



STATEMENT DF105

Catholicism for the New Age: Matthew Fox and Creation-Centered Spirituality by Mitchell Pacwa, S. J.

Father Matthew Timothy Fox, O.P. (Order of Preachers, commonly known as the Dominicans), has placed himself at the center of a storm inside the Catholic church. What gave rise to the conflict between Fox and Catholic leadership? Is Fox a danger to the Christian church? These are questions we shall seek to answer in this article.

Matthew Fox was born on December 21, 1940, entered the Dominicans in 1960, and was ordained a priest in 1967. In 1970 he received a doctorate, *summa cum laude*, from the Institut Catholique (Paris) in Medieval theology.

His first popular book on prayer, *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear* (1972), created the impetus which eventually led to his establishing the Institute for Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS) in 1977 at Mundelein College, a small Catholic women's college in Chicago. He moved the ICCS to Holy Names College, another small Catholic college in Oakland, California in 1983, where it has remained to the present day.

The ICCS teaching staff includes Starhawk the witch (alias Miriam Simos); Buck Ghost Horse, a shaman (mystic guide healer); Luish Teish, a Yoruba (West African) voodoo priestess; and Robert Frager, representing Sufism (Islamic mysticism). Typical of New Age approaches to spirituality, some psychology is thrown in: John Giannini, a Jungian analyst, and Jean Lanier, a Gestalt therapist. Brian Swimme is the resident cosmologist, and "geologian" (i.e., exponent of environmental wisdom) Fr. (Father) Thomas Berry teaches on occasion.

Fox established Bear and Company to publish creation spirituality books, such as *Earth Ascending*, by Jose Arguelles, originator of the 1987 "Harmonic Convergence," and *Medicine Cards: The Discovery of Power through the Ways of Animals*, complete with book and "medicine shield" cards. Later he founded *Creation*, a magazine sponsored by the Friends of Creation Spirituality, Inc., whose president and editor-in-chief is Fox. *Creation* describes itself as "deeply ecumenical, deeply cosmological, deeply practical and deeply alternative." A recent issue portrays a nude Jesus Christ, seated in the yoga lotus position, with antlers on His head (July/August, 1991). Another shows the "Qetzalcoatl Christ," with the Lord's face in a picture of Qetzalcoatl, the Aztec Plumed Serpent deity (May/June, 1992).

Fox's problems with the Catholic hierarchy began in 1984 when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the head of the Vatican's department for protecting orthodoxy, asked the Dominican Order to investigate Fox's writings. Three Dominican theologians examined his books in 1985 and concluded they were not heretical. One of them, Fr. Benedict Ashley, O.P., reported at a 1991 lecture that Fox's work did not seem worth condemning because it was too superficial and did not appear to be a danger to the faithful. He was wrong, as he now admits.

The Vatican continued to object to Fox's teachings, such as his diminishing or even denial of original sin, refusal to deny belief in pantheism (the belief that God is all and all is God), endorsing homosexual unions in the church, identifying humans as "mothers of God," and calling God "our Mother." The presence of the witch, Starhawk, on the ICCS staff caused another scandal. For these and other reasons, the Vatican in 1986 asked the Dominican Master General to stop Fox. But the Chicago Dominican superior, Fr. Donald Goergen, O.P., wrote a detailed defense on Fox's behalf and let him go on.

In September, 1987 Ratzinger's Vatican office began its own investigation of Fox and his teachings. Fr. Goergen received charges against Fox in April, 1988, but claimed that Fox's theological views had not been disproven. At this point the Vatican insisted that the Dominicans prevent Fox from further teaching and writing. Accordingly, the Master General asked Fox to take a one year sabbatical to calm the situation. In a "Pastoral Letter to Cardinal Ratzinger and the Whole Church," Fox responded by publicly calling the Catholic church a dysfunctional family because "power, not theology, is the real issue." Still, he began a year-long silence on December 15, 1988.

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Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

On December 15, 1989, Fox resumed his busy teaching, lecturing, and writing schedule — including appearances at John Denver’s (New Age) Windstar Foundation and an Easter retreat at Findhorn, Scotland (a prototype New Age community). In 1991 Fr. Goergen ordered Fox to leave the ICCS in California and return to Chicago or face dismissal from the Dominican order. Fox refused, and at the time of this writing his dismissal awaits only the Vatican’s formal approval. If dismissed, Fox would remain a priest, but would be forbidden to perform the sacraments.

