

4. Week Beginning 23rd November 2014 Cosmic Intimacy – Incarnation and Eucharist

In his Jubilee letter, Tertio Millennio Adveniente, Pope John Paul II, calling for 'a new springtime of Christianity,' had intimations of the cosmic nuances of preparing for the third millennium. He was well aware of the significance of creation theology in this regard. 'The fact that in the fullness of time the eternal Word took on the condition of a creature, gives a unique cosmic value to the event which took place in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Thanks to the Word, the world of creatures appears as a cosmos, an ordered universe. And it is the same Word who, by taking flesh, renews the cosmic order of creation.'

Creation had waited for billions of years to achieve self-consciousness. Once this breakthrough was accomplished, the cosmos then needed to celebrate its incredible life-story with its mysterious beginning, its hazardous evolution, its split-second timing and its relentless success. For with the advent of humanity – its new and unique heart and mind – this became possible. After the incarnation, the Eucharist is one of its richest celebratory expressions. And this expression has to be symbolic – encapsulated in time and space. 'The earth, like an apple, is placed on the table.' Around the table bearing the fruits of the earth and the work of human hands, through the human voices, gestures and sacramental ceremonial of its offspring, the very cosmos itself is in worship before its God, offering itself to its incomprehensible lover-God in the ecstasy of its joys and the bitterness of its sorrows . . .

Thus in a ritual in time and space, involving bread and wine and words, in one privileged and symbolic moment, the eternal significance of the mighty cosmos is carefully embraced and forever celebrated . . .

In the dynamic presence of the bread and wine on the table, we have symbolised just about everything that can be predicated of humanity, of the earth and everything in it and on it – its flora and fauna, of the universe and the cosmos itself – the past, the present and the future of all creation. All labour is therefore holy. All true work, as the Prophet tells us, is love made visible. These rich and simple elements gather up the intense flow and counter-flow of the world, its darkness and light, its failures and mistakes, its strivings and hopes, its indomitable creativity. Theologian Fr Dermot Lane writes that 'By previewing the future, the Eucharist gives a focus, a sense of direction, to a world that is in danger of losing sight of gifted origins and graced endings.'

And then the eternal words of divine disclosure and universal revelation are spoken: This is my Body. They sound around the earth like the angels' Christmas song and the tenebrae of Good Friday. They echo off the stars with the energy of transfiguration. They were first whispered by our Creator-Parent as the terrible beauty of the fiery atoms shattered the infinite darkness of nothingness with unimaginable flame, heat and light. And they are whispered again, a thousand times a day, in the midst of God's holy people around a table with a piece of bread and a cup of wine. This is my Body. It is God-become-atom, become-galaxies, become-universes, become- earth, become-flesh, become-everything. It is a kind of Angelus of hope – a remembering, a reminding, a recapitulation and a confirming that the divine and the human, the sacred and the secular, the holy and the profane, are all God's one body by virtue of creation, first in time but revealed to us later, and once for all, in the ultimate gift of meaning, the incarnation.

But there is a death at the heart of all growing and liberating. The seed must die. as we take, break, share, eat and drink the cosmic bread and wine and turn to embrace the stranger at the 'kiss of peace,' how aware are we of the kind of dying we may be called upon to make? and we must believe that our efforts will bear fruit even though we may never live to see that harvest . . .

In one sense we are at the beginning now. There is a mission of cosmic proportions to be accomplished – a world to win and a universe to save, God's body to be healed. A massive re-education of mind and heart is called for. There is, it seems to me, a readiness for change, a potential for transformation. There is a growing sensitivity to new strategies of concern, a kind of genetic awareness of the need for imminent action. There are pockets of conspirators all over the world; and when these small streams of consciousness seem to make but little headway into the dry mainland, we must believe that at another invisible level, the waves of transformation are already sweeping through.

For while the tired waves vainly breaking
Seem here no painful inch to gain;
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main. (Arthur Hugh Clough)

(*Treasured and Transformed* pp185,186,187)