

Matthew Fox and the Cosmic Christ

MARGARET BREARLEY

The myth of matricide

Matthew Fox, an American Dominican, is a prolific and controversial author, whose 'creation spirituality' is gaining wide influence within both Roman Catholic and Anglican churches and retreat centres. To review his recent book, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (Harper & Row, San Francisco 1988) is an even more complex task than reviewing his earlier writings, for it is somewhat like a hologram; its beginning, entitled: 'Prologue: A Dream and a Vision', already contains its end; each segment of the text is interdependent on the rest and, in a sense, contains the whole. Rather than developing thought and argument in logical progression, the book represents shafts of light thrown from different perspectives on one central image or myth. For the first time Fox has constructed an all-embracing myth which he believes is capable of explaining the totality of contemporary reality. He then demonstrates a new ethic, derived from that myth, and finally demands that an utterly new reality be formed on the basis of his central myth and its ethic.

The dominant myth is that of matricide. Fox accuses traditional Christianity — and therefore Western culture — of being matricidal. In earlier writings he had already radically condemned Christian orthodoxy.

While claiming to restore the Hebrew roots of Christianity, Fox had in fact rejected both the God of Israel and traditional prayer as 'useless' and denied both Old and New Testaments as sources of revelation.¹ In *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* Fox is even more radical. Merely on the basis of a prophetic 'dream' in which he heard a voice saying 'Your mother is dying', Fox describes the entire Western culture as 'involved in a matricide which is also ecocide, geocide, suicide and even deicide'. (p 17) The *anima* is dying; wisdom, creativity, youth, love, native peoples, Mother Church — all are dying. But, above all, it is Mother Earth who is raped, tortured, crucified: 'We have begun to put our hands in her lanced side and in her crucified hands and feet'. (p 16) Mother Earth's murderer is the patriarchy of western civilisation, of dualistic Christianity, above all of 'fundamentalism', which is 'patriarchy gone berserk'. (p 27) Whereas Mother Earth is portrayed as almost human, 'very aware and sensitive', (p 18) the Church has become inhuman. Dominated by patriarchal theology and fundamentalism, the Church is now matricidal and sado-masochistic. (p 28) Because of his dream,

1 M. Fox, *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear*, (Paulist Press, New York 1972, 1976), pp 19, 26, 62. Cf. M. Brearley, 'Matthew Fox: Creation Spirituality for the Aquarian Age', *Christian Jewish Relations*, vol. 22 (1989), pp 37-49.

Fox describes the 'fundamentalist forms of Christianity', to which he applies Dorothea Soelle's term of 'Christofascism', as imbued with 'a reptilian kind of energy and hatred' and 'reptilian language'. (p 28)

This dehumanising portrayal of the Church is perhaps Fox's revenge on the Vatican for silencing him for one year on grounds of heresy. But it is actually crucial to his spirituality. For Fox proclaims the 'good news' to the Church that out of the crucifixion of Mother Earth will come a spiritual awakening 'from Mother Earth herself'. (p 18) As the Church separates from 'fascist religious sects', it will awaken at last to compassion and be reborn: 'those who are engulfed in mother church's womb need to be born again in the womb of mother cosmos. This second birth is crucial for the redemption of the Church'. (p 32)

The revival of mysticism

Fox declares that Western matricide has involved a 'dangerous... denial of the mystic', (p 39) which has led to a 'depressive' culture. In one of his intuitive semantic leaps into sweeping generalisation, he then states: 'a civilisation that denies the mystic is no civilisation at all'. (p 43) But both civilisation and Church can be redeemed through a 'deep mystical awakening the likes of which the planet has never witnessed before... an awakening in our mystical consciousness'. (p 34) Only mysticism, 'a resurrection story for our times', (p 35) can redeem humankind and Christianity: 'How will we move from crucifixion or matricide to healthy living? The link... lies in the human psyche's capacity for resurrection: for aliveness, wakefulness, awareness, and rebirth — in short, mysticism.... If we can awaken to an authentic mysticism, then a resurrection of Mother Earth is possible'. (p 38)

It is welcome that Fox in this and earlier books stresses the need for the Church to rediscover mysticism. Here, as elsewhere, Fox plays a valuable role in pointing to deep lacunae and flaws within Christianity past and present. He rightly highlights the appalling record of the Church towards Native American Indians and other oppressed peoples. He rightly stresses the Church's distorted teaching on sexuality and consequent history of misogyny.² He rightly claims that in the last three hundred years the Church has abandoned its mediaeval neo-Platonic cosmology (though this was a necessary consequence of invaluable scientific developments). Most of its mystical traditions are little known today. Yet while few in the Church now know that mediaeval mystics understood the songs of their own souls, briefly but ecstatically entering the holy presence of God, as echoing both the song of angels in the spiritual realm and the song of Creation within the earthly realm, as it glorified its Creator,³ authentic Christian mysticism never died. From Traherne, William Law and John Wesley to Gerard Manley Hopkins, Kierkegaard, Thomas Merton, even to parts of the charismatic renewal, it has survived until today, with its emphasis on holiness, the Holy Spirit, biblical meditation and awareness of the beauty of God's creation.

2 Cf. U. Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for Heaven. The Catholic Church & Sexuality*, Andre Deutsch, London 1990.

