

ECO-THEOLOGIES OF THOMAS BERRY AND JOHN ZIZIOULAS:

INTIMATIONS FOR ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE

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Regis College, Toronto School of Theology 2012

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https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/34911/5/Otu_Idara_201211_ThM_thesis.pdf

Abstract

The contemporary ecological crisis is the most inexhaustive, anthropogenic catastrophe in human civilization yet, with its adverse waves sweeping across the globe, even to generations unborn. The earth crisis has prompted theological discourses from diverse faith traditions on the religious responsibility to preserve ecological integrity.

This exigency to protect and care for creation is increasingly inevitable and religion has an indispensable responsibility in unison with societal institutions to foster a collaborative dialogue towards an authentic resolution. Within Christendom, there is a dire need for a continuous and mutual engagement of eco-theological paradigms, at the level of both orthodoxy and orthopraxis, for the enhancement of an ongoing renewal of Christian ecological responsibility.

Accordingly, given the Christian responsibility of protecting and caring for creation as a common patrimony of all humanity, this thesis will compare and contrast the functional cosmology of Thomas Berry with the creation theology of John Zizioulas in order to draw seminal theological insights suitable for the ecological justice mission of the Church. This academic research will argue that amidst the vicissitudes of human induced ecological devastations, the eco-theological motifs of Berry and Zizioulas are significant in the ongoing search for renewing the theological dynamics of the Church's mission for ecological justice.

1.6 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to explore the functional cosmology of Thomas Berry and to examine the place and role of humans in a continuously unfolding self-emergent universe. In this exposé, it was shown that Berry strongly holds that the universe has both a psychic-spiritual and physical-material aspect, which is implicated in the foundation of his theological presupposition of creation as divine revelation. Berry's cosmological vision highlights the fundamental shift in the

understanding of the universe from cosmos to cosmogenesis and identifies the universe process as the maternal birth of the human person. The human person is the universe self-reflective consciousness; it has a unique responsibility to intimately participate in the fulfillment of the unfolding of earth existence. The awakening of human consciousness to its cosmocentric identity and destiny becomes the seedbed for a functional spirituality. Berry's functional spirituality, which envisions a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship, is the Great Work, positing humanity's transit into a new ecological age, and it has consequences for the ecological justice mission of the Church. Berry's cosmological vision contains a new direction and seminal insights for the Church in responding to the present-day ecological peril.

Moreover, his eco-theological motif is significant for deepening the discourse on Christian ecological responsibility, when it is put in dialogical conversation with the creation theology of John Zizioulas, which is the thrust of the next chapter.

2.6 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to examine the creation theology of John Zizioulas, which emerges from the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. This examination reviewed the major cosmologies of the early Church and Zizioulas' interpretation of them in light of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Zizioulas conceives creation as an act of God with an absolute beginning. God, in creating the human person, seeks to be in communion with the whole of creation. Thus, the human person as a relational being has a responsibility of mediating communion between God and creation. As a vehicle of communion, the human person is called to become a Priest of Creation modeled after Christ. The human person exercises this role in freedom and through the liturgy, in a thanksgiving of communion with creation. In this way, the human person is able to truly become a liturgical being, which is demonstrated by adopting a spirit of asceticism and by a change of attitude towards creation.

Zizioulas' creation theology holds possibilities for an authentic response to the contemporary ecological crisis. In particular, Zizioulas' ecological vision is significant for the ecological justice mission of the Church. The creation theology of John Zizioulas and the functional cosmology of Thomas Berry, when put in dialogical conversation are capable of bringing about a complimentary ecological praxis. The outcome of such dialogical conversation can provide overarching theological dynamics for eco-justice. In this light, in the chapter that follows, I will undertake a comparative theological analysis of Berry's and Zizioulas' thought based on the first two chapters of this research.

3.5 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to present the eco-theological motifs of Berry and Zizioulas under three categories: the sacredness of creation, ecological anthropologies, and their ecological spiritualities. The comparative theological analysis of both theologians on these select themes has shown that their

theological foundations, though apparently related, are fundamentally unique. Berry and Zizioulas interpret the sacred nature of the universe distinctly. They also differ greatly in their articulation of the role of the human person in creation, as well as their presuppositions for their ecospiritualities. The points of convergence in the delineated eco-theological motifs of Berry and Zizioulas are important trajectories for the Christian practice of ecological justice.

Berry's functional cosmology resituates humanity as an integral member of a single sacred community with a functional role in terms of the working of the earth. Zizioulas, in a similar fashion, develops a creation theology that presents the human person as Priest of Creation, with an ontological role of bringing about communion between God and creation. Zizioulas more explicitly, though, situates the practice of ecological justice within a liturgical context, offering up creation to God in the same way as the gifts of the Eucharist are offered up to the Father. Each of the above foundational paradigms is important and relevant in constructing theological foundations for the practice of ecological justice. In the chapter that follows, the theological task will be to further evaluate the significance of the three select themes in light of the eco-justice mission of the Church.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis has been to demonstrate the significance of the functional cosmology of Thomas Berry and the creation theology of John Zizioulas for the ecological justice mission of the Church. The theological analysis of both theologians reveals their distinct eco-theological motifs in light of the ecological crisis. The global ecological concern has metamorphosed into a complex reality with multifaceted dimensions and as such demands an integral response. In fact, it would be absurd to assume that only a mono-religious tradition or a mono-ecological hermeneutics can provide the needed epistemological and theological foundations for the Christian faith. The comparative study of the eco-theologies of Berry and Zizioulas is to promote such a theological cooperation within Christian traditions.

In chapter one, the functional cosmology of Thomas Berry was presented. The chapter explored the main contents of his cosmological vision, which is characterized by the cosmogenetic principles of differentiation, subjectivity and communion. This reveals the divine presence in creation as well as the human as an integral part of the psychicspiritual and physical-material of a sacred community.

Chapter two examined the creation theology of John Zizioulas. The chapter is concerned with his interpretation of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, which emerged from the early centuries of the Church. Creation has an absolute beginning and the human person is created for communion. As a Priest of Creation, the human person is called to bring creation into communion with God both liturgically and ascetically.

The comparative theological analysis of Berry and Zizioulas was the focus of chapter three. The three theological dynamics discussed were: the sacredness of creation, humanity as microcosm and mediator of creation as well as the human and earth community. The comparative study shows that the eco-theologies of Berry and Zizioulas, though related, are distinct in their theological presuppositions. The dialogical conversation between both theologians forms a complimentary praxis relevant for the renewal of theological foundations as praxis for the eco-justice.

The aim of the chapter four was to examine the significance of Berry and Zizioulas to the ecological justice mission of the Church. Evaluating the contributions of Berry and Zizioulas within the context the Church's ecological teaching complemented the Christian practice of eco-justice. Some insights from African ecological wisdom further demonstrated the relevance of the ecological vision of Berry and Zizioulas.

Given the unprecedented global ecological crisis, Berry and Zizioulas remain significant theological voices within Christianity that reawaken humanity to the empirical, religious and existential realities of creation. The Church's call to ecological responsibility and mission of ecological justice is enriched and complimented by both theologians. In order to be relevant, the Christian commitment to eco-justice must be viewed not as a humanistic agenda; rather, it must be informed by a cosmological vision, a transformative ecological anthropology and an integral eco-spirituality. The Christian vocation to preserve ecological integrity is imperative: humans cannot remain indifferent.