

Towards A New Nicaea: A Biocentric Movement for Cosmic Wholeness

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An Introduction to the background of the Nicene Creed

It is an honor and a great joy to write a paper on the Nicene Creed at a time when CATS X celebrate the 1700th year of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is a faith affirmation of the early church and a very important landmark in the history of Christian theology. The Nicene Creed also functions as a basic theological foundation for many Christian denominations. The Nicene Creed emerged out of a particular complex context. It includes theological controversy, Greek philosophy, church hierarchy and the politics of the Roman Empire. Galerius in the year 311CE issued the Edict of Toleration on his death bed allowing Christians the right to exist again to setup their places of worship; provided that they do not offend against.[1] In the year 313CE Emperor Constantine and Licinius met at Milan Conference concerning the welfare and the security of the state and promoted that Christians and all others should have freedom to follow the kind of religion they favored.[2] The early Christian community grew from a persecuted church which affirms the famous statement uttered by Tertullian, “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” to a state church with wealth followed by privileges. As the number of Christians grew in the empire, the Emperor Constantine saw a division is becoming inevitable in the church unless he swiftly moves to settle the theological controversy through the Nicene Council. Constantine was able to work out his agenda by politically maneuvering for his own advantage. He saw division in the church could lead to the disadvantage of political stability. Therefore, we see the clear marriage of the politics of the Empire and the theological triumphalism of the Ecclesia. The Roman coin denarius, on one side of it depicts the globe is in the hand of the Emperor and in his other hand is the scepter. This is a symbol of domination. Empire politics is always a system of domination, exploitation, plunder and rape the earth. It manipulates all forms of life at the expense of masses and the biocentric life system.

Some Issues faced in the Sri Lankan Context

There is a global ecological crisis around the world. We experience this in our own country in several ways. There is ill legal sand mining taking place in rivers, chemical waste of certain industries channeled to either streams or to soil by poisoning them, Our forests are under threat due to hydro power plants in high bio-diversity areas without environmental Impact Assessment. The Funa and Flora Protection Ordinance section 3 and 6 strictly forbid any development activity in nature reserve such as building permanent or temporal structures, deforestation leads to removal of plants, destroy fauna and flora, filling marshy land, the human-elephant is another issue that we face in Sri Lanka, and the frequent flooding is due to high rain falls that has turned usual weather patterns significantly. We have been tampering with nature and have caused disaster and damage to the eco-system. The politicians of our country that ruled have caused massive destruction to our country for many decades. They have lived as political parasites and given favors to their cronies.

The need for an Ecological-Biocentric Nicaea

Our theological task is to explore the Nicene Creed into new dimensions and have afresh reading to face the present challenges of the contemporary world. Anthropocentric domination has serious consequences on life as a whole. The damage it has caused to the mother earth is irreparable. This

anthropocentric view of subjugation has rendered to exploit, manipulate and rape the earth. The biocentric system that give life to all forms of creatures has now become a victim of the dominant system of the Empire. This has continued for centuries taking for granted that this can continue without conscience and accountability. Our planet earth is the only one that has life and facing massive threats to all forms of life. We are experiencing an ecological apartheid. More than ever it is essential to conscientize that all life is sacred and we all have an obligation to protect, preserve and sustain this earth for generations to come. Therefore, it is mandatory to press to this clarion call for a biocentric ethic. The creation theology of the Nicene Creed is not merely a mechanistic view of nature but creation in continuation.

Creatio Continua : God as Maker of Heaven and Earth

I wish to state how some theologians worked out their theology of creation as a process of in continuation. For instance Thomas Aquinas of the 13th century in his doctrine of creation first part in question 45, Article 1 and question 104, Article 1 discusses creation as production and God's continuous action in preserving creatures. Also in his Summa Contra Gentiles Book II chapters 16 – 21 states God is not only the cause of the beginning of the universe but also its sustainer. So for Aquinas God's creative act is an ongoing process and the world depends on God's will in every moment and not merely at its inception.

Another example is Karl Barth a 20th century theologian, in his Church Dogmatics Vol. III/ 1, The Doctrine of Creation stresses God's ongoing involvement in creation, for him God is not a static event occurred some time ago but an ongoing act of God's self-revelation and will. He did emphasis the relational aspect where God remains active and present within creation. Barth doesn't subscribe to the view the creation functions independently of the creator. Also in his Church Dogmatics Vol. III/4, He goes on to emphasis creatio continua as the sustaining power of God's Word. He rejects purely a mechanistic view of nature.

Jurgan Moltmann a German theologian of the 20th and 21st centuries, a prolific writer of theological literature in his book : A new theology of creation and the Spirit of God [1985] For him creation is a continuous ongoing dynamic process that involves the continuous presence and action of God. His description of God as both transcendent and immanent in creation, sustaining and renewing it through the Spirit. For Moltmann creatio continua is linked to the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Spirit is the power that sustains life, renews creation and directs it toward its eschatological fulfillment.

In his another book, "The Spirit of Life : A Universal Affirmation" [1992] he argues by saying, Spirit is the source of life and vitality of creation and brings forth fullness of life. For Moltmann the Spirit is engaging in the ongoing renewal of the earth and all living creatures and its interconnectedness of creation and redemption are inseparable.

