

FAITH AND THEOLOGY IN A NEW KEY

presented by Steve Oreskovich

CCMT Meeting – Christ the King APRIL 14th 3:00 PM-5:00 PM

The election of Pope Francis has sent a tremor of excitement throughout Christendom. News reports are painting a portrait of a man of the poor shunning the trappings and finery of the historical Papacy, a "Pope of the people" who will exemplify the gospel spirituality of compassion, generosity and openness of heart to the physical and religious poverty of the world. American and western Europeans yearn for change. Expectations abound worldwide.

What is troublesome to many in the midst of the excitement is the reality that the very institutions (Catholic and Protestant) charged with responsibility for teaching the Gospel and preserving and enriching the faith and the faithful, decide and act out of an inadequate cosmology and worldview. The prevailing worldview produces a theology and hierarchical structure that belongs to a century long left behind by the advances of science, medicine, psychology, sociology and most especially theology (faith seeking understanding). Our relationship with our God is completely dependent on how we understand the nature and mystery of God. A worldview that does not reckon with the radical evolutionary and interdependent character of the universe will produce a theology that is not only ineffective but dangerous.

Contemporary theological studies unabashedly embrace the dynamic, evolving universe in which we live (Process Theology) and the mystery of human existence (Existential Theology), offering new generations the possibility not only of a revitalized relevant faith but of a spirituality that can hear "the heartbeat of God" and survive and thrive no matter the condition and direction of the institutions.

Seminaries and some upper level university classes in Religious Studies offer courses in contemporary theological studies. Unfortunately for a myriad of reasons this exciting information, so critical to faith in the pews' is seldom discussed or taught in faith communities. What follows here are some of the words and graphics we will discuss in April. Rosemary thought it best to get them on the site early so you who want to come can study them. Of course they are far from complete and at first might be confusing. If you have time to peruse them our time together may make more sense.

The graphics were created by Joe Boddy in an attempt to visualize concepts that require many new words to explain. In short as you will read and hear in April, Panentheism and Existential Theology contain some ideas and thoughts you may have already discovered in your faith journey, but never quite had the words nor mental concepts to repeat or explain. In past group discussions of a God who is not only Incarnate in Jesus but deeply related to the world as sun rays are to the sun; many people have said, "I have felt this presence of God for years but never could explain it". As Process/Evolutionary theologians say in many different ways, "God is in the world or God is nowhere".

(Document 2:God-Heaven-Sacred)

In the upper left corner of the first graphic is a drawing of what is often called the Medieval/Biblical Cosmology that so many of us received in Catechism Class, CCD and heard as the background to endless

sermons on hell, heaven, Resurrection etc.. God is transcendent and dwells "up" in a perfect world of angels and saints. God comes into the world but once as the second of the Trinity to redeem the world tainted by Adam's sin, a sin of separation passed from generation to generation. The transforming Grace of Christ's sacrifice comes "down" through sacred events, mediated by certain ordained people and designated places. Prayer up, forgiveness and blessings down from a God on high (Theism).

The lower left panel offers another model of GOD-IN-THE-WORLD and THE WORLD-IN-GOD (Panentheism) with an explanation of that model by a Roman Catholic theologian, Bernard Lee. Here we find that whatever IS has come to be "within" a God who not only contains all possibilities for the growth and forward movement of the world, but who receives the growth and movement of that world into God's "self". God is enriched by our every positive, creative (loving) decision and God suffers disappointment and loss as a result of our our harmful, destructive and life-destroying choices and actions. Not a distant observer but the primary partner in creation and a "fellow sufferer". (also called by the unattractive but accurate name of Di-Polar Theism).

(Document 3-Faith is a Gift)

The second page is a very brief explanation of what might be called a statement of Faith in the language of both Existential theology and Process Theology (a kind of Panentheism) concluding with an explanation of the Trinity.

(Document 4-God as All Possibilities)

The third graphic is Joe's creative efforts at imaging what you just read on the second page. In this drawing we see that the universe (including you and me) are composed of matter always becoming spirit (Teilhard de Chardin).

Of course, this is only the beginning. From this model ushers new understandings of not only the nature of our God (self-giving love) but redefinition of the person and message of Jesus (Christology), life after death, hell, prayer, sin and those many concepts that are so deeply seeded in our child memory banks that it is both freeing and fear-provoking to rethink. As time permits we will tackle each of these important parts of our faith.

If it all seems overwhelming don't weaken. It will be my task and pleasure to attempt to make sense of it all and answer the questions that inevitably result from thinking of our faith in a new key. If you are a reader of theology the shortest introduction to Process Theology (Panentheism) is the small but serious book; WHAT IS PROCESS THEOLOGY by Robert B. Mellert. For an excellent and thoroughly orthodox explanation of Process Thought from a Roman Catholic you can read Bernard Lee's book, THE BECOMING OF THE CHURCH. It is much longer and not an easy read. If you have an appetite for theology with an existential bent John Macquarrie has two fairly readable publications; THE HUMILITY OF GOD and THE FAITH OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD, subtitled A Lay Theology. All of these are older publications that are best found on Amazon.com