

FMC New Story Group, November 28, 2022

# What is Ecotheology?

# Also Sprach Zarathustra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAIgtu-pLDU>

# Also Sprach Zarathustra

- Nietzsche's 1883-85 book *Also sprach Zarathustra* was a meditation upon man's place within the cosmos.
- By 1882 he had already declared: 'God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.'
- He argued that the development of science and emergence of a secular world were leading to the death of Christianity.
- Lacking a superior governing moral authority, Nietzsche feared that Western civilisation would inevitably fragment and lose its way.

# What is Ecotheology?

- Ecotheology is the attempt by theologians to integrate the sacredness of nature with Christian theology.
- Philip Clayton\* does this by means of panentheism:

The world (including nature) is “within” God AND God transcends the world.

- Theologians do not quite agree what the word “within” means.
- He rejects theism (That’s O.K.)
- And pantheism (My favorite)

# Theism\*

- God is anthropomorphic
  - Omniscient (all-knowing)
  - Omnipotent (all-powerful)
  - Omnibenevolent (all-good)
  - Transcends the universe
  - Opposed to a scientific way of knowing
- 
- \*Philip Clayton "God and Gravity: a Philip Clayton Reader on Science and Theology."

# WARNING

- Ingestion of these beliefs may be harmful to your health.
- May cause indigestion, sleepless nights, and other unhappy behavior.



# Pantheism

- Old definition: There are many gods in nature and in humans.
- New definition: God is immanent only, not transcendent.
- All matter is the body of god.
- Matter is spirit::spirit is matter
- All matter is connected; relationship replaces transcendence.
- God is not complete; it is evolving through on-going creativity.
- We participate in this on-going creativity.
- Human relationships are called love.

# What is Ecotheology?

- Karen Armstrong does not use the word “Ecotheology,” but the Library of Congress classifies *Sacred Nature* under this term.
- In this book Armstrong shows how the major religions, Confucianism, the Dao, Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, and indigenous religions, observe the sacredness of nature.
- She concludes that there is a strong sense of inherent sacrality that recurs in nearly every religious tradition.
- Christianity is an exception.



# Confucianism

- Qi is the essence of being, an energy that pervades all life, plant, animal, human and divine worlds enabling them to fulfil their potential.
- There is no division between human beings and the cosmos because they share the same reality.
- Confucians regard themselves not as creatures but as co-creators of the universe.
- Humans together with the *wanwu* or “ten thousand things” form one body with the universe,
- We must treat the *wanwu*, the “things of nature,” as we would wish to be treated ourselves, because we share the same vital force.

[Karen Armstrong, *Sacred Nature: Restoring our ancient bond with the natural world*]

A large, bold, black Chinese character, '氣' (Qi), is centered on a white square background. The character is written in a traditional, calligraphic style with thick, expressive strokes. The top part of the character consists of three horizontal strokes, followed by a vertical stroke that curves to the right at the bottom. The overall shape is reminiscent of a stylized '3' or a '7' with a curved tail.

# The God in Nature in Christianity

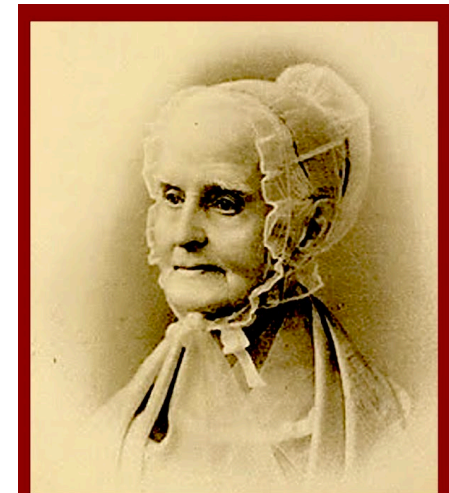
- The Book of Job: unique in the Hebrew scriptures
- The Gospel of Thomas: not included in the Bible
- Celtic Christianity: a heresy
- Thomas Aquinas (1225-74): His theology did not persist
  
- What these traditions have in common is a belief in the sacredness of nature.
- “Nature does not figure prominently in Christianity” \*
  
- [Karen Armstrong, *Sacred Nature: Restoring our ancient bond with the natural world*]

“It is our modern failure to foster a reverence for these “things” that has resulted in our serious environmental crisis. //

[Karen Armstrong, *Sacred Nature: Restoring our ancient bond with the natural world*]

# Quaker Theology

- God is within—Quaker panentheism.
- Many Quakers identify as atheists or non-theists rejecting the theology of theism.
- Others identify as theists.
- We are left to work out our own theology.
- The search is always open ended.



Let us have unbelief.  
But let it be a  
reverent unbelief.  
-*Lucretia Mott*