

Jesus as Ecological Prophet

This section is an example and an experiment as to how we might work with contemporary texts and ancient wisdom to further understanding, justice, and peace. The theory is based on the idea that all cultural, philosophical, and “religious” insights are based on the commonality of being human. The quality of being human that is most fascinating and useful to our purposes is the quality of transcendence. Intimacy with the natural world energizes the ability to relate in ways that go beyond self-interest. The concern for others has its origins in the developing awareness of the interconnected of all things. It seems that human beings from the beginning of their existence on earth realized in some way that their very existence depended on the forces of Nature. The desire to offer sacrifice may have had its origins in the human recognition for the need to express gratitude for that which Nature provided. The experience of the powers of Nature led to the idea of Creation and consequently to the notions of divine creativity. These powerful assumptions provide a working framework for appreciating the interplay between the natural order and the mystical experience.

The focus on the person of Jesus is meant as a starting point for a wider and global project. It is incumbent on every tradition to ponder its Sages as presently understood in light of the ancient wisdom of that particular tradition and the commonality of the human experience. The present ecological focus reflects a contemporary issue of great importance in the public discourse. How the ancient (“founding”) Sage might be understood in our time probes a question of invaluable significance. Consider, for example, the shamanistic influences on the development of Lau Tzu and Taoism. Call to mind the reflective experience of the Lotus Flower for Buddha and subsequent Buddhism. The Wisdom literature of the Hebrew Tradition is quite familiar with the dynamic interplay of redemption / liberation and the powers of Nature (Creation).

While it is true the historical Sages need to be understood in the historical context, it is also shortsighted to think the historical context is more relevant to probing their significance than the contemporary situation. The Sages have withstood the test of time. The Scriptures and Sacred Stories attributed to their inspiration testify to the plurality of their wisdom and the significance of their teachings. Indeed we bring a new situation to their wisdom as we discover through their insights a new perspective on our contemporary issue.

The idea and belief in a personal creator god is not assumed as an objective fact in this consideration. It is without prejudice to any belief or philosophy that this reflection takes place. The issue is not whether or not the Sage believed in God. No critique one way or another is implied. The “issue” of god is quite another topic. What is important here is how the Sage experienced the divine or not and what significance that experience has in our time. The historical Buddha might serve us well at this point. The Buddha when asked if he believed in God responded with a simple smile. The Buddha’s answer is still the object of consideration in our time. Call to mind the Rig Vedas 10.129.1-7. The ambiguity, while disturbing, is enlightening suggesting that we probe ultimate reality with caution, reverence, and humility.

THE GAZE OF JESUS
JESUS AS ECOLOGICAL PROPHET



VII. THE GAZE OF JESUS

96. Jesus took up the biblical faith in God the Creator, emphasizing a fundamental truth: God is Father (cf. *Mt 11:25*). In talking with his disciples, Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God's eyes: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God" (*Lk 12:6*). "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (*Mt 6:26*).

Biblical faith in "the Creator" recognizes in all creation a transcendent power that moves beyond exclusive self-interest. Every aspect of the created order has within it a tendency to be there for the sake of something or someone else. There is an inherent simplicity in the complexity of all that is. It is, in a word, beautiful, a cause for delight. As we encounter the forces of Nature, we glimpse the majesty and mystery of Creation in its self-giving capacity.

O Great Spirit, let me walk in beauty, and make my
eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset. Make
my hands respect the things you have made and my ears
sharp to hear your voice. Let me learn the lessons you
have hidden in every leaf and rock.

Sioux Prayer

97. The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: “Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest” (Jn 4:35). “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but once it has grown, it is the greatest of plants” (Mt 13:31-32).

Genesis 2: 4a ff portrays God as engaging the soil, the mud of Earth, in the fashioning of the human person. We have become strangers to the soil. We need to meet the ground under our feet. We become alienated from ourselves as we become strangers to the mud from which we were fashioned. Creation has many surprising aspects. We must recover our capacity for spontaneity and surprise by touching the soil, engaging the Earth, and being astonished by the World around us.

SOFT MOON SHINING

My beloved Divine Mother
Dance with me
under the soft moon shining
in the wide open fields
far beyond the toil and trouble
of my busy mind

Dance with me
before the night grows old
while the winds of love
still bow the grasses
and the coyotes howl for you
to step their way

Dance with me my beloved
while the Mystery's Edge
still flirts in the shadow
of your radiant light

Ethan Walker III

98. Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (Mt 8:27). His appearance was not that of an ascetic set apart from the world, nor of an enemy to the pleasant things of life. Of himself he said: “The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard!’” (Mt 11:19). He was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel. Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (Mk 6:3). In this way he sanctified human labour and endowed it with a special significance for our development. As Saint John Paul II taught, “by enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, humanity in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity”. [79]

Living in harmony with creation puts us in contact with the powers and energies that come from deep within this relationship. We discover something about ourselves as human beings in our harmonious relationship with creation. We remember we are part of the created order. We can see our own potential in the splendor of creation. Our capacity to labor is a powerful expression of our willingness to live as beings in harmony with all creation. Creation’s story is our story.

The divine economy, which has made us in the image of the loving Creator, calls us to love and care for all creation. The image we have of ourselves is reflected in the way we treat the creation. If we believe that we are no more than consumers, then we shall seek fulfilment in consuming the whole earth; but if we believe we are made in the image of God, we shall act with care and compassion, striving to become what we are created to be.

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† Bartholomew of Constantinople

When we have totally surrendered to that beauty,
we will become a mighty kindness.

Zero Circle
Rumi

99. In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: "All things have been created through him and for him" (Col 1:16).[80] The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ's creative work as the Divine Word (*Logos*). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word "became flesh" (Jn 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.

The ancient Sages are usually understood by their followers in ways they may not have recognized. The followers' insights into the nature of the Sages tend to move in the direction of divinization or radical otherness. We must learn to explore the faith traditions to discern the "going down" of the divine energies, the involvement the ultimate has in the so-called mundane. Often the greatness of someone is found in humble circumstances. So true with the Sages whose wisdom emerges in the midst of conflict, division, or defeat.

Make Me Strong in Spirit

***Make me strong in spirit
Courageous in action
Gentle of heart***

***Let me act in wisdom
Conquer my fear and doubt
Discover my own hidden gifts***

***Meet others with compassion
Be a source of healing energies
And face each day with hope and joy***

~ Abby Willowroot © 1998

100. The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20). This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that “God may be everything to every one” (1 Cor 15:28). Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.

There is a certain tenderness in this imagery that honors the integrity of everything that exist in the created order. The underlying energies of the Cosmos are so honored and respected that so-called superior being are awestruck by this insight. The Risen Christ is receptive of all things and creatures seen and unseen. Everything must be respected for the being it is. Nothing may be treated as mere object. Everything, seen and unseen, has an ultimate destiny by virtue of its own integrity. Its “useful purpose” as defined by another more powerful being does not annul or negate its ultimate value.

Oh Great Mystery

We give thanks for the natural world we see:

All the creatures, stones and plants

Who show us how to be.

We learn their lessons, seek their truths,

Return our loving praise,

We honor the peace they show us,

Which guides our human ways.

We ask that we may become like them,

Living in harmony,

And deep within our hearts,

Know the Sacred Mystery.

Jamie Sams

Native American Writer

[79] Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), 27: AAS 73 (1981), 645.

[80] Hence Saint Justin could speak of “seeds of the Word” in the world; cf. *II Apologia* 8, 1-2; 13, 3-6: PG 6, 457-458, 467.