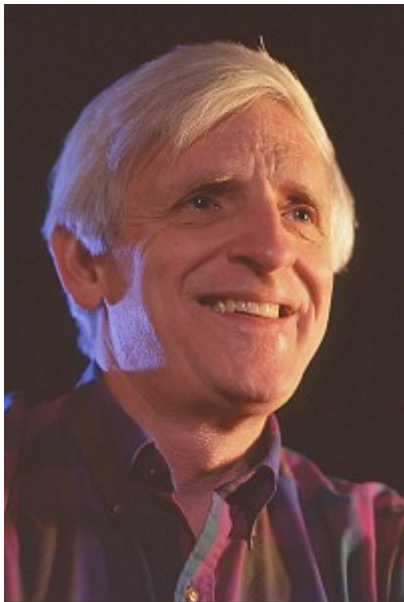


Matthew Fox's Autobiography: The Making of A Post- Denominational Priest



When I was in the second year of seminary, word got back to my systematic theology professor that I had shared my statement of faith at a meeting of Presbytery, and that it contained a lot of “creation-centered” spirituality. One morning I got word that the good professor wished an audience with me. I walked up four flights of stairs to his office where I found him sitting behind his large oak desk, smoking his pipe, and reading my statement of faith. He looked up at me and solemnly

pronounced that if I continued down this road I would never make it to seminary because I would be constantly stopping in front of every tree and bowing before it! I told him that if it was a choice between being in a devotional relationship with a tree and being part of a society that saw them as nothing more than “resources” for human consumption, I would happily bow before every tree.

Emmanuel college had been infiltrated by the Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox, and the neo-Barthians were not impressed or pleased. By the time of my mini-inquisition I had read a couple of this heretic's books, namely, *Whee! We, Wee, All the Way Home* and *On Becoming a Musical Mystical Bear*. Because of these books, and Matthew Fox's mentorship I had made the shift from a redemption-centered paradigm to a creation-centered paradigm. And everything changed.

When Matthew's people invited me to blog about his new, revised autobiography, *Confessions: The Making of a Post-*

Denominational Priest, I felt honoured and called to do so. My own confession is that I've only read 300 of this over 500 page book. But I found those three hundred pages extremely interesting. To read the story of Matthew Fox is to track the major cultural events of the world from the 1960's to the present day. Such is his commitment to the necessity of cultural engagement, and his deep sense that culture – the arts, science, the humanities, and the major events of our lives are the arena of Spirit.

His is a ministry of prophetic engagement, but engagement that is grounded in the mystical. Not the mysticism of a neo-Platonic Hellenistic dualism, but one that is more grounded in Judaism and the mysticism of Meister Eckhart and Hildegard of Bingen. I invited Matthew to speak at the church where I was the lead minister in Vancouver on three different occasions. As well, a small team of people, led by a woman who had taken a master's course in creation spirituality from Matthew's university, ICCS, brought the Cosmic Mass to Vancouver. I was privileged to be part of the planning team for this radical ("getting to the roots") form of liturgy, as we moved through Fox's four ways of Positiva, Negative, Creativa, and Transformativa.

I confess that while I had always known Matthew's deep commitment to justice based in a spirituality of compassion, I was always less certain about his mysticism, his felt sense of the presence of G_d in his life. His autobiography was so refreshing to me because he tells the story of his deep spiritual yearning for G_d, and his sense of how the numinous animated his life. This is from his personal journal:

I am convinced that my greatest mistake all my life long has been in not trusting God enough. This trip, with its possibly portentous outcome, has taught me this trust. I now know that Christ, who brought me here, loves each of us personally and watches all we do and hears all we wish for. Oh God! Give yourself to souls. It is all people wish for!

I learned about his out-of-body experience, observing himself speaking from a chandelier in the ceiling, during a lecture. And how, during his year of being silenced by Rome, he found himself in an indigenous sit-out/vision quest, experiencing visions of animals, masks, saints, and learning in his bones that was not not alone in his suffering. I enjoyed hearing about Matthew's piety. To be honest, when I had listened to Matthew speak, it was mostly his passion for justice mixed with an understandable smattering of bitterness at the systemic intransigence and collusion in evil of the institutional church. But he allows us to see this deep well of spirit in this autobiography.

