evolution of earth, and of life itself, in the universe, "is our new Genesis, our own story of how things came to be in the beginning, how they came to be as they are, and our role in the story. The great necessity is that this story be understood and be told as the creative process that it is, our special revelatory experience of the divine mystery itself. Only out of this new revelation can we discover the vision that we need, the mystical communion we seek" (1994, 19). Berry does not mention the "old" Genesis, or the traditional understanding of "special revelation." Indeed, he has elsewhere observed that it might be better if we would set traditional Christian scripture aside for a time and learn only from the revelation provided by the great story of the cosmos itself.

The article in the *ARC* volume by Anne Marie Dalton places Berry's article in the context of his overall contribution. She sums up Berry's analysis in these words:

Berry is consistent in maintaining that religious (in particular, Christian) beliefs played a significant role in the development of attitudes that led to the instrumentalization of nature in the modern world. What has resulted is an immense cultural problem or "supreme pathology"... What is required is an infusion of new values at the cultural level.... Berry proposes that the scientific account of evolution can ground the appropriate values. (Dalton 1994, 21,22)

The article by Stephen Dunn surveys "New Christian attitudes towards the earth" and finds them all wanting. He considers in turn Jürgen Moltmann, Ian Barbour, James Gustafson, Paul Santmire, Douglas John Hall, and Rosemary Reuther, and concludes that "while these authors are trailblazers for Christian theology, in light of the ecological crisis they fail to sense that the turn to cosmology is truly a revolution in our perception of the universe, the Earth, and of ourselves, demanding a new 'horizon' for the theological task" (Dunn 1994, 33).

We need rather, says Dunn, a "radical theological openness" to the picture of human nature provided by the new story. He turns to Berry's words to describe this new perception. We are "being[s] in whom the universe activates, reflects upon, and celebrates itself in conscious self-awareness" (Dunn 1994, 34).

The final article, by Sharon Betcher ("Watery Depths: Ecofeminism and 'Redemptive' Wetlands"), amplifies a thesis which has, in the past decade or so, been advanced with growing insistency: the Christian tradition is deeply (perhaps irretrievably) flawed by its patriarchal perspective,

by its exclusion and fear of the feminine, and by its hostility towards the mysterious and untamed natural world. Drawing on her farmer's suspicion of swamps, her recovered appreciation for wetlands, and knowledge of her body, she observes: "Against the horizon of the sacred and holy, both women and wetlands appear as sinister and forbidding, with little economic value granted to either. Noxious in the case of wetlands, obnoxious in the case of women, moistness—oozing fluids—supposedly defines each of them: milk, menses and mouthiness (e.g. juicy gossip) in the case of women; muck, mire and abysmal mud in the case of wetlands" (Betcher 1994, 53). Her thesis is that "the cultural and intra-psychic maps of 'pollution' communicated through the narratives of Judeo-Christian tradition, position us in destructive relationship with wetlands....I attempt in this article to open out how patriarchy's sacred endeavour of becoming 'clean and proper' has contributed to the destruction of life's generativity" (Betcher 1994, 51).

Betcher's conclusion is to return to a new/old affirmation of wetness and the feminine, which, she argues, might open new possibilities for our experience of the Spirit. For "[b]ecause she has from the beginning insisted on brooding on the waters, it is perhaps no surprise that the Holy Spirit has been silenced in Western Christianity" (Betcher 1994, 57).

These articles together reflect both a negative critique of Christianity, and a positive program for a more cosmically-sensitive faith. The main features of their critique against Christian orthodoxy can be summed up as follows:

(1) The conception of God in orthodoxy's Old Story is of a distant, detached, patriarchal figure with little ongoing closeness to "His" creation. God is transcendent, "above the earth." This divine transcendence is rooted in an unavoidable Judaeo-Christian distinction between Creator and creation, and has given rise to an unhealthy, world-rejecting dualism. Susan Griffin, in *Reweaving the World*, an anthology of ecofeminist literature, expresses explicitly this notion of exclusive transcendence: "the divine as immanent [is] a concept foreign to Judaeo-Christianity. The view that we've grown up with is that the divine and matter are separate and that matter is really dangerous" (Griffin 1990, 87).