Fox continues to have tremendous influence — both within and outside the Catholic church. Recently CNN International featured him as a theologian speaking for the environment. His books are used by nuns, are found at Catholic retreat houses, and are distributed in bookstores — religious and New Age alike. Influenced by Fox, some nuns include wicca (witchcraft) ceremonies in their rituals and celebrations, breaking the hearts of believing Catholics who witness it. Creation spirituality (*see* glossary) is taught to young children, neglecting the doctrines of sin and redemption, but starting classes with a “Pledge of Allegiance to the Earth.”

In 1989, Reverend Lawrence Krause — a graduate of the American Baptist Seminary in Covina, California, and ordained by the Covenant Church — started the New Creation Fellowship and Renewal Center in La Mesa, California. This appears to be a New Age denomination inspired by Fox’s ideas.

In this article, I shall examine Fox’s teachings in some detail, focusing primarily on his world view and his view of God and Christ. I shall then examine Fox’s reliability as a scholar, for if his scholarship can be shown to be faulty, then everything he teaches and writes becomes suspect.

FOX’S WORLD VIEW

Two questions in the introduction to Fox’s book *Original Blessing* provide an important insight into his world view:

1. In our quest for wisdom and survival, does the human race require a new religious paradigm [model]?
2. Does the creation-centered spiritual tradition offer such a paradigm?

As the reader may guess, my answer to both these questions is: *yes*.¹

A New Paradigm

Like many New Agers, Fox borrows the idea of a “paradigm shift” from Dr. Thomas Kuhn, a historian of science. Kuhn describes how people make models or paradigms of the universe to direct their interpretation of its events. Science often shapes the basic paradigms by which people view reality. Sometimes scientific discoveries so severely affect the old paradigms that they are abandoned for new and more useful ones.

Such a paradigm shift occurred when science changed from the mechanistic idea of the universe, which is associated with Sir Isaac Newton, to Albert Einstein’s world of relativity. Newton interpreted the universe as a huge mechanical system that operates according to predictable, immutable laws (such as the *law of gravity*). His paradigm compartmentalized the world into discrete entities — distinct constituent parts of the larger mechanism.

Buckminster Fuller, Matthew Fox, and many others claim that the new *Einsteinian* paradigm has not yet been accepted in place of the *Newtonian* paradigm. Once it is, they say, a completely new way of viewing the world will dominate. This new paradigm is one that will link humanity with all creation, and will emphasize the interconnectedness of all things. In other words, a “wholeness” paradigm will replace Newton’s mechanistic paradigm.

Fox is an evangelist of the inevitable new scientific, religious, and philosophical paradigm. Evidently, he wants to incorporate Christian theology and spiritual traditions into this new paradigm. For Fox, it is important to note, Christian ideas do not have priority over the new paradigm. Rather, Christianity must change to fit the new ideas. If the church does not adapt and lead the new way of thinking, “Mother Earth” will die, taking everyone down with her. How, then, must the church change, according to Fox?

To recover the wisdom that is lurking in religious traditions we have to let go of more recent religious traditions.... Specifically,.... an exclusively fall/redemption model of spirituality.... It [the fall/redemption model] is a dualistic model [separating the sacred and profane] and a patriarchal [father oriented, male dominated] one; it begins its theology with sin and

original sin, and it generally ends with redemption. Fall/redemption spirituality does not teach believers about the New Creation or creativity, about justice-making and social transformation, or about Eros, play, pleasure and the God of delight.²

Fox identifies St. Augustine and his theology of humanity's fall into sin and need for redemption as the prime culprit behind today's problems. Wars (especially the threat of nuclear war), ecological crises, boredom, unemployment, and the rest of modern woes go back to St. Augustine's idea that people are born with original sin in their souls. Fall/redemption theology leads to "sentimentalism and fundamentalism," focusing on personal salvation and a personal savior.³ As a result, Fox says, people have "no ego, no self-respect, no tolerance for diversity, no love of creation, no sense of humor, [and] no sense of sexual identity or joy."⁴

Frequently, as is typical with New Agers, Fox's books decry society's and the church's emphasis on the brain's *left* hemisphere, with its analytic, verbal, logical processes. Fox wants people to incorporate the *right* hemisphere of the brain, with its emotion, connection making, mysticism, cosmic delight, and orientation toward the maternal, silence, and darkness.