Therefore, we should bear in mind that neither for Aquinas, and for Barth, nor even for Moltmann, God function as the model of the Deist which means Clockmaker-Clock model where the designer and the design are independent and without connectivity. All these three great theologians saw God is involved in creation and that's a continuous task of the ongoing creation.

Teilhard de Chardin is a Jesuit scientist and a theologian. He is well known for his work as a Paleontologist. He never went for a walk without his geologist's hammer and naturalist's magnifying glass.[3] In his book, "The Divine Milieu" he believed that God is the animating force behind every single event.[4] His understanding of matter was that God incarnating the world of matter or the whole world 'becoming

incarnate'. [5] His another book was the, 'The Hymn of the Universe' which during his daily mass gave a cosmic function and a planetary dimension. In his explorations in Asia, he says, "I have neither bread nor wine, nor altar, I will myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your, priest will make the whole earth my altar and on it will offer you all the labors and sufferings of the world." [6] For Teilhard Christ is not primarily an antidote to human sin but a new stage in evolution, organically related to the whole cosmic process.

A New Nicaea a Biocentric Cosmic Wholeness

The story of the Squirrel Grove

Attin ants, an impressive tribe that has worked a pact with certain fungi. The ants and fungi are "symbionts," dependent on one another and each contribute to mutual survival. Douglas John Hall is systematic theologian of the United Church of Canada calls for "the ontology of communion" within creation's matrix of interrelatedness. In this sense the well-being of one species is dependent on the well-being of the other. This leads us to the point to respect all forms of life and confirms that all life should be treated as sacred. Therefore, must strive discern that all life forms are in a pilgrim. Evolution is the history of an extended family and we are all symbionts on this "Earth Community."

Drawing insight from our own spiritual wells

Some Buddhist Insights

In Buddhist scriptures of the Agganna Sutta teach us how greed developed in the world and dhamma is the antidote for greed. In this Sutta the Lord Buddha states how human actions can disrupt natural order and calls to return to a moral and ethical living. Buddhism speaks for the well-being of all life and reverence for life. It calls to practice non-violence [Ahimsa] to all beings, compassion to [Karuna] to all beings, and practice simplicity and contentment.

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Zen Master once said, "The earth is not something separate from us, but that we are earth itself."

Symbols and Hierophanies

Rabbi Abraham Heshel was prophetic in his stance when stated that humankind will not for lack of information but it may perish for lack of appreciation of acknowledgement, respect, value, care; maltreatment of human and other kind. [7] There is plenty that we can learn from the natural phenomenon. Nature is a powerful source of communication and natural symbols with full of creativity. Rocks rivers and trees can become hierophanies for us the disclosure of Ultimate Reality. [8] Trees can remind us old stories to affirm life and New stories which provides fresh energy as a symbol of resistance to face life during times of discouragement.

The Hebrew scriptures begins with the tree of life and Christian scripture end with the tree of life and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. [Rev.22:1-2]

The Bodhi Tree for the Lord Buddha provided shelter, a place for reflection, meditation and enlightenment. That's why Buddhists continue to venerate the Bodhi tree as a sign of respect and sacred to Buddhist community.

Viktor E. Frankl was an Austrian Neurologist, Psychiatrist, and a holocaust survivor. One day he was having a conversation with a woman on her death bed. This young sick woman was experiencing loneliness. She could see a tree through the window. In her conversation with Frankl she said that she was not concerned with her religious life. Now in my loneliness, the only friend is this tree and the tree speaks to me. Frankl asked what does the tree say? And she said, 'the tree says to me, I am life, I am life, I am Eternal life.' To find meaning in life is to find the will to live. This tree became a symbol of hope at her last few days of her life.

Conclusion

An ecological audit is an important principle to evaluate where all forms life stands in relation the whole earth. Our quest should be to integrate with all forms of life into an eco-friendly system. God's covenant with Novah inclusive covenant. More than ever, we need to listen what does the earth has to say us. Aldo Leopold a naturalist once said, "education I fear is learning to see one thing by going blind to another." [9] Many centuries we have handled nature and messed up in style. Now it is time to learn from nature lessons that we have never learned. The earth is the home for all life. The New Nicene Creed we look for should be biocentric home where no one is a threat to anyone and the entire earth whether animate and inanimate live and find space and being in a beautiful symbiotic relationship. Pope Francis in his Encyclical letter Laudato si, says "May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope. [10] This is a utopia which is brought about by the grace of God's evolution revolutionizing the earth and marching forward. This I call an utopianized eschatology, the cosmic reality unfolding day by day. This is a New Nicene Creed where all beings are included with a renewed earth ethic.

End Notes

- 1] Documents of the Christian Church : Selected and Edited Henry Bettenson, Oxford Press, 1943, p21-22
- 2] Ibid. p22
- 3]The Divine Milieu : Teilhard de Chardin, Harper and Row publishers 1960, p19
- 4] Ibid. p24
- 5] Hymn of the Universe : Teilhard de Chardin, Harper and Row Publishers, 1961, p10
- 6] Ibid. p19
- 7] Earth Community, Earth Ethics : Larry L. Rasmussen, WCC Publication, Orbis Books,1996, p195
- 8] Ibid. p195
- 9]Ibid. p188
- 10] Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter, LAUDATO SI, On Care of our Common Home, p177