(2) This notion of divine transcendence of a patriarchal God has been transferred to "man" through the idea of the *imago dei*—the belief that only "man" is made in God's image. If in our inmost nature we are made in God's image, and if God is transcendent over creation, then "man" too is transcendent over creation as well, and can minimize his connections with the earth. Women are marginalized in this conception, seen as relating to God only through men, and regarded with suspicion because it is more difficult for women to transcend their bodies. (Here we

may recall Betcher's reference to "milk and menses.")

(3) Stemming from this notion that man alone is made in the image of God is the assertion that the Christian concept of salvation is extended only to humans: the rest of the world is "desacralized" and seen only as raw material for the divine-human story of redemption. Christian conceptions of "going to heaven" for eternity give little impetus for the long-range care of the earth.

(4) The practical outcome of these two doctrines—divine transcendence and human transcendence—is the idea of dominion, that we are mandated by God to fill and rule the earth, and to use it for our purposes. Many feel this notion unduly elevates human nature, and taints even the gentler notion of stewardship with an idea of dominion rooted in a conviction of human superiority. As Stephen Dunn says, "a theology of stewardship...cannot address the cosmological revolution" (Dunn 1994, 33). The fact that a recent conference featuring Thomas Berry bore the title "Beyond Stewardship" is an indication of some environmentalists' dissatisfaction with the idea of stewardship. Bill Devall and George Sessions, in their important book, *Deep Ecology*, spell out more precisely what many find objectionable in the concept of stewardship. "For the supporter of deep ecology...the most damaging aspect of the wise steward argument is the continued radical separation of person from wilderness. ...It is in all versions anthropocentric and dualistic. 'We have emerged from the first world of Nature,' the wise steward seems to say, 'and can never return to our place crackling with spirit.' There is no norm of bio-centric equality" (Devall and Sessions 1985, 126).

These then are the main liabilities of the Old Story of Christian orthodoxy, as they are assumed by many proponents of the New Story: a transcendent God, a transcendent "man," and an arrogant notion of dominion sometimes masked as 'stewardship.' Such doctrines, argue proponents of the New Story, cannot provide us with the theological or spiritual resources to make us at home in the cosmos as it is revealed through contemporary science. Instead, as Stephen Dunn argues, "only the turn to cosmology" is adequate to the task. What might such a "turn to cosmology" look like? The main points of the proposed cosmological revisioning of Christianity are as follows.

First of all, for the distant, transcendent deity of the Old Story, the New Story proposes a God of total immanence, a God, in fact, who is co-extensive with the universe. Berry's words make this basic monism explicit: "[T]he universe is the primary religious reality. Any human activity must be seen primarily as an activity of the universe and only secondarily as an activity of the individual...it is clear that the universe as such is the primary religious reality, the primary sacred community, the

primary revelation of the divine” (Berry 1987, 37). That perception of a radical distinction between Creator and creation which seems to be a consequence of affirming divine transcendence is here addressed by an opposite perception: that transcendence is swallowed up in immanence, and the universe, not God, is the primary religious reality; or rather, the universe *is* God, the only agent of creation.

To some feminist thinkers this equation of Creator and creation seems to remove the taint of patriarchy. On this view a divinity which is coextensive with the universe is like a woman in that it/she brings forth life from it/herself. It is in the context of this recovered monism that ecofeminist notions of Gaia—the goddess in which we participate—have become popular. As Starhawk put it in “Full Circle,” a recent film on the ecofeminist vision: “For me the goddess is immanent, she is the world, she is us, she is nature, she is the changing of the seasons, she is the earth herself. It is as if the whole universe were one living being that we are a part of.” Such monism is seen as a necessary move to counter patriarchal notions of dominion, which are in turn rooted in theistic notions of divine immanence as a backdrop for human immanence.