Fox believes his new paradigm will awaken the world to the cosmic. Instead of Christ redeeming us from sin, Christ Himself becomes cosmic, liberating everyone from the "bondage and pessimistic news of a Newtonian, mechanistic universe so ripe with competition... dualisms, anthropocentrism, and...boredom."⁵ Fox's translation of Meister Eckhart (a thirteenth century German mystic) says that all persons are "meant to be mothers of God" and everyone is called to give birth to the Cosmic Christ within themselves and society.⁶ Then, with St. Hildegard of Bingen (a twelfth century Benedictine abbess), Eckhart, and psychologist Carl Jung, everyone will know themselves to be "divine and human, animal and demon. We are Cosmic Christs."⁷

Fox also identifies Christ with Mother Earth. For him, Christ's redemption takes on new meaning and power in the Cosmic Christ context if people see it as the "passion, resurrection, and ascension of Mother Earth conceived as Jesus Christ crucified, resurrected, and ascended."⁸ Holy Communion is "intimate," "local," and "erotic" when it becomes "the eating and drinking of the wounded earth."⁹

A key aspect of the new paradigm is Fox's idealization of feminist theology and rejection of patriarchal (father oriented) religion. He advocates a return to maternal (mother oriented) religion, like that of native peoples throughout the world. Their "matrifocal [mother-centered] religion" helps them reverence God as a mother, the earth as our mother, the universe as our grandmother. They care for earth, he declares, and seek justice, compassion, creativity, and harmony among people and within the ecology. He preaches this religious ideal as the new paradigm of "deep ecumenism," which will allow people of all religions to come together at a mystical level.

Is Fox a New Ager?

Is Fox a New Ager? On the one hand, he freely employs New Age ideas — for example, he sets Newton against Einstein, the right brain against the left, and mysticism as the basis of religion, not dogma. He quotes New Age thinkers such as Fritjof Capra, Buckminster Fuller, and Gregory Bateson. He suggests that the "contemporary mystical movement known as 'new age' can dialogue and create with creation spiritual tradition."¹⁰

On the other hand, Fox criticizes New Age "pseudo-mysticisms" such as interpreting "'past life experiences' in an excessively literal way without considering the possible metaphorical meanings." Dealing with "past lives," he allows, is an acceptable technique of "working out — often in a very commendable and creative way — the deep suffering and pain from [people's] present life."¹¹ While Fox's interpretation of past life reading is not New Age, his *endorsement* of the practice, probably from a Jungian point of view, is unacceptable to Scripture and Catholic teaching.

Fox criticizes other New Age trends which are: "all space and no time; all consciousness and no conscience; all mysticism and no prophecy; all past life experiences, angelic encounters, untold bliss, and no critique of injustice or acknowledgment of the suffering and death that the toll of time takes. In short, no body. To these movements the Cosmic Christ says, 'Enter time. Behold my wounds. Love your neighbor. Set the captives free.'"¹²

Again, Fox does not reject New Age practices; he simply wants them balanced by social justice, conscience, and concern for the physical world. He prophesies in the name of the Cosmic Christ that New Agers should love their neighbors and do justice. New Agers would probably agree (many New Age thinkers and activists, such as Capra, have raised the same concerns) and merrily go to a conference on saving the environment, crystals, or channeling.

Fox's analysis, however, is inadequate because he does not reject the *occult* practices of the New Age movement. Commending witchcraft and shamanism (primitive spiritism) in his Institute encourages disciples to investigate the occult in the guise of

learning the ways of “matrifocal” (mother-centered) primitive religions in order to awaken the compassionate and creative mother in everyone.

In Scripture, God calls us to be compassionate, loving, and thirsty for justice. At the same time, however, He condemns the occult practices of native Canaanite religion, its mother goddesses Anath and Ashtarte, and its demand for human sacrifices (Deut. 18:9 - 14). Furthermore, Starhawk’s wiccan religion of the goddess is explicitly pantheistic (all is *God*) and monistic (all is *one*).¹³ This causes one to wonder whether Fox’s frequent commendations of Starhawk’s work in reawakening the goddess religion mean that he accepts pantheism after all. Honesty requires him to state his true relationship to Starhawk’s wiccan theology: is he pantheistic or not?