3 Richard Rolle, *The Fire of Love*, trs. C. Wolters, Penguin Books, London 1972, chs. 15-17.

But Fox's own understanding of mysticism radically differs from that of traditional Christian mysticism, for he rejects any notion of a transcendent God into whose presence the soul can enter. He further rejects the contemplative forms of prayer, fasting and biblical meditation, which virtually all Christian mystics have practised.⁴ Mysticism means for Fox not the soul approaching the transcendent God but the immersion of the psyche into the unconscious mind, into the 'great underground river' of the life force itself, where in earlier books he had located divinity.⁵

Fox's mysticism is explicitly described as being identical with Aldous Huxley's 'perennial philosophy'. (p 47) He thus follows the path which Prof. R. C. Zaehner so roundly condemned: 'Unfortunately... there are still many rather simple individuals who prefer to treat mysticism as a single phenomenon, identical in all its manifestations and present everywhere in the world.... This is very far from the truth'.⁶ For Fox, mysticism is the attainment of non-dualistic 'cosmic consciousness' through the psyche and through psycho-physiological techniques such as deep breathing, widely practised in yoga and occultism. Whereas traditional Christian mysticism has been practised by an ardent, often ascetic minority within the Church — although in movements such as the late mediaeval *devotio moderna* and the modern charismatic renewal certain aspects of Christian mysticism have become widely known and used — Fox's version of mysticism is, he claims, universal. His aim is 'to elicit the mystic within each person'; 'everyone is a mystic'. (p 48) Because mysticism is a 'right-brain experience', (p 47) 'all of life is mystical, i.e. irrational'. (p 55) Mysticism leads to rebirth, to universal creativity; as each person births the mystic through the psyche and bodily techniques, 'the true self' is born, 'a birth with God of what is truly divine'. (p 64) Indeed, Fox even claims that 'the earth yearns' (p 65) for his version of mysticism, since it involves the permanent eradication of all dualism, between heart and head, body and mind, above all 'the primary dualism — that between humans and divinity'. (p 50)

Matthew Fox and dualism

Yet here, as elsewhere, Fox is himself deeply dualistic. His creation spirituality and mysticism result from wilful dualism on his part; he has split away from what he too narrowly categorises as 'fall-redemption theology' its own integral vision of creation, which he has then claimed as an independent spirituality. Contrary to historical evidence, Fox denies that God-centred fall-redemption theology has inspired mystics. He caricatures traditional main-stream theology as non-mystical, ascetic and exclusively concerned with sacraments and liturgical rites. He claims that there has been a separate 'creation-centred tradition', to which all Christian mystics belonged and which he now is resurrecting.

4 E. Underhill, *Mysticism. A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, 11th. edn., London 1926, Pt. II, chs. 3,6-8.

5 M. Fox, *Original Blessing. A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Bear & Co., Santa Fe 1983, pp 161, 172. Cf. also *Whee! We, Wee All the Way Home: A Guide to Sensual, Prophetic Spirituality*, Santa Fe, 1981, p 55.

6 R. C. Zaehner, *Our Savage God*, Collins, London 1974, p 10.

As a mediaevalist steeped in the German mystics, I am convinced that Fox's dualistic distinction between 'non-mystical' fall-redemption theology and mystical creation spirituality is a deliberate fallacy. With the possible exception of Eckhart, all of Fox's so-called 'creation mystics' — Johannes Tauler, Heinrich Suso, Julian of Norwich, Hildegard of Bingen, Mechtild of Magdeburg — were deeply rooted within both the Church's institutions and the traditional God-centred theology of sin, redemption and *imitatio Dei*. Their language, with its word-coinages, bold similes and — in the case of women mystics — erotic overtones, was innovative and bold, as was fitting for those trying to express inexpressible spiritual experiences. Their theology was by and large orthodox; indeed, Hildegard of Bingen and other mystics willingly combatted heretics of their day. Their mystical experience was most certainly not rooted, as is Fox's nature-centred mysticism, in 'the primal sacrament, the primal mystery that is the universe itself'. (p 39) On the contrary, it stemmed, as Kenneth Kirk demonstrated when discussing Richard of St Victor, from rootedness in love of the historical Jesus Christ: 'The purpose of contemplation is not to achieve a mere ecstatic vacuity. It aims at a genuine vision of God 'in the face of Jesus Christ'. Its goal is '*Christum clarificatum videre*' 'to see Christ in utter clearness':⁷ not union but communion with God, not absorption into the monistic One but voluntary approach to the Creator in whose image man is created.

The truth is that both the Church — with all its faults — and traditional theology have been far more all-embracing than Fox admits. Intolerant towards Jews, women and heretics they undoubtedly were, but there was room for mystics, hermits and a profoundly positive awareness of creation's beauty. In attacking the Church and 'Christo-fascism', Fox's methodology is ahistorical and highly selective. He damns St Augustine, for example, as the archetypal representative of non-mystical fall-redemption patriarchy, yet ignores the *Confessions*, with their neo-Platonic teaching of the soul's capacity to see God and their outpourings of lyrical delight in creation, seen as doubly glorious because endowed with spiritual meaning as well as physical beauty. As evidence for his claim that traditional theology despised creation and produced 'a perverse understanding of mysticism as mortification of the senses', (p 39) Fox cites only one minor, unrepresentative twentieth-century text. He ignores the importance of gardens for the mediaeval Church (even anchorites had them); he ignores Victorine spirituality, the role of the Cistercians in transforming nature, the long monastic cherishing of the natural world which preceded St Francis of Assisi,⁸ and the major Christian tradition of Man as marvellous microcosm. Fox's 'authentic mysticism' is thus based on inauthentic scholarship and what appears to be a falsification of history.

From the historical Jesus to the Cosmic Christ

Yet Fox clearly wishes to authenticate his myth and mysticism fully and so

7 K. E. Kirk, *The Vision of God. The Christian Doctrine of Summum Bonum*, Harper & Row, New York 1966, p 374.

8 cf. Roger D. Sorrell, *St Francis of Assisi and Nature. Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment*, OUP, New York/Oxford 1988.

he claims the historical Jesus as a teacher of his own purportedly non-dualistic creation mysticism. He recreates Jesus in his own image: as attuned to nature, right brain, birthing images — all twenty one of Fox's 'running, working, experiential definitions of mysticism' (p 47) are demonstrated in his version of the historical Jesus. His account of Jesus' teachings is, at very least, partial. Fox's Jesus, a storyteller whose 'ministry was one of birthing images', (p 71) taught merely 'Glad Tidings about blessing and responsibility for the world.... The Kingdom of God is creation itself' (p 68). Jesus taught that 'all is in God and that God is in all' (p 71), calling others 'to be true to their hearts'. (p 72) Fox claims that the spirituality of Jesus and himself is panentheistic; yet if Dr Johnson's definition of a pantheist as 'one who confounds God with the Universe' holds good, then Matthew Fox is actually preaching a form of pantheism.