The notion that the universe is coextensive with the Divine leads to the next major element of the New Story, the view that humanity can no longer be seen as separate from the universe, but as in some way an integral part of it. The universe is, perhaps, “God’s body,” but we must see that it is *our body* as well. As Warwick Fox elaborates the idea in *Toward a Transpersonal Ethic*, “We are simply a part of the earth: it is our extended body. In contrast to the narrow, atomistic, or particle-like conceptions of self... the transpersonal ecology conception of self is a wide, expansive, or field-like conception from the outset” (Fox 1990, 217).

We could sum up these two features of the New Story in this way. Cosmology and evolution are revealing to us the story of how the primal cosmic fireball has developed, through billions of years, into greater and greater diversity, culminating in the planet, which is like our own extended body. We are connected through the evolutionary process to all of life, to the planet, and through the planet to the whole evolving cosmos. That picture of the evolving cosmos which has produced us is all the divinity we can, or need to, know.

The third main part of the New Story is its ethical implications, the consequences of this story for human action. If humanity should now understand itself as enfolded in the evolution of the earth, which is itself enfolded and intelligible within the larger unfolding of the divine cosmos, what does that imply for human behavior?

Two sorts of results are suggested. The first is that we are to torture ourselves no longer with the obligations of difference, but let go of the

illusion of separate existence. We must learn to be one with the rhythms of the universe. We must stop doing and learn to be. Such an attitude would be the living-out of what the deep ecologists call "biocentric equality." The other implication for action which is sometimes drawn from the New Story is that we human beings are to be the voice, the nerve endings, even the mind, for the emerging cosmic process. The idea is well expressed, again, by Thomas Berry, who says that this "immense cosmic process...has come to a certain fullness of expression in human consciousness. Within human intelligence the creative process attains a capacity for self-awareness and for a human inter-communion with the numinous mystery present throughout the process. This intercommunion, as a revelatory presence of the divine, takes place through the human community in the diversity of its manifestations" (Berry 1987, 36). In Berry's description of the origin of human consciousness we can begin to see a major problem with considering the New Story to be the primary and framing story.

If, as Berry repeatedly asserts, "only the universe itself is a self-referent, a text without context," and if our own nature, including Berry's assertion, is explicable only in terms of the unfolding cause-and-effect sequence of cosmic evolution, then human consciousness (with all its analytic, imaginative, and explanatory functions) is only another ripple on the cosmic stream, and of no more (or less) significance than the coloration on a butterfly, a crater on the moon, or the metabolism of the AIDS virus.

As E.O. Wilson put it several years ago in *On Human Nature* (1978), if evolutionary biology is right (and he assumes that it is), and if it is "genetic chance and environmental necessity, not God" who made the species (1), then the dilemma facing human beings is that "we have no particular place to go. The species lacks any goal external to its own biological nature" (3). Wilson is honest enough to recognize this as a dilemma, though it has not kept him, more recently, from making a passionate argument, in *The Diversity of Life*, for purposeful human action to maintain the diversity of species: "The stewardship of environment is a domain on the near side of metaphysics where all reflective persons can surely find common ground" (Wilson 1992, 351).

The dilemma which Wilson describes is pertinent to our discussion in two ways. First, it seems to undermine the very nature of the science which Berry (and others) have proposed as the new context for religious understanding. Such a science seems to reveal a cosmos which has produced stars, planets, life and humanity in a process without purpose (or, more precisely, a process whose only purpose is itself). Human beings—their actions, passions, values and understandings—have no privileged

place in this process, which is a centerless web. Hence the ideal of “bio-centric equality.” The problem is that this understanding gives no validity to the very science on which it is based. Science becomes (in terms of Wilson’s carefully worked-out sociobiological hypothesis) one more means by which natural selection has insured the survival of particular arrangements of DNA. It has no more claim on “truth” than does the protective coloration of a fish (which also may be useful in insuring the survival of its bearer’s genes). If the argument which shows that human reason is just another evolutionary strategy is valid, it invalidates all arguments, including itself. Thus the principle of bio-centric equality leaves no room for the science on which it is founded. The same sort of reasoning undercuts any proposal for “environmental ethics.”