Fox even affirms a qualified belief in the astrological ages, as affirmed by Jung and New Agers. Fox calls astrology a “tradition that offers us a glimpse into our own futures,” but in the same section he emphatically states, “What I present here is not my personal belief in astrology (I do not *believe* in astrology) but a method of seeing the human consciousness historically, where historical means both past and future.”¹⁴

For Fox, astrology is a “symbolic method of seeing our futures” that “might have a valuable insight.” Jung defends this view “by arguing that astrological wisdom is significant for what it tells us of the contents of our spiritual unconscious and, as such, needs to be taken very seriously.”¹⁵ Then Fox recounts Jung’s description of 2,000 year-long stages in human history the *bull* (Taurus), from 4,000 to 2,000 B.C. — representing “primitive, instinctual civilizations”; the *ram* (Aries), from 2,000 B.C. to A.D. 1 — characterized by Judaism, conscience, and awareness of evil; the age of the *fishes* (Pisces), from A.D. 1 to 1997 — “dominated religiously by the figure of Christ.” The symbol of the two fish swimming in opposite directions “implies a dualistic spirituality that has so characterized Christian thinking and, in particular, Christian mysticism. It implies a Christ vs. anti-Christ tension.”¹⁶

Fox claims that the Piscean Age ends at the end of the twentieth century “according to this theory, and if there is some truth to it,” the Age of Aquarius is opening soon. It will be characterized by the symbol of water and “the deep,” but he does not explain the significance of this further. In the New Age, “evil will be made conscious to every individual who may in turn be made truly spiritual and responsible.” Individuals will have experiences of “the living spirit” in this spiritual age “where both the spirits of ugliness (evil) and of beauty (God) will be available to every person to choose in his own Way.”¹⁷ He says it will also be an age of “reincarnation,” not in the sense of transmigration of souls, which he rejects, but of restoring the *sensual* and *incarnate* sense again (i.e., people will have a positive experience of getting back in touch with their bodies).¹⁸ Fox foresees a changed church in the Age of Aquarius, too: “Sensual sacraments and liturgies, church leaders and schools, life -styles and working conditions — there lies the re-incarnational church for a post-Piscean Age.”¹⁹

The New Age movement gets its name from its belief that society will soon be transformed (many expect this around the turn of the millennium). This belief motivates many people to support the movement because the changes are proclaimed as inevitable and irreversible. Since no one can stop the inexorable advance into the Age of Aquarius, it is reasoned, it makes more sense to join it than fight it. Fox too is convinced that the old Piscean Age, with its dualistic, Augustinian, Newtonian world view, is dead.²⁰

I suspect that, like New Agers, Fox motivates himself and others to change their ideology and theology because he is convinced that a new, Aquarian Age is upon the world and the church. However, what if he is wrong? What if 1997 does not usher in the Age of Aquarius as he claims? Christianity has weathered many dramatic upheavals in society — from the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70, through the collapse of the Roman Empire, the French Revolution, and the atheistic persecutions of the Marxists and Nazis. The church, the beloved Bride of Jesus Christ, will survive *until He returns for her*, through the period New Agers call the Age of Aquarius and beyond.

Fox does the world and the church a disservice by not teaching the whole Scripture and by accepting only parts. The Greek word for heresy means taking parts out of the whole. While Fox’s love of creation and its God-given goodness is commendable, his new paradigm is not. It becomes a vehicle by which Christians are ushered into the New Age movement.

FOX’S TEACHING ON GOD AND CHRIST

A central element in the New Age movement is belief in pantheism, the idea that God is everything and everything is God. Where does Fox’s doctrine of God and Christ place him? Although he seeks to avoid this conclusion, his views on these all -important subjects belong in the New Age category.

Fox explicitly rejects pantheism as a heresy that removes God’s transcendence and makes the sacraments impossible.²¹ Instead, he holds to panentheism, which teaches that “everything is in God and God is in everything.” This idea has its home in the late

Neo-Platonism (a mystical philosophy which combined ideas from Plato with Oriental, Jewish, and Christian beliefs) of the Middle Ages, especially as represented by John Erigena, Nicholas of Cusa, and Meister Eckhart. Because Fox does not like Platonism, he dubs these Neo-Platonists “creation-centered theologians.”