But for Fox the historical Jesus is, in any case, no longer an appropriate paradigm. The movement from the Enlightenment's quest for the historical Jesus to today's quest for the Cosmic Christ names the paradigm shift that religion and theology... need to undergo'. (p 78) The implications of abandoning Jesus in favour of the Cosmic Christ will be unavoidable and radical: 'every theologian must embark on these pathways... this will require a deep letting go of the old paradigms of education and theology'. (pp 78f). There must be surrender of 'the Jesus dimension to religion' and the 'personal saviour of fundamentalism', since these paralleled 'the individualism of the Enlightenment and industrial age' and are no longer appropriate for 'an emerging age', which needs a new 'vision for existence'. (p 82) The paradigm shift to the Cosmic Christ will involve total re-education: 'indeed it may require an entirely different kind of person'. (p 80) This theological 'shift will affect every aspect of our culture'. (p 82) On the basis of his central myth, Fox asserts that the Cosmic Christ represents 'a true second coming, an ushering in of a spiritual and cultural renaissance that can heal the most poignant and urgent pain of our time — the crucifixion of Mother Earth'. (p 83)

Fox seeks to authenticate further his vision of the Cosmic Christ by reinterpreting Hebrew and Christian scriptures. But at times he retranslates the Bible to suit his own interpretation and omits verses which run counter to it.⁹ He claims that his vision of the Cosmic Christ is mirrored in the 'cosmological theology' (p 109) of the Bible, the Church Fathers and mediæval mystics — yet whereas their vision was clearly that of Jesus Christ's lordship over creation and the cosmos, Fox's vision is radically other. He contends that 'the Cosmic Christ is not restricted to Jesus' (p 168) and that it is only the cross which distinguishes 'between those who believed in Jesus as the Cosmic Christ and those who were initiated into other forms of cosmic spirituality'. (p 85) Only the 'historical cross' (p 88) separates 'Cosmic Christ mysticism from other cosmic mysticisms'.¹⁰ Fox rightly affirms that all cosmic mysticism (whether pagan or eastern or that of perennial philosophy) is rooted in space, whereas the historical Jesus, the cross and Judæo-

9 e.g. p 90, omission of crucial part of Col. 1:18; p 92, mistranslation of Eph. 2:10 as referring to 'good life' instead of 'good works'.

10 cf. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh: 'Christianity is not Christianity, but Crossianity. Its symbol is the cross, not Christ' (*The Rajneesh Bible*, Rajneeshpuram, Oregon 1985, Vol. 1, p 142).

Christian biblical mysticism are rooted in time.¹¹ So the quest for the Cosmic Christ moves one from the time dimension of linear salvation history to the space dimension of cosmic mysticism. 'Jesus is time; Christ is space'. (p 143) Here the central myth is essential to Fox's attempted transformation of Christianity. For he escapes from the cross which 'grounded the Christ' in time by mythologising it as crucified Mother Earth: 'The appropriate symbol of the Cosmic Christ who became incarnate in Jesus is that of Jesus as Mother Earth crucified yet rising daily... like Jesus, she rises from her tomb every day... wounded, yet rising, Mother Earth blesses us each day'. (p 145)

Mother Earth spirituality

Fox's spirituality rejects all traditional concepts such as God the compassionate Father, Jesus the self-sacrificial friend of sinners, Mother Church, and the caring Christian community. Mother Earth replaces them all. Mother Earth is now the temple; it is she who seeks our good, weeps for her children and yearns to take us under her protection. Indeed, it was Earth who accomplished 'a uniquely divine act in birthing Jesus Christ'. Subsumed within Mother Earth, Jesus conveniently disappears: 'Jesus is Mother Earth'. (p 147) 'Mother Earth... understood as Jesus Christ crucified' (p 149) replaces the historical Jesus of time, opening the way for the Cosmic Christ of space and ultimately of all religions. Fox states: 'I am proposing that in a Cosmic Christ context the paschal mystery takes on new power, deep meaning and moral passion when we understand it as... the life, death, and resurrection of Mother Earth'. (p 149) 'Mother Earth is a constantly sacrificed paschal lamb'. (p 150)

This radical spirituality based on Mother Earth and the Cosmic Christ reinterprets and transforms the entire Judaeo-Christian tradition both retrospectively and in the present. Fox claims, for example, that behind much of Old Testament wisdom literature lay 'Isis... a black mother goddess' (p 43) and that Passover derived from Mother Earth worship. (p 150) All theology is rerooted, not in 'Jewish spiritual consciousness', as Fox once claimed, but in Earth. While Old and New Testaments are rejected as 'manmade word-books',¹² revelation occurs primarily through Nature: 'Mother Earth is a special word of God'. (p 147) It is her blood, for example, that 'is spilled for our... salvation'. (p 150) It is the universe, not God, who loves us and yearns for us. Eucharist is 'the eating and drinking of the wounded earth, the ingesting of the sacrificial victim'; (p 214) 'drink blood of the cosmos itself in all its divinity'. (p 228)

Although Part IV of this book is entitled: 'Who is the Cosmic Christ?', the

11 For discussion of concepts of time cf. Murad D. Akhundov, *Conceptions of Space and Time: Sources, Evolution, Directions*, trs. C. Rougle, (MIT Press, Camb. Mass. /London 1986; Elliott Jaques, *The Form of Time*, Crane Russak/Heinemann, New York/London 1982; J. B. Priestley, *Man and Time*, Aldus Books, London 1964; P. Ricoeur, ed., *Cultures and Time*, Unesco Press, Paris 1976, (esp. pp 149-168, 'The View of Time and History in Jewish Culture' by Andre Neher); S. G. Brandon, 'Time and the Destiny of Man', in J. T. Fraser ed., *The Voices of Time: A Cooperative Survey of Man's Views on Time as Expressed by the Sciences and by the Humanities*, Allen Lane, Penguin Press, London 1968, pp 140-157.