All of the writers we have surveyed assume (again, with passion and conviction) that we ought to live differently, that the diminishment of the diversity of life is in some sense *wrong*, yet if the unfolding evolutionary picture is the “only context” for our thought, then words like “wrong” can have no force. If all life is equal in value, then all action (including life-destroying action) is equal in value.

This dilemma comes to an ironic point in the criticism of “stewardship.” As we have noted, some environmentalists assert that this is an arrogant notion. They argue that we are immersed as one species in the great stream of cosmic life, and thus have neither the knowledge nor the right to assume that we can stand apart from that stream in order to “exercise stewardship.”

Before discussing the irony in this argument, we must acknowledge that there are good reasons to be suspicious of “stewardship.” For a long time the word has been limited to financial matters. (Consider that “stewardship Sunday” in innumerable Christian churches has traditionally had everything to do with the budget, and nothing to do with Creation.) And sometimes the word is still used by those who mean by “stewardship” nothing more than “resource management”: a strategy for getting maximum return on investments. The damaging consequences of *that* idea can be seen (for example) by considering the “stewardship” of west coast forest ecosystems which have been “managed” as tree farms into (at best) even-age monocultures and into (at worst) barren and eroding hillsides.

The irony comes from the fact that all who are criticizing such disastrous examples of stewardship are doing so out of an assumption that human beings *ought* to act differently, more responsibly, more caringly, towards the earth. And they propose various strategies for more responsible action, such as preservation of biodiversity, greater scientific understanding, alternative forestry practices, and less consumptive ways of



living. *All such proposals assume that we human beings—however much we are embedded in the earth's evolutionary flux—ought to live a more responsible life.* But if the New Story of the cosmos is the only story, the largest context, there is no room for an “ought,” or for the concept of responsible human action. If the universe is unfolding as it should, why should we be troubled by its course?

It is impossible, on the one hand, to criticize the notion of stewardship as basically flawed, and then on the other, to make an argument—on any grounds whatsoever—that we human beings ought to live differently. This impossibility cuts with particular force against the frequently-repeated notion that we have evolved to be the “consciousness” of the universe. If the random processes of the universe are the only context we have, then there is no particular value to consciousness, and no reason to speak of consciousness, or of human responsibility, as “emerging.”

The central idea of stewardship is not selfish use by a privileged being: it is costly care which is responsible both to the thing cared for (in this case, the earth), and to an Other who has called us into responsibility. Such an understanding of stewardship places profound limitations on our actions toward the earth. (That this is the case is illustrated, rather ironically, by a recent disagreement in the West Coast island community where I live. A new policy statement by the “Island’s Trust,” the government body charged with land-use matters in the island, made frequent use of the concept of stewardship. The document, and the *word* “stewardship,” were violently opposed—not by environmentalists, but by property-owners who argued long and vociferously that “stewardship” was a “socialist, new-age plot” and “another name for expropriation.”)

The concept of caring for the earth (whether or not we call it stewardship), and that of science itself, requires us to acknowledge that there is something special about the human, and about human consciousness. (It was, for example, human beings, not whales, corals, or rain forests, who gathered in Rio a few years ago to discuss, with great moral earnestness, the fate of the planet.) That special status challenges the notion of biocentric equality—not by justifying the careless destruction of other species, but by making possible the very argument that other species have intrinsic worth. No other species makes such an argument, and herein lies our terrible uniqueness.

This is, of course, an old philosophical problem, sometimes called the naturalistic fallacy: it is impossible to get an “ought” from an “is.” And though science has enormously expanded our understanding of the “is” of the cosmos, nothing in that vast picture of value-less fact gives our explanations or proscriptions any weight—unless there is a context beyond the universe of which we have some knowledge, however imperfect

and incomplete. Christian orthodoxy is based on the belief that we do have some knowledge (mediated and imperfect) of such a “context.”

This brings us to the second inadequacy of these attempts to replace the Old Story with the New: their failure to pay attention to the nature of the Creator at the center of the old story—a failure for which Christendom itself is largely responsible.

I would like to outline some main features of orthodox Christian cosmology, which grow from the Christian doctrine of the triune God. It is only from this root that we can begin to understand the Christian concept of human nature and the human task. The God whom we meet in Christian Scripture is three-fold, revealed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The implications of this biblical picture of God as “Being in Relationship” have been developed in Christian thought in terms of “the trinity.”