A short list of stuff I didn't know

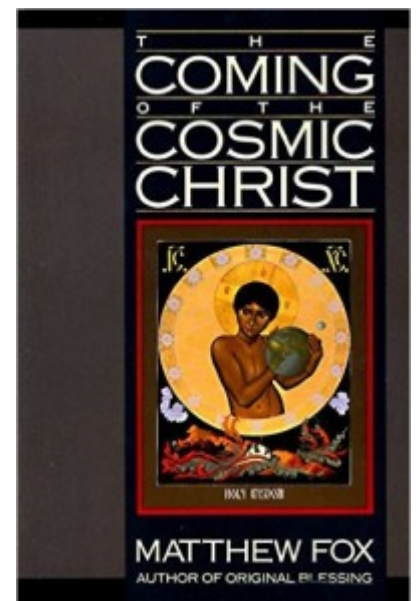
There are many things I did not know about Matthew including: Hugh Hefner, (yes of the Playboy Empire) invited him to lunch, complete with Playboy bunnies) after reading a piece Matthew wrote about the trivialization of sex in American culture. Hefner loved it and reprinted the article; I didn't know that Matthew received the idea of the distinction between creation-spirituality and redemption-centered spirituality from one of his professors when he was studying in Paris, a man named Chenu.

Chenu named the two spiritual traditions: that of "fall/redemption" and that of "creation-centered spirituality." Scales fell from my eyes; I was bumped from my horse! The most pressing question I had brought with me to Paris—how do mysticism and social justice relate (if at all)?—now had a context! So did the issues of dualism and the demeaning of body and matter. Creation spirituality would bring it all together for me: the scriptural and Jewish spirituality (for it was the oldest tradition in the Bible, that of the Yahwist author of the ninth or tenth century before Christ); science and spirituality; politics and prayer; body and spirit; science and religion; Christianity and other world religions. It would be my task to study

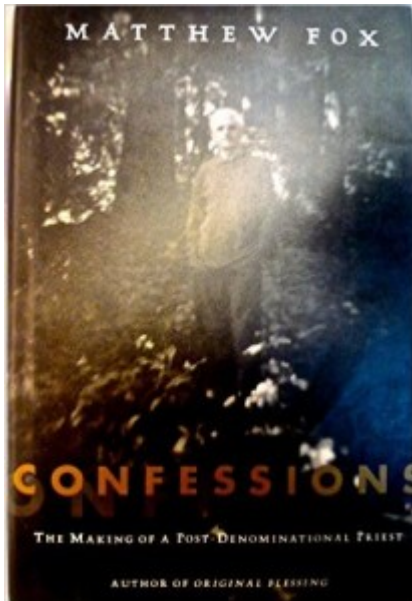
creation spirituality more deeply and to begin a cultural translation of it. This task would prove to be a process in its own right with unforeseen consequences.

I didn't know that Thomas Merton exchanged letters with Matthew encouraging his interest in mystical theology and encouraging him to study in Paris; I didn't know the depths of Matthew's scholarship. He graduated with his Phd. from University in Paris with a "maxima" – the equivalent of a summa cum laude in North America. The last person to receive this distinction was theologian Karl Rahner 15 years previously; I didn't know that he was inspired by Abraham Lincoln at a very early age; I didn't know that reading Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was pivotal to his spiritual journey; I didn't know that he suffered from polio as a boy, or that he subsequently was a good athlete; I didn't know that he had a love relationship with his dog, Tristan, whom Matthew regarded as a wisdom teacher; I didn't know that he was in a serious car accident that left him in excruciating pain, until he found a holistic chiropractor.

Matthew was the first person to introduce me to the idea of the Cosmic Christ. At the time, I knew he got this right, but to be honest I didn't totally grock it. I was not surprised to hear of his early relationship with Dr. Brian Swimme, physicist and cosmologist, who is also one of my intellectual mentors. Brian too has a deep sense of the numinosity of the Great Story of the evolutionary process, and it is not a far theological step to appreciating that the Christ, who animated Jesus of Nazareth, is present in every atom and molecule. I was not surprised to learn that Teilhard de Chardin is one of Matthew's mentors, who more than anyone else (Teilhard) grasped the cosmic dimensions of the Christ story.



Like all true prophets, Matthew was silenced and then expelled from the Dominican Order. To read the background of the story is to feel righteous rage for the likes of Ratzinger, the cardinal who headed up Rome's persecution of Fox, and deep disappointment in his order for reversing their support of him, and expelling him from the order. Their loss was the world's gain. And this is the story of the post-denominational mystic/prophet, Matthew Fox.



Matthew is a true Human, an exemplar of what the world can make us if we engage it with courage, conviction, piety, and profound compassion. The fact that he is still going strong is a gift to the world. I salute you, Matthew, honour you, and thank you for being the spiritual warrior that you are. [Get the book](#). It's a great trip through the mind and heart of a great man.