12 M. Fox, *Original Blessing*, p 38.

question is never fully answered. Fox's Cosmic Christ is 'the pattern that connects', (p 133) the connection between time and space, microcosm and macrocosm, man and Mother Earth. It is the essence of non-dualism, replacing revelation, the Holy Spirit and all traditional bridges between the divine and the human. The Cosmic Christ is universal; although Christ was 'incarnated in Jesus', (p 140) nevertheless 'we are all Cosmic Christs' (p 137) since the divine 'I am' is revealed in every creature. (p 154) Furthermore, the Cosmic Christ is not yet fully manifested. Just as Fox had earlier asserted that 'in some sense God is not born yet',¹³ the same is true of Christ: 'in a real sense the Cosmic Christ is not born yet'. (p 136)

The primacy of sexuality and the new ethics

The myth of Mother Earth crucified by patriarchy and resurrected by discovery of the Cosmic Christ creates its own ethic. The traditional Judaeo-Christian ethic of absolute moral values of good and evil, the ideals of righteousness and holy living, the sanctification of daily life, are abandoned. Time becomes irrelevant: 'the past and the future are not what exist; it is the now moment that exists most richly'. (p 155) Life's only purpose is to 'birth the Cosmic Christ in our being and doing for that is why we exist'. (p 155) Sexuality becomes the dominant value, since 'the Cosmic Christ of sexuality' (p 168) 'urges us to render sexuality a hierophany' again (p 173) and to restore 'the sacredness of the phallos. Phallos as god-image...'. (p 176) Fox cites the Hindu god Shiva, the creator and destroyer: 'The phallos is identical with me.... The phallos is... the symbol of the god', and adds: 'This is Cosmic Christ language.... There *alone* [my italics] will men recover active respect and reverence for their own amazing powers'. (p 176) Fox teaches that one must 'recover the sense of sacred phallos... by way of drumming, dancing and entering into the irrational processes... puberty rites... celebrating one's chthonic wholeness in the company of male adults'. (p 177) 'Love beds are altars' (p 177) and the sense of lust should be recovered as power and therefore as virtue: 'it takes courage to be lustful'. (p 178) Mystical sexuality is an 'important base for cultural renewal and personal spiritual grounding'. (p 179)

One wonders what might be the implications of this proposed revival of the sacred phallus. The biblical prophets clearly condemned phallic cults such as those of Baal and Tammuz. Moreover, phallus worship and associated cults, such as those of Dionysus, Attis, Astarte and the Great Mother, could involve unethical practices including orgiastic rites, child sacrifice and self-castration¹⁴ — drumming being a vital part of all these rites and heightening the ecstatic fervour. This should surely make any renewal of sacred phallic eroticism highly questionable today, particularly in the light of Fox's corollary: 'gay people need to lead straight people'. (p 232)

Other key values of this ethic include: the celebration of youth, play,

13 *Ibid.*, p 225.

14 cf. H. A. Strong, *The Syrian Goddess. Being a Translation of Lucian's "De Dea Syria" With a Life of Lucian*, London, 1913, pp 53, 65, 88. For bibliographical references cf. M. Eliade, *From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, Collins, London 1979, I, pp 449-451.

creativity, and the 'personal arts' including massage, story-telling and growing flowers. They are the values of amoral hedonism and self-fulfilment, not the values of social justice, righteousness and compassion with suffering. And yet on the basis of this Mother Earth dream myth and self-centred ethic, Fox proposes creating a new society, a new reality. He demands a new politics and a new economics based on the values of Mother Earth. (p 201) Education would mean universal 'educing the Cosmic Christ': (p 207) 'in classrooms ecstasy will replace boredom' (p 208) as the eclectic and intuitive 'model of education' evolved in Fox's own Institute becomes widely adopted.

The transformation of liturgy and society

Above all, Fox calls for 'a thorough renewal of worship in the West'. (p 211) Traditional liturgies should be replaced by 'the playing out of the cosmic drama in our psyches and social groupings'. (p 212) The spiritual transformation of traditional Christianity is vital, since 'if our civilisation could truly redeem worship, it could itself be redeemed'. (p 211) But 'liturgy in its present context is not redeemable. It needs to yield to fuller and fresher wineskins. It needs to conform to a living cosmology.... It needs an immediate recycling of our leaders and preachers.... All worship leaders need to be instructed... in body awareness and awakening'. (pp 216f) In practice Fox demands: worship in circles, 'preferably on the soil of Mother Earth'; (p 217) the centrality of Eros; and the breaking of divisions between body and mind using 'rituals of the native peoples'. These would include sweat lodges in every church and synagogue, Sun dances with drumming, moon rituals, drinking the 'blood of the cosmos' and radically replacing the existing liturgical calendar. Fox seriously suggests, for example, that each Sunday could be devoted to celebrating a different organ of the body.