Like all attempts to formulate Christian doctrine precisely, the attempt to articulate the doctrine of the trinity bears a close parallel to our attempts to reduce the complexity of creation, such as the nature of matter, to language. The results may be counter-intuitive—as, for example, quantum theory often is—but they are the best way of articulating the inexhaustible “given” of the created reality. In any case, the “given” behind the Christian doctrine of the trinity seems to suggest these important principles for our understanding of the relationship between Creator and creation.

Firstly, the doctrine of the trinity makes it necessary to speak of *both* God's immanence and transcendence. The tendency of advocates of the New Story, seeing the errors to which the doctrine of divine transcendence in the Old Story has led, is to dissolve it in a doctrine of divine immanence, making the universe divine. But the reality (like the reality of the universe itself) is stranger and more complex than either of those

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1. Our recent desire to clean up the gender-particularity of these personal designations with more generic terms like “Creator,” “Redeemer,” and “Sustainer” is understandable, in view of past problems with patriarchy. But I continue to use the traditional names for three reasons: (1) all the substitutes obscure the *personality* of God, thus contributing to the very impersonal distancing which is (rightly) being questioned; (2) to describe the trinity in functional terms is, once again, to drive a wedge between God's immanence and transcendence—as the dangerous separation between “creation,” “redemption” and “providence” has often done in Christian theology; (3) to tidy up these names out of our own concern for what is correct is a rejection of the particularity and specificity of human history, which is the context for revelation. To homogenize the names for God in the interests of our current wishes is very similar to the attitude which, as Sharon Betcher describes it, persists in tidying up the messiness of creation in general, and wetlands in particular. We ought to have some of the same sort of reverence for the texts and language of another time that we have towards other species now

extremes. Biblically the relationship of Creator and creation is expressed not only in the transcendent God who, in Genesis 1, speaks all things into being, but also in the immanent God who, in Genesis 2, moulds humanity (*adam*) out of the earth (*adamah*). The relationship is expressed as well by the way in which Psalm 104 takes the sequential days of creation at the beginning—something God *did*—and recasts them as something God *is doing*: “When you send your Spirit they are created, and you renew the face of the earth” (Psalm 104:30).

The Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins provides a superb theological formulation of the paradox of God’s immanence and transcendence:

God is so deeply present to everything that it would be impossible for him, but for his infinity, not to be identified with them or, from the other side, impossible but for his infinity so to be present to them. This is oddly expressed I see; I mean a being so intimately present as God is to other things would be identified with them were it not for God’s infinity, or were it not for God’s infinity he could not be so intimately present to things. (Hopkins 1959, 128)

This way of putting the matter counters the normal critique of theism with a profound reversal. Rather than the greatness of God being understood as distancing Creator from creation, God’s greatness is here seen to enable a deeper intimacy of Creator and creation. As we shall see, this self-giving greatness of the Creator is centered on the cross in a way which places the cross, the suffering of God, at the very foundation of creation, thus overturning all our notions of power, dominion, and hierarchy—as well as perverted notions of stewardship.

In an important study of trinitarian thought called, significantly, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity*, Colin Gunton expresses more precisely what God’s transcendence is and what it is not. His words are a carefully stated alternative to the tendency we have seen earlier to confuse the being of Creation and creator: “the theology of the Trinity enables us to conceive the utter *ontological* otherness of God and the world. It is one thing to be God, quite another to be the creation...” (Gunton 1993, 228). This assertion of the clear transcendence of Creator over created is being questioned by proponents of the New Story largely because that transcendence has been understood in a deistic way, as leading to divine indifference or (worse) divine manipulation. The “otherness” of the transcendent God has been seen as leading to the “desacralization” of the earth, and to our own alienation. In response to such a view Gunton argues:

