

Week beginning 31st August Fire in the Depths of the Earth

An orthodox theology of Creation holds that God, right from the beginning, desired to become human simply because, as St Thomas Aquinas put it, God's infinite love needed to express itself outside itself (*bonum est diffusivum sui*) – first in Creation, then finally and fully revealed in Incarnation. And by virtue of solidarity and derivation, this love is embodied to a greater or lesser degree in all of us and in the evolving world itself.

Being human does not mean being banished, fallen, cursed – a *massa damnata* as St Augustine put it – as if God's original dream for us was, at some stage, radically destroyed. Terrible things happen when mythical truth is confused with historical truth. Paradise was not lost in the past; Adam and Eve never existed on this planet; the Creator's original blueprint was never destroyed by an actual 'fall'.

If all of this is true – that the essential face of Creation, as we have it, has always carried the tender look of love rather than the sinister shape of sin – then other intrinsically connected issues to do with the vibrancy of faith will need careful revision and development.

Here is one topical example. People sense that we're at a very significant threshold in history where two pivotal stories meet – the love story revealed in the orthodox theology of nature and grace, and the amazing story revealed in the scientific explorations of a painfully evolving and utterly wonderful world.

These stories do not have to collide with each other: rather do they embrace each other, offering a fuller picture of what is beautiful and true. They both speak of a fundamental connectedness in our origins, evolution and destiny. The emerging cosmology, often called the new universe story, can be seen as validating the rich theological (but mostly neglected) vision which has always been at the heart of true Christianity.

A new consciousness of the bigger picture is called for, a clearer insight into the intrinsic connection between Creation and incarnation, into the deepening conversation between the mystic and the physicist. a fundamental concept is that we all flow from one source; some will call it the process of evolution, others the work of the Holy Spirit . . .

Evolution, you could say, is intrinsic to incarnation. It is how Creation, already containing the divine seed, has prepared the necessary ground – the human era – for the birthing of God. There is a sense in which Creation is the beginning of Incarnation, 'the first Bible', as Aquinas put it.

Pentecost reminds us that God's fire already burns in the darkest depths of the living earth.

Ultimately, for the Christian, the Holy Spirit is present as the innermost mystery of all things, and may be understood as the invisible power at work in a continually evolving universe, until God be 'all in all' . . .

The recovery of a theology of nature and grace, now enriched by the emerging insights of the new cosmology, will have profound implications for many Christian teachings, for our understanding of sacrament, for pastoral ministry, for the religion/science debate and for a new evangelising of young and old. It will help, above all, to shift our self-image as fallen failures, complicit somehow in the death of Jesus, to an awareness of our role as vital co-creators with God of a steadily developing, ever-evolving universe. We are not guilty exiles on a fallen earth – we are the beloved bearers of her divine dream.

(*Treasured and Transformed* pp 157,158,159)