Liturgical transformation of Christianity towards practices adopted from Eastern or native religions is simply the outward sign of a far deeper inner transformation towards 'deep ecumenism', 'mystical solidarity' (p 232) between all religions, 'the movement that will unleash the wisdom of all world religions... the last hope for the survival of the planet'. (p 228) Fox especially hopes for deep ecumenism 'between goddess religions and Christian mysticism'. (p 235) His description of the Cosmic Christ as 'the bodhisattva one... fully committed to the enlightenment of every creature on earth' (p 153) is already an example of Arnold Toynbee's anticipated 'coming together of Christianity and Buddhism' as 'the most important event of the twentieth century', to which Fox himself alludes. (p 232)

The final section of *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, entitled 'A Vision of the Second Coming', outlines the new reality to be created in church and synagogue, seminary and school, indeed the whole of society. Fox proclaims his spirituality as universally true: 'creation spirituality... does indeed constitute a basis for church renewal... and with it a potential for spiritual renewal that touches every element of society'. (p 238) He anticipates that only what he calls 'Christofascist fundamentalism', which 'is not mature enough to be called a spirituality', (p 141) would oppose it. Fox's latest book thus offers all-embracing blueprint for the future. From the myth of Mother

Earth crucified and the advent of the Cosmic Christ, it creates a radically new ethic and demands a radically new reality. This blueprint is attractive to many within the Church, as the mass audiences during Fox's 1991 tour of England and Scotland testify. Fears of ecological catastrophe, natural yearning for a golden age of universal brotherhood and peace, and disillusionment with a Church largely devoid of the supernatural create fertile ground for Fox's millenarian spirituality.

Transformations of Christianity

I believe that Fox is preparing not an authentic spiritual, mystical renewal of Christianity, but an authentic spiritual, mystical renewal of pagan 'cosmic consciousness'. At times this emerges clearly from his own sources, as when he quotes Black Elk's description of man's expansion of consciousness during a Sun dance: 'It is by this "expansion" that a man ceases to be a part, a fragment, and becomes whole or holy; he shatters the illusion of separateness'. (p 227) This is Huxley's perennial philosophy in a nutshell. Normally, however, Fox attempts to demonstrate that his 'healthy' spirituality in fact embodies the quintessential teaching of Judaism and Christianity, obscured by centuries of false teaching due to Newtonian mechanistic science and unhealthy dualistic theology. But in practice, as I shall later show, Fox embodies radically different teaching drawn from spiritual sources which were ultimately hostile to exoteric Christianity.

Matthew Fox *could* have chosen to reroot Christian spirituality in orthodox Western theology by resurrecting some of its valuable and lost mediaeval traditions — its angelology, its emphasis on symbolic modes of perception, its Christian cosmology of microcosm and macrocosm. The consecrated space of cathedrals, for example, with their demonic gargoyles without and angelic figures within, represented time embodied in stone. One entered through the western door into creation and passed through biblical time — portrayed in statues and wall paintings — subsequently moving at the end of the nave into contemporary time and finally into eschatological time with scenes of the Last Judgment and heaven. Mediaeval theologians taught that the Scriptures and Nature complement one another in each attesting to God's working in history. As St Hugh of St Victor wrote: 'This whole visible world is a book written by the finger of God',¹⁵ morally and spiritually meaningful, revealing through its beauty 'the wisdom of the creator'.

Alternatively, Fox could have introduced some of the wealth of Eastern Orthodox ritual and spiritual practice, or have turned to the rich mysticism and spiritual cosmology of Judaism, which, while insisting on clear demarcation between the sacred and the profane, has had far more wholistic religious traditions than Christianity. Judaism has normally emphasised marriage rather than celibacy, moderation rather than asceticism, and man as intrinsically good (though with an inclination towards evil) rather than tainted by original sin. With its theology of blessing, its sanctifying of everyday life, its emphasis on the goodness of sexuality (the Shekina —

15 Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book*, St. Alban's 1973, p 48.

God's holy presence — overshadows a husband and wife when making love), its wiser attitudes towards women and its traditions of an educated and involved laity, living Judaism could indeed help to heal some of the undoubted problems within Christianity due to its dualistic traditions.

But by rejecting God's biblical word and God himself, Fox excoriates orthodox Judaism and, by replacing the historical, salvific Jesus with the Cosmic Christ, he excoriates orthodox Christianity. He removes the uniqueness of each. Passover is located in Mother Earth worship, the paschal lamb is Mother Earth. Both Jewish and Christian covenants are to be replaced by 'a new Israel', based on the 'restored covenant' between creation and humans — the rainbow. The rainbow is neither Jewish nor Christian, neither Islamic nor atheist. It belongs to all creation. It is a cosmic covenant' (p 151). At first sight this might seem an orthodox development, simply a revitalised version of traditional — and highly regrettable — Christian replacement theology. But its implications are profound. For by removing the uniqueness of Judaism and Christianity, each with their distinct mix of universalism and particularism, and by replacing the Passover and Jesus of time with the rhythms of Nature and the Cosmic Christ of space, Fox is in fact reversing Western history by grounding Christian spirituality in paganism. (Fox spent Easter 1991 at Findhorn New Age centre, where his 'Paschal Mysteries' actually celebrated the Earth as Christ crucified and resurrected, and the incipient dying of institutions. Fox's deep ecology passion week incorporated specifically pagan traditions and encounter with the pre-Christian gods.)

The abolition of time

G. Pattaro has stated that 'the governing principle of Christianity is to be found within history and along the axis of time'.¹⁶ Both Judaism and Christianity have shared a unique attitude to time deriving from their vision of God directly working in history. The pagan concept of time was radically different. C. S. Lewis noted that 'to the Greeks... the historical process was a meaningless flux or cyclic reiteration'.¹⁷ Distinctions between mythological time and historical time were blurred. Time, viewed as continual decline from a past golden age or a grim wheel of karmic circular history doomed to repeat itself, had no intrinsic meaning, other than marking the repetitive processes of Nature. Societies based on such concepts of time had little intrinsic drive towards reform, because there could be no concept of progress. Rather than the active eradication of evil, they encouraged spiritual withdrawal, as in Taoism: 'Attain the utmost in passivity. Hold firm to the basis of quietude'.¹⁸ Indeed, such societies could teach that evil, like time itself, is only an illusion; it does not really exist. The Hindu hero Arjuna was told by Krishna that in battle no one really kills or is killed.¹⁹

16 Germano Pattaro, *The Christian Conception of Time*, in P. Ricoeur, op. cit., pp 169-195 (170).

17 C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, Cambridge 1967, p 174.

18 *The Book of Tao*, XVI.