[B]ecause it generates a theology of free and open relations, such a logic is not necessarily alienating. God’s relation to the world is personal and

free, and so also, liberating. The teaching that the creation is what it is by virtue of the real relation of God to it both in its absolute beginning out of nothing and in its being continually upheld and directed to perfection is not the offence that it has been taken to be. Because the world has its 'inscape' provided by the Son, the one who became part of the world for the sake of the world, and the Spirit, whose characteristic form of action is to enable the world to become itself, a trinitarian theology of creation offers that which neither antiquity—for the most part—nor modernity adequately achieved. (Gunton 1993, 228–9)

Christendom has found it all too easy, in the wake of the Enlightenment, to conceive of the Creator as a cosmic machinist, and of creation as a self-less machine. The recent arguments from Berry (and others) that the universe is divine are an understandable reaction against such deistic notions, but by merging Creator and creation, they remove both the personality of God, and the possibility of relationship. The biblical story, on the other hand, presents us inescapably with a personal and relational God: not only "other" than creation but involved and suffering through the Incarnate Word ("without whom nothing was made") and the renewing Spirit ("You send forth your Spirit, they are created..."). Such relationship upholds the idea of individual uniqueness and value (the force behind the Hopkins term "inscape," which Gunton here adapts), and the very possibility of love. This leads us to the second point which must be made about the Christian understanding of God.

This Creator who is "deeply present" to creatures is likewise, in the Biblical and theological picture, a being characterized by relationship and community. Far from being detached, aloof, and alone, as Christians and non-Christian alike have sometimes caricatured Him, the God of biblical revelation is communal in very nature. Something of this centrality of relationship in the divine nature is seen in Genesis 1 in the description of "the image of God" as "male and female" (though the emphasis in the whole biblical account is on God as love, not on God as having a "male" and "female" side).

The implications for the cosmos in general—and for human nature in particular—of this picture of God-as-community have been spelled out by a number of recent thinkers. Jürgen Moltmann, for example, observes that:

The trinitarian concept of creation binds together God's transcendence and his immanence. The one-sided stress on God's transcendence in relation to the world led to deism, as with Newton. The one-sided stress on God's immanence in the world led to pantheism, as with Spinoza. The trinitarian concept of creation integrates the elements of truth in monotheism and pantheism. God, having created the world, also dwells

in it, and conversely the world which he has created exists in him. This is a concept which can really only be thought and described in trinitarian terms. (Moltmann 1985, 98)

Certainly what Moltmann calls the “one-sided stress on transcendence” has encouraged the human attitudes of dominion and technological manipulation which are sometimes veiled by the word “stewardship.” But the corrective is not an opposite “one-sided stress on God’s immanence.” Though Moltmann mentions Spinoza in this connection, it is difficult to distinguish Spinoza’s pantheism from the picture of a divine universe (“without context”) which Berry calls “panentheism.”

As Moltmann points out, the alternative to both deism and pantheism, and their accompanying mistakes about the place of humans in creation, is the trinitarian understanding of God as a “Being in Communion.” Understood from a trinitarian perspective, the created cosmos is (by analogy with the triune nature of God) a universe of distinct particulars, whose nature is found not in isolation, but in relationship with each other.

The world is neither a machine-like interaction of separate atoms (as in the Newtonian/deistic conception) nor a homogenous mass of emerging divinity (as in Spinoza’s conception, and perhaps, in Thomas Berry’s). Rather, it is a network of distinct entities in which, as Gunton puts it, each thing is real “by virtue of the way it is held in being not only by God but also by other things in the particular configurations in space and time in which its being is constituted; that is to say, in its createdness” (Gunton 1993, 200).

A final characteristic of the Biblical picture of God is that the Creator is loving, self-giving and seen most clearly in the ultimate sacrifice of the crucifixion. A cryptic statement in the Apocalypse speaks of “the lamb slain before the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), thus linking Christ and creation. Moltmann spells out this mystery further in a reflection on the idea of God creating “out of nothing”:

God “withdraws himself from himself to himself” in order to make creation possible. His creative activity outwards is preceded by this humble divine self-restriction. In this sense God’s self-humiliation does not begin merely with creation, inasmuch as God commits himself to this world; it begins beforehand, and is the presupposition that makes creation possible. God’s creative love is grounded in his humble, self-humiliating, love. This self-restricting love is the beginning of that self-emptying of God which Philippians 2 sees as the divine mystery of the Messiah. Even in order to create heaven and earth, God emptied himself of his all-plenishing omnipotence, and as Creator took upon himself the form of a servant. (Moltmann 1985, 88)

