



A new name for Eco-spirituality

The word *eco-spirituality* is not always a helpful one. It can raise images of people hugging trees, bowing to points of the compass or speaking in tearful tones about the lost habitat of an owl. While such images express real eco-concern, they rarely inspire ordinary people.

However, if we want to seriously connect with the Jesus story it means embracing the whole world of 'flesh' which he took on as his Father's chosen way of saving us - incarnation. Learning, and respect, and caring, and being a living part of the whole gift of God's creation is integral to the Christian way.

A broad literacy about the physical world roots our deep connection with earth-li-ness as revelation. Connectedness is a basic word the ecological scientists teach us. So, Christian spirituality is about birthing a relationship with the fullness of Earth and through it to God who became an Earth-being.

The language of ecology can become spiritual language. It resonates easily with Catholics: *community, mutuality, inter-connectedness, regeneration, transformation*. Moreover, learning the language of ecology changes us. Using words such as 'rainforest' instead of 'jungle', or 'wetlands' instead of 'swamps', has helped many people become environmentally aware.

Education *for the environment* is the basic philosophy of the Townsville diocese's dedicated environmental centre called *Gumburu*. It butts onto the edge of the rain forest. Young and old who experience a few days there calm down and merge into a larger canvas. They grow to find themselves in a broad web of life - relating within a dynamic of diverse unity.

Gumburu was the inspiration of Townsville teachers including Paul Lucas who edited the Queensland edition of *On Holy Ground* for Catholic Earthcare Australia. As a type of mission statement about *ecological conversion*, it offers educators a mentality, an approach, a paradigm, that is, a foundational story behind the stories of our God filled connection with Earth.

That our relationship with God is so rooted in Earth is a terrible shock for many Catholics. It should not be if we know our theological history and Scripture. Ecology has brought us back to their foundations, incarnation.

But, the depth of the incarnation is like *future shock* for many church people who fixate on a make believe Arcadian church period of a century ago. Some resort to ridicule of *the church of climate change* in their shock. Others look to the panacea of Euro-centric liturgical trappings.

The 1990 *Peace Day Message* of Pope John Paul II is a Fifth Gospel for our times. His short letter was foundational in articulating a spirituality that loves Earth and God present there. I suggest that each of us print out a personal copy from the Vatican website and read it often.

All of the 'big' saints had a healthy relationship with Earth. They loved it and learnt from it. Saint Thomas Aquinas answered his own question about why God created such a diversity of animals and plants, 'to better show forth the fullness of God'.

Their prayer rejoiced in *brother sun and sister moon*; poetry captured *dappled things*. Dr Norman Habel led an ecumenical team in Adelaide to go a step further by creating a *Season of Creation* for community prayer. It's Scripture Readings for the four Sundays leading up to the Feast of St Francis are on the web.

Ecological conversion leads us towards *ecological vocation* said Pope John Paul II. He spoke often about Earth suffering, and the need for us to respond with just and compassionate action - a spiritual journey that flows over into action, incarnational belonging, caring with flesh.

Eco-spirituality is a flawed name, but somehow combined with *incarnation*, it is maybe the best we have for now to help us luxuriate in being creatures of God's Earth.

<http://www.columban.org.au/>

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