All three philosophers came under church scrutiny and condemnation because their explicit claims of panentheism (which is bad enough, since it holds that the creation is inherently divine) masked an implicit pantheism. Fox has the same problem. His quotation of Nicholas of Cusa sounds like pantheism, though he calls it panentheism:

The absolute, Divine Mind, is all that is in everything that is....Divinity is the enfolding and unfolding of every thing that is. Divinity is in all things in such a way that all things are in divinity....

We are, as it were, a human deity. Humans are also the universe, but not absolutely since we are human. Humanity is therefore a microcosm, or in truth, a human universe. Thus humanity itself encloses both God and the universe in its human power.²²

Fox frequently quotes his version of Meister Eckhart:

The seed of God is in us....Now the seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree, a hazel seed into a hazel tree, the seed of God into God.²³ I discover that God and I are one. There I am what I was, and I grow neither smaller nor bigger, for there I am an immovable cause that moves all things.²⁴

These and similar passages throughout Fox’s books manifest an understanding of Christ and divinity rooted in Fox’s translations and imagination rather than Scripture or church teaching. Sounding remarkably like New Ager Mark and Elizabeth Clare Prophet of the Church Universal and Triumphant, Fox wants people to “birth” their own “I am,” which is the experience of the divine “I am.” The reason for our existence, Fox tells us, is to “birth the Cosmic Christ in our being and doing.”²⁵ Fox believes that everyone can and should give birth to the Cosmic Christ, which he believes will awaken the maternal within us.

Fox’s Cosmic Christ sounds pantheistic and not at all like Jesus, the only begotten Son of God. He writes, “The divine name from Exodus 3:14, ‘I Am who I Am,’ is appropriated by Jesus who shows us how to embrace our own divinity. The Cosmic Christ is the I am in every creature.”²⁶ Again Fox sounds like the Church Universal and Triumphant, claiming that Jesus appropriated His divinity and we can do the same. This makes Jesus no more divine than we are, as New Ager teach.

Fox tells us to “let go of the quest for the historical Jesus and embark on a quest for the Cosmic Christ”²⁷ Yet he does not want Cosmic Christ theology to be believed or lived “*at the expense of the historical Jesus*” (emphasis in original).²⁸ Fox seeks a dialectic or interchange of ideas between the historical and the cosmic so as to incorporate the prophetic and the mystical. This requires a conversion from a “personal Savior” Christianity, which is “anthropocentric and antimystical,” to a “Cosmic Christ” Christianity.²⁹

Which of Fox’s statements do we believe? He is confusing and contradictory. Perhaps he emphasizes the need for using the right side of the brain (with its intuition, mysticism, and freedom from dualistic, either/or thinking and the limitations of logic) *because of his own illogic*. For many New Ager, the emphasis on right brain nonthinking is the perfect defense against logic, communication of ideas, the expertise of other people, and common sense. Fox’s thinking mixes New Age ideas and clichés with his own faulty translations of old treatises from the fringes of Christianity, as I will now demonstrate.

FOX’S FAULTY SCHOLARSHIP

While Fox’s extensive interests and background include late Neo-Platonist philosophy, Medieval spirituality, and ecology, his scholarship is sloppy and embarrassing. He betrays the trust placed by nonspecialists that scholars do their homework.

I first noticed difficulties with Fox’s use of Scripture, my own area of expertise. He mistranslates texts and misrepresents linguistic findings to support his theological bias. For instance, he writes: “The word for ‘mountain’ in Hebrew also means ‘the Almighty’ and it comes from the word for breast. Mountains are the breasts of Mother Earth, thus ‘Come! Play on my mountain of myrrh.’”³⁰

This is a confused batch of misinformation. “Mountain” in Hebrew is *har*; the name “God Almighty” comes from the Akkadian word, *El Shaddai*; “breast” in Hebrew is *shad*, from the root *shadah*, which is not the root of *Shaddai* (*shadad* is). While a slight error if it were alone, Fox is mixing and matching etymologies irresponsibly to make a feminist point, though one that is nonexistent in Hebrew.