This then is the picture of God at the centre of the Old Story of creation, not a distant, patriarchal engineer but a passionately involved personal being. He is other than creation, but at every point intimately involved, in Spirit and incarnate Word. This immanent-and-transcendent triune God upholds each thing in its distinctness—but things have their distinctness only through their relationships. Even God is “being in communion,” and creation likewise is a communion of interconnected entities more vast and more complicated than we can understand.

Yet it is our task and nature to understand creation: to name it, to use it, but above all to care for it. And this understanding of a God whose nature is to be in relationship implies a kind of humility and responsiveness in knowing which has been followed all too seldom in Christendom. N.T. Wright describes such a knowing: “To know is to be in relation with the known, which means that the ‘knower’ must be open to the possibility of the ‘known’ being other than had been expected or even desired, and must be prepared to respond accordingly, not merely to observe from a distance” (Wright 1992, 45). This kind of knowing, based on relationship and response to the other, should be a corrective to any one-sided understanding of “dominion.” However we understand the “dominion” of Genesis 1:28, we can never separate it from the “keeping” of Gen. 2:15, which is based on the kind of relational knowing which Wright describes. We are to “keep” creation as God “keeps us.”

Just as the triune God is “being in Communion,” human creatures are made, “in the image of God” to be in responsible relationship with God, with each other, and with the other creatures of the earth. Certainly one of the greatest tragedies of modernity is the way it has taken the idea of individual human worth and narrowed it to a notion of individual rights and freedoms. Such individualism elevates “man” to the position of God, but not the triune, transcendent-and-immanent God of Scripture, creating Spirit and Incarnate Word. We have considered our selfhood only after the model of a misunderstood transcendence, and thus have failed to see that we are fully ourselves only in communion.

Such an understanding of human nature does not at all diminish the extent to which we are made of “the dust of the earth,” and of the dust of stars, as the New Story of creation is showing us. But we can only understand and act on the implications of that New Story if we recognize, in consciousness and responsibility, the fact central to our nature in the Old Story: that we men and women are called into a unique relationship of responsibility to our Creator in whose image we are made, male and female.

Creation is “waiting in eager anticipation” (Romans 8) to be brought into full, articulated relationship with human beings. Here I can only

agree with Berry's words that "this immense cosmic process has come to a certain fullness of expression in human consciousness. Within human intelligence the creative process attains a capacity for self-awareness and for a human inter-communion with the numinous mystery present throughout the process" (Berry 1987, 36). But that "numinous mystery" *precedes* the process, and has been made known to us in the Word of Scripture and of Christ. Thus it is only within the framework of that larger Old Story of Creation by the triune, transcendent and immanent Creator that the New Story, for which Berry is such an eloquent spokesman, can be understood.

It is within this framework that we must understand the concept of stewardship. As Douglas Hall has put it: "It is no wonder that an increasing number of ecologists and others, many of whom have no personal relationship to the Christian faith, find in this Judaeo-Christian symbol one of the most profound metaphors of what is best in the Western world.... Our first responsibility as Christian stewards may be to become better stewards of the stewardship idea itself" (Hall 1990, 213–14).

Proponents of the New Story often say, rightly, that the concept of stewardship is all too easily subverted into oppressive dominion by those who arrogantly think that by exercising stewardship they are reflecting the divine nature. But the deepest truth of the Old Story of Christian orthodoxy is that the divine nature is most fully seen not in lordly transcendence, but in the agony of incarnation and crucifixion.

When the New Story of creation is centered on the cross, and the self-giving of the Creator which it expresses, then we can understand how that New Story fits into the larger narrative of the Old. And when the Old Story is informed by the New, then we will be able to live out that Old Story with greater care, wisdom, and humility. For the Old Story of the Christian gospel is good news not just for human beings, but for the whole cosmos.

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