19 *Bhagavad-gita*, trs. Swami Prabhavananda and Chr. Isherwood (1951), pp 40,44. Cited by Abba Hillel Silver, *Where Judaism Differs*, Collier Books/Macmillan Publishing Company, New York 1989, p 263.

Unlike paganism, in which space predominated and the gods were immanent in space, worshipped through visual images, Judaism was, in the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:

a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time... Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events.... To Israel the unique events of historic time were more significant than the repetitive processes in the cycle of nature. While the deities of other peoples were associated with places or things, the god of Israel was associated with events: the Redeemer from slavery, the revealer of the Torah, manifesting themselves in events of history rather than in things or places. Thus, the faith in the unembodied, in the unimaginable was born.²⁰

Judaism and its daughter religion, Christianity, in stressing the uniqueness of historical events in time, recognized uniqueness — the uniqueness of God, the uniqueness of each individual life, the unique bond between God and man; paganism does not. In the words of the philosopher Emil Fackenheim: 'It is perhaps the essence of paganism to deny all uniqueness — the uniqueness of crimes and the uniqueness of anguish, as well as that of acts of holiness and moments of joy — and to assert that the rhythm of nature covers it all'.²¹ In writing about Auschwitz, Fackenheim retains an optimistic faith that Christianity and Judaism will retain this distinctive awareness dependent on their vision of time: 'Christians, like Jews, know about uniqueness... they will... refuse refuge in a paganism that denies uniqueness and lets the grass of nature cover it all'.²²

But it is precisely this uniqueness that Fox is attempting to destroy by rerooting the Passover and the cross in Mother Earth — and the rhythm of nature. By denying the historical event, the uniqueness of time, Fox is reorientating Christianity back towards the space of paganism. This process is not, of course, new. From before the days of Gregory the Great, who urged that the pagan stone temples should not be destroyed but simply rededicated, the old gods were partially subsumed within saints and relics, holy wells and shrines, and even some rituals. So in restoring the predominance of space over time, Matthew Fox could see himself as restoring a major tradition, particularly within Catholicism.

His undertaking is in keeping, furthermore, with those of other recent thinkers. His overcoming of time is clearly derived in part from Teilhard de Chardin's unorthodox but Christian *The Future of Man*, which foresees 'the end of a "thinking species"; not disintegration and death, but a new breakthrough and a rebirth, this time outside Time and Space'.²³ Man would at some future time 'form a single consciousness', 'a turning inward of consciousness, an eruption of interior life, an ecstasy'.²⁴ Yet Teilhard was less

20 A. J. Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's/The Sabbath. Its Meaning for Modern Man*, Harper & Row, New York 1966, p 7f.

21 E. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History. Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem*, Schocken, New York 1978, p 132.

22 *Ibid.*, pp 132f.

23 P. Teilhard de Chardin, trs. N. Denny, *The Future of Man*, Collins, London 1969, p 302.

24 *Ibid.*, p 306-7.

radical than Fox, arguing, for example, against monism and Huxley's 'perennial philosophy'.²⁵ But the overcoming of time has other, more disturbing roots. The atheist philosopher Schopenhauer claimed that the essence of Christianity was Buddhism, and, like Fox, both rejected Newtonian linear time and replaced the Creator, 'the old Jew in Cloud-cuckooland', by the Will to Life (i.e. the sexual life force). Schopenhauer's ideas were embodied in Richard Wagner's 'prophetic dream' of restoring paganism to Europe by eradicating Judaism and repaganising Christianity. By summoning the Germans to their divine mission as Aryans, Wagner hoped to create 'a new reality... a race imbued with deep religious consciousness of the reason for its fall and raising itself up to new development'.²⁶ This would involve abandonment of traditional western ethics and of linear time, rerooting man back into amoral sexuality, nature and into his inner psyche, and reinterpreting the historical Jesus as the Aryan Christ.²⁷ In Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal*, in which Christian symbols mask pagan content, the hero is told: 'Time is here become Space'. Aldous Huxley, too, was attracted to the Buddhist 'deliverance out of time into eternal Suchness or Buddhahood'.²⁸

In Fox's mysticism, 'space takes over, spacefulness.... The resurrection was nothing if not a conquest of time and place... by space.... We lack the inner, psychic space of mysticism.... To this distorted attitude towards space the Cosmic Christ says, ".... Listen to your inner space for the divine.... And love space as yourself"' (p 141f) In rooting out the Jesus of time and rerooting us in the Cosmic Christ of space, Fox demonstrates what Mircea Eliade defined as the Hindu 'escape from Time'. Eliade described this as the 'royal road to deliverance.... Even to make oneself conscious of the ontological unreality of Time, and to realise the rhythms of cosmic Great Time, is enough to free oneself from illusion'²⁹ Matthew Fox is furthermore carrying out a programme proposed already in 1946 by Aldous Huxley: 'From the writings of Eckhart, Tauler and Ruysbroeck... it would be possible to extract a spiritualised and universalised Christianity, whose narratives refer not to history as it was... but to "processes forever unfolded in the heart of man". But unfortunately.... Christianity has remained a religion in which the pure Perennial Philosophy has been overlaid... by an idolatrous preoccupation with events and things in time... regarded... as... intrinsically sacred and indeed divine'.³⁰

Esoteric sources of the Cosmic Christ

Finally, it is important to note that the Cosmic Christ has a far more explicit tradition than the woolly ideas teased from the Christian mystics — yet Fox

25 cf. U. King, *Towards a New Mysticism. Teilhard de Chardin and Eastern Religions*, Collins, Glasgow 1980, p 207.