Another example occurs in his comments on the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon):

[The male lover in Song of Solomon] invokes the earth goddesses in this charge; this man is not out of touch with the pre-patriarchal spirituality: I tell you O young ones of the holy city: Do not arouse my lover before her time. I charge you by the “spirits and the goddesses of the field,” by the gazelles and the hinds: Do not disturb my love while she is at rest. (2:7; 3:5; 8:4)³¹

Fox’s translation and comments are faulty. The Hebrew has no reference to spirits and goddesses but rather reads:

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem: by the gazelles and by the hinds of the field: Do not awaken, do not stir up love until she pleases. (2:7)

The Hebrew word “gazelles” is *sebaoth*, similar to “hosts” in the name “Lord of Hosts” (Lord *Sabaoth*). The Greek Septuagint translates this word in Song of Songs 2:7 as “by the powers and forces of the field.” The Aramaic Targum has “by the Lord of Hosts and by the Strength of the land of Israel.” Paul Jouon, S.J., a French Hebraist, considered this an allusion to the armies of angels and their leaders, but the majority of scholars see them as words for gazelles and deer,³² not as references to earth goddesses.

Fox also abuses Hebrew etymology in claiming “the Hebrew word for blessing, *berakah*, is closely related to the word for create, *bara*....The word for covenant, *beriyth*, is also directly related to the words for ‘create’ and for ‘blessing.’”³³ This is utter nonsense, on a par with claiming that “carpet” originally meant dogs driving automobiles. *No etymological connection exists among these Hebrew words.* Covenants and creation may be blessings, but Fox bases his point on a false premise.

In another place Fox makes an erroneous claim about the Hebrew language to support an equally erroneous statement about God: “The with-ness of God is especially significant because, while Greeks focus on nouns in their literature, Jews focus on prepositions such as with, against, from, etc. The Covenant is a sign of God’s withness. To be without covenant would be unbearable for the Jewish believer. God, then, is a preposition for the Jew. And the preposition is basically one of presence, of with-ness.”³⁴

In fact, the Hebrew language does *not* focus on prepositions but on verbs, usually in the form of what Hebrew grammarians call triliteral roots. The prepositions are substantives derived from verbs. The words meaning “God” are not prepositions, nor are they derived from prepositions. It is absurd to call God a preposition.

Elsewhere Fox mistranslates Greek words that are not even in the New Testament! He writes of “the counsel of Jesus to his friends (substituting the word ‘culture’ for *kenosis*) when he declared that they be ‘in the culture but not of it.’”³⁵ First, the Greek word *kerrosis* (meaning “emptying”) does not appear anywhere in the New Testament. Why does Fox bother to mistranslate it? Second, the saying of Jesus which he reinterprets here is apparently John 17:16, “They [the disciples] are not of the world [*ek tou kosmou*] as I am not of the world [*ek tou kosmou*].” Perhaps Fox did not want to inform his readers that neither Jesus nor His friends were “of the cosmos,” a key word in Foxian thought.

Serious problems arise from Fox’s translation of John 1:1-5, 9, 10, 12, and 14, where he uses the impersonal sounding words “Creative Energy” to translate the Greek word *logos* (usually translated as “word”). The word “energy” is simply unacceptable as a translation of *logos*. Further, instead of the personal pronoun “he” (present in Greek), Fox uses “it” to refer to the Word eleven times, though he calls “it” the “Child of the Creator.” Fox’s depersonalization of the Word made flesh makes Christ an impersonal energy. More evidence of a depersonalizing tendency appears in a quote of thirteenth century saint and mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg: “From the very beginning God loved us. The Holy Trinity gave *itself* in the creation of all things and made us, body and soul, in infinite love” (emphasis added).³⁶

Fox also misrepresents the way Christians have allegorized the Song of Songs, saying that they read “into the Jewish tradition a dualism between body and soul and an alien original sin mentality that are not there.”³⁷ However, it was the rabbinic tradition that first allegorized the Song of Songs. Had Rabbi Aqiba not insisted on an allegorical interpretation of the Song, the rabbis would not have kept it in their Scripture canon. Christians simply continued the Jewish tradition of allegorizing the Song, though they adapted it to their understanding of Christ and the church.

Training in Hebrew and Greek helped me catch all the above errors, but I am not an expert in Medieval literature. When I asked Medievalists about Fox’s work, they noted its defective and dishonest qualities.

Dr. Barbara Newman, an expert on St. Hildegard of Bingen at Northwestern University, is skeptical of Fox’s work on St. Hildegard. In a footnote she says of Gabrielle Uhllein’s *Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen* and Fox’s *Illuminations of*

Hildegard of Bingen that the “so-called translations in these volumes are not to be trusted.”³⁸ Newman’s review of Fox’s edition of *Hildegard of Bingen’s Book of Divine Works, with Letters and Songs* says: “The present book, like earlier Hildegard volumes from this press [Bear & Company], raises serious questions about the editor’s integrity.”³⁹ It is not a translation from Hildegard’s original Latin version but is from a German abridgment, which Fox erroneously calls “a critical text.” One wonders why Fox did not use the original texts.

Newman says the introductions in Fox’s volume are “rife with errors about Hildegard’s work,” such as the false idea that she founded monasteries for men or administered a small kingdom. Instead of the feminist portrayed by Fox and company, Hildegard “firmly defended social hierarchies, and believed in divinely ordained gender roles,” called God *Father* and *Son*, and used masculine pronouns for God.⁴⁰ Neither was Hildegard a creation-centered theologian, as Fox claims: “Hildegard’s teaching is not creation centered at all; it centers on the Incarnation....”⁴¹ Newman concludes her review by saying, “the wholesale misrepresentations that Bear & Company engage in cannot, in the long run, serve the cause of human integrity by purveying historical fallacies.”⁴²

Another critic is Simon Tugwell, O.P. who reviewed Matthew Fox’s *Breakthrough. Meister Eckhart’s Creation Spirituality in New Translation* in the Dominican journal, *New Blackfriars*. Tugwell, proficient in Eckhart’s thought and in Middle High German language, thoroughly exposes Fox’s poor scholarship.

First, Tugwell says Fox’s translation is poor quality. Instead of using the Middle High German of Eckhart’s original, Fox chose Quint’s modern German translation of the original. *Why did Fox not use the original language?* Tugwell goes on to say that Fox inaccurately translates Quint’s text with “an extraordinary number of mistakes.” At times Fox does not understand the syntax; at times he does not know the meanings of words. But, Tugwell says, “sometimes it is difficult to avoid the feeling that the mistranslation is deliberate, intended to minimize anything that would interfere with the alleged ‘creation-centeredness’ of Eckhart’s spirituality.”⁴³

Tugwell says the historical introduction in this book “is so dominated by wishful thinking and sheer fantasy that the reviewer hardly knows how to begin criticizing it.”⁴⁴ When Fox alleged Celtic influence on Eckhart, Tugwell found himself reduced to “helpless, gibbering fury.” He accuses Fox of “tendentious half-truths, or....downright falsehood.” For instance, Fox claims Eckhart was a feminist influenced by the beguine movement (semi-monastic sisterhoods going back to twelfth century Holland), but in fact no *reliable evidence exists for either assertion*. Also, Fox calls Eckhart, a Dominican, “the most Franciscan spiritual theologian of the church” because he rejected the dualist thoughts of Platonist philosophers. In fact, St. Francis was *clearly* dualistic because he said that the soul lives in the body “like a hermit in a hermitage” and called the body and soul “both men” inside the person. Fox ignores this dualism in St. Francis, whom Fox has dubbed “creation-centered.” In short, then, Tugwell caught Fox committing significant errors.

Unfortunately, the appeal and use of Fox’s pseudotranslations are widespread. An American scholar visiting Norwich, England stopped at a gift shop, and the racks displayed all the Bear & Company translations. When the visitor explained how faulty and inaccurate these translations were, the clerk gushed, “That all may be true, but Fr. Fox has been such a help to my spiritual life.”

Why are the above criticisms significant for understanding Fox and creation-centered spirituality? First, they throw the rest of his scholarship into question. I certainly do not trust his biblical scholarship; neither do a Hildegard of Bingen scholar and a Meister Eckhart scholar trust his translations and commentaries. Experts find Fox committing so many dumb mistakes that he is either full of malarkey or, as some (including myself) suspect, is deliberately deceitful. Since Fox has repeatedly betrayed his trust as a scholar, why should he be trusted as an authority on religious matters?

Second, Fox constructs much of his creation-centered theology from *his own*, translations of Hildegard and Eckhart. His faulty translations support a crumbly theological edifice. Scholars can show that neither Sacred Scripture, St. Hildegard, St. Francis, nor even Meister Eckhart are to blame for Fox’s peculiar theology. He must bear full responsibility (and culpability) for this abominable approach to “spirituality.”

IS ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY DYING?