26 R. Wagner, *Religion and Art in Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, London 1892-9, trs. W. Ashton Ellis, vol. vi, p 247.

27 cf. M. Brearley, 'Hitler and Wagner', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 22 (1988), pp 3-22.

28 A. Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, Chatto & Windus, London 1946, p 64.

29 M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religion Symbolism*, London 1961, trs. P. Mairet, p 91.

30 A. Huxley, op.cit., p 63.

nowhere mentions this genuine tradition. This is an astonishing and significant omission, yet it is not surprising, given the fact that the thinkers who most strongly championed the Cosmic Christ were all Theosophists or occultists. Violet Tweedale's theosophical book of 1930, *The Cosmic Christ*, for example, describes the Cosmic Christ as the Solar Logos, permeating the substance of the world. She is clear that the Christ is '...esoteric teaching. There is nothing new in it. No other teaching is so ancient, but it has been guarded knowledge'.³¹ She is equally clear that 'institutionalised Christianity could not be expected to accept our statement that the Cosmic Christ is the great solar Deity' and a deeply occult force, 'vibrations thrilled through with Deity... the concrete manifestation of universal energy'.³² Like Fox, she identifies the Cosmic Christ 'in all the sacred Scriptures of the world',³³ especially the Upanishads and the writings of Lao-Tzu. The greatest messengers of the Cosmic Christ had been Krishna and Osiris. Like Fox, she saw organised religions disintegrating as a result of the Christ Spirit: 'the time for them is passing' and envisaged that universal Cosmic Christ teaching would herald a golden age: 'Cease to limit Christ to the God of Israel... unveil Him in the sacred Bibles of all lands... under a multiplicity of names; then a Cosmic understanding will dawn upon the world...'.³⁴

Occultists such as the creator of the Theosophical Society, Helena Blavatsky, had long taught that the Christ and Jesus were separate entities, that Jesus was an occult initiate and that Christ was an avatar of Buddha. But, as Tweedale acknowledged, it was Rudolf Steiner, erstwhile Theosophist and a practising occultist, 'who did more than any man living to glorify the Christ and set before us his true position in the universe'.³⁵ In Steiner's *The Spiritual Guidance of Mankind* the Christ is a cosmic being 'foreshadowed through the undivided Brahma'.³⁶ 'Through the astral body of the Boy Jesus... the Bodhisatva became a Buddha'.³⁷ 'From the age of thirty onwards, 'the entire being of the cosmic Christ was acting uninterruptedly upon Him.... The Christ stood always under the influence of the entire cosmos... the cosmic forces... the sun and the stars... directed his body'.³⁸ The Cosmic Christ directed onto Jesus 'the influence of... the forces of the cosmic spiritual hierarchies which direct our earth'.³⁹ Steiner's Cosmic Christ is clearly theosophical and occult in origin, arising 'out of the new spiritual science or theosophy, which reveals to man in a new form his connection with the whole macrocosm'.⁴⁰ Fox omits explicit occult terminology, but in many respects his Cosmic Christ is similar to that of Tweedale, Steiner and other gnostic writers.

It is disturbing enough to find clear, though unacknowledged, parallels

31 V. Tweedale, *The Cosmic Christ*, Rider & Co., London n.d., p 28.

32 *Ibid.*, p 35.

33 *Ibid.*, p 40.

34 *Ibid.*, p 40.

35 *Ibid.*, p 38.

36 R. Steiner, *The Spiritual Guidance of Mankind*, London 1961, trs. H. Collison, p 76.

37 *Ibid.*, p 84.

38 *Ibid.*, p 85.

39 *Ibid.*, p 85.

40 *Ibid.*, p 95.

between the new myth which Fox is demanding that all of Christianity should accept and the old myths of esoteric gnosticism and occultism. It is even more disturbing to find strong parallels between Fox and leading modern New Age occultists. Alice Bailey, strongly antisemitic and the most important occult writer of the New Age movement, anticipated widespread 'emergence of the Christ-consciousness' as the New Age dawns.⁴¹ Peter Caddy, Rosicrucian, occultist and founder of the Findhorn New Age community in Scotland, described the woman, trained in magic, who initiated him into esoteric spirituality as 'a midwife attending the birth of the Christ consciousness within... the birth of the "Christ within" through a classical initiatory path'.⁴² Thirdly, David Spangler is a leading New Age writer and spirit medium, who spent three years spiritually guiding the Findhorn community. In *Reflections on the Christ* (1978), his vision of Christ is virtually identical to that of Fox: 'the only way to deal with evil as a race... is for us to begin to affirm creatively... the divinity that lives within us'.⁴³ For Spangler, too, Christ is what connects: 'Christ is the unifier... the avenue out of microcosmic limitation into macrocosmic wholeness, universal consciousness is through the Christ'.⁴⁴

In Spangler's later book, *The Rebirth of the Sacred* (1984) he envisages the New Age being created from a 'planetary spirituality' based on the Perennial Philosophy and on the 'creation theology' of Meister Eckhart.⁴⁵ Spangler anticipates 'the unity of... religions... within... the "esoteric"... domain of existence'.⁴⁶ This universal planetary spirituality would involve redefining the nature of divinity, renaming the sacred, creating new culture and institutions to 'honour that universal sacredness'. As an influential creator of the New Age, Spangler's definitions of its characteristics are disturbingly close to Fox's vision of the Cosmic Christ future. It will be holistic, affirming interconnectedness and Gaia; it will be androgynous, mystical, global — with 'world communion' —, and will seek synthesis of person and planet. Above all, the New Age is a spirit, a 'presence made up of the collective spirit of humanity, and the spirit of our world, of Gaia'⁴⁷ — in other words, Fox's Cosmic Christ. Spangler is no Christian. He channels three separate spirits and anticipates a New Age 'mass Luciferic initiation', since 'Lucifer prepares man in all ways for the experience of Christhood'.⁴⁸ Is Fox's vision of *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* in fact identical with Spangler's vision of 'the liberation of the Cosmic Christ', in which 'Findhorn represents the Second Coming'?⁴⁹ It seems highly likely: for Spangler's Cosmic Christ, too, is derived from Theosophy; he too is described as Bodhisattva, as intense