Not all of Fox’s concerns are wrong headed. Christians need to show more love for creation and the environment. Growth in compassion and creativity (in the analogous sense by which we creatures *can* be creative) is a laudable goal. As well, passion for justice and concern for the poor are biblical characteristics. Yet none of these requires us to abandon the faith handed on to us by the apostles. We need not accept Fox’s view that “the Church as we have known it is dying.”⁴⁵ or that “Christianity as we know it will *not* survive for we know it now in wineskins that are brittle, old and leaking.”⁴⁶ Christ Jesus, truth incarnate, will renew the Church and bring many people to salvation through union with Him. We can depend on that.

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

Matthew Fox has invented a creation-centered theology that tries to see everything in God and God in everything. His Cosmic Christ is especially in the earth, and he would have us all learn to find this Christ in ourselves and in the world. Clearly, Fox's theology distorts historic Christianity into a crypto-New Age system that leads people away from the real Christ of Scripture. The warning of St. Paul is well-suited for this modern-day wolf in clerical clothing: "See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe [Greek: *kosmos*], and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority" (Col. 2:8-10, RSV).

NOTES

- 1 Matthew Fox, O.P., *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Company, 1983), 9.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 10-11.
- 3 Matthew Fox, O.P., *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 151.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 182.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 135.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 138.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 149.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 214.
- 10 Fox, *Original Blessing*, 16.
- 11 Fox, *Cosmic Christ*, 45-46.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 141.
- 13 Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess*, 10th Anniversary Edition, Revised and Updated (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 10-11, 22, 23, 27.
- 14 Matthew Fox, *WHEE! We, wee All the Way Home: A Guide to the New Sensual Spirituality* (Wilmington, NC: A Consortium Book, 1976), ii.
- 15 *Ibid.* Unfortunately, though Randy England's *Unicorn in the Sanctuary* (Manassas, VA: Trinity Communications, 1990), 122, quotes Fox's statement about astrological ages rather extensively, he omits Fox's denial of belief in astrology. England should have been more fair and directed the criticism more pointedly.
- 16 Fox, *WHEE!*, ii-iii.
- 17 *Ibid.*, iii.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 183.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 196.
- 20 Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 256.
- 21 Fox, *Original Blessing*, 90
- 22 Fox, *Cosmic Christ*, 126
- 23 *Ibid.*, 121.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 155.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 *Ibid.*, 169.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 170.
- 32 Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 385-86.
- 33 Fox, *Original Blessing*, 46.
- 34 *Ibid.* Here Fox cites a lecture by Dr. Ron Miller at ICCS, Mundelein College, Chicago, 18 January 1982.
- 35 Matthew Fox, O.P., *On Becoming a Musical, Mystical Bear* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972), 66.
- 36 Fox, *Original Blessing*, 48.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 62.
- 38 Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1987), 250n.
- 39 Barbara Newman, review of Matthew Fox, ed., *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works, with Letters and Songs*, "Church History 54 (1985), 190.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 191

41 Newman, *Sister*, 250

42 Newman, review, 192.

43 Simon Tugwell, O.P., review of *Breakthrough: Meister Eckhart's Creation Spirituality in New Translation*, Introduction and Commentaries by Matthew Fox, *New Blackfriars* 63 (1982), 197.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Fox, *Cosmic Christ*, 31.

46 *Ibid.*, 149.

GLOSSARY

Carl Jung: (1875-1961) A Swiss psychologist and onetime associate of Sigmund Freud who founded a school of "depth psychology." He was interested in myth and religion, but personally believed in alchemy, the occult, and pantheism.

creation spirituality: Matthew Fox's name for his religious approach. Its starting point and focus is on creation, which is identified with God and the Cosmic Christ. He sets it in opposition to belief in man's fall into sin and Christ's redemption.

pantheism: The belief that God is in everything and everything is in God.

cosmic: Fox uses this to mean the whole universe, with its laws of harmony and wholeness and its beauty.

Cosmic Christ: Though Fox affirms belief in the historical Jesus, he considers the Cosmic Christ to be a "third nature" in addition to the divine and human natures. By saying it is the "I AM" in every creature, the Cosmic Christ is identified with creation. The earth is called the Cosmic Christ.

cosmology: For Fox, the study of the cosmos or universe, with a focus on a new paradigm based on Einstein's physics rather than Newton's. It brings together science, mysticism, and art, and tries to do away with all dualism.