41 A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations*, Lucis Publishing Company, New York/London 1988, p 570.

42 P. Hawken, *The Magic of Findhorn*, London, Souvenir Press 1975, p 61.

43 D. Spangler, *Reflections on the Christ*, Findhorn Publications, Findhorn 1981, pp 65-66.

44 *Ibid.*, p 43.

45 D. Spangler, *The Rebirth of the Sacred*, Gateway Books, London 1984, pp 56f.

46 *Ibid.*, p 56.

47 *Ibid.*, p 84.

48 D. Spangler, *Reflections on the Christ*, p 43.

49 *Ibid.*, p 10.

50 *Ibid.*, p 13.

energy, as 'the basic evolutionary force within creation',⁵⁰ 'that... energetic power which maintains all creation in existence. It is within each one of us'.⁵¹

It seems probable then, that Fox derives his impetus for the Cosmic Christ not from Christian mystics, who wrote from within an orthodox exoteric theological framework, but from gnosticism, Steiner, Theosophists and New Age spiritists like Spangler. Indeed, the lengthy passages in *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* in which 'the Cosmic Christ speaks' verbatim (e.g. pp 198, 211, 227f, 244) are strongly reminiscent of Spangler's channellings of the spirit which he calls 'Limitless Love and Truth'.⁵² Creation spirituality, as presented by Fox, is simply the ancient occult gnosis wrapped in shimmering new language and packaged for the 1990s. If that is the case, then the outlook is bleak. For so ambiguous is the identity of the Cosmic Christ that, in Spangler's terms at least, he is virtually identical with Lucifer: 'Christ is the same force as Lucifer... Lucifer prepares man in all ways for the experience of Christhood'.⁵³ Furthermore, the myth and ethic which Fox proclaims could lead to a dire reality indeed. Both Professor Zaehner in *Our Savage God*⁵⁴ and Bryan Wilson in *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*⁵⁵ have expressed their conviction that a democratic and benevolent society cannot be built on the 'cosmic consciousness' of the perennial philosophy. A society based on universal 'cosmic consciousness' could lead to moral anarchy, apathy and enslavement under totalitarianism. Fox's monolithic vision of the new spirituality, with its ready-made scapegoat of 'Christofascist' fundamentalists and its promotion of the psyche, irrationality and phallic values, could lead to a potentially terrifying reality.

The future of traditional Christianity?

That reality may be far distant. But the myth and the ethic are already making huge inroads within the Protestant and Catholic Church worldwide and creation liturgies inspired by creation spirituality are increasingly being used in cathedrals and churches. So far there has been little scholarly analysis of either creation liturgies or creation spirituality. I believe that it is vital for those of us who are not fundamentalists to analyse both, learning to appreciate the valid questions they pose to the Church. It is vital to understand their sources of inspiration and above all their implications for the future. For this century has taught us that ideologies which, like that of Matthew Fox, claim total truth and universal validity, which use new myth and new ethic to create new reality, are capable of destroying both the concept of God and millions of human beings.

In his recent book, *Morality after Auschwitz*, historian Peter Haas writes, 'In Auschwitz we see a coherent ethic at work'.⁵⁶ Haas shows how Hitler

51 Ibid., p 14.

52 D. Spangler, *Revelation*, pp 191-6.

53 D. Spangler, *Reflections*, pp 40,43.

54 R. Zaehner, op.cit., esp. Introduction.

55 Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*, OUP, London/Oxford/New York 1976, esp. pp 78-81.

56 P. J. Haas, *Morality after Auschwitz. The Radical Challenge of the Nazi Ethic*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1988, p 179. Cf. also G. Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution*, OUP, Oxford 1986.

radically condemned Weimar Germany, created a central myth to explain contemporary reality and a new ethic to endorse it. The myth postulated the Jews as the enemy of the German state, of the Aryan race and of western civilisation, all of which were dying and in need of rescue. The ethic simply identified the Jews as the source of evil and destruction — therefore whatever would limit and finally destroy Jewish existence became ethically good and justifiable, however much it was in contradiction to traditional western ethics, because it would ensure the survival of Germany. Haas demonstrates how the Nazi myth and its ethic created a new reality — Auschwitz. He believes such a pattern of new myth creating new ethic and new reality to be repeatable: 'The stories that created the Holocaust brought, and will bring again, agony and death'.⁵⁷ Fox has repeated that pattern, and the long-term consequences of his monolithic nature-centred mysticism could be sombre. For, as historian Robert Wistrich demonstrated in his book *Hitler's Apocalypse*,⁵⁸ when a humane theology of Both/And is replaced by a Manichaean ideology of Either/Or, an inhumane programme of the survival of the 'good' and destruction of the 'bad' can result. Matthew Fox writes: 'Christianity as we know it now will not survive.... The issue is the survival... of Mother Earth'. (p 149) There may be a further issue: in Fox's Earth, will orthodox Christians and Orthodox Jews as we know them now survive?

Dr Margaret Brearley is Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish/Christian Relations, Selly Oak College, Birmingham.

57 P. Haas, op.cit., p 229.

58 R. Wistrich, *Hitler's Apocalypse. Jews and the Nazi Legacy*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1985, esp. ch. 2, 'The Politics of Either-Or'.