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A mystic brings lessons in awe and creativity In Charlotte, Matthew Fox will share what he thinks today's Christianity needs to thrive.

By Lynn Trenning Special to the Observer

Matthew Fox is a mystic and teacher whose hopeful enthusiasm infuses his scholarship. His many quests include reconstructing Christianity by deconstructing it, instilling religion with awe and pleasure, and reinventing education. The author of 28 books, Fox will lecture on Creation Spirituality and hold a workshop on creativity at Myers Park Baptist Church. His visit is sponsored by The Olive Branch Center and Myers Park Baptist.



Fox was a Dominican priest for 34 years until he was expelled from the order in 1993 by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. Among Ratzinger's complaints against Fox were his refusal to condemn homosexuality, his reference to God as mother and the accusation that Fox is a feminist theologian. Since then, Fox's ordination has been officially received by the Episcopalian church, but he describes himself as a "postdenominational priest in a postdenominational era."

"Denominational labels are melting before our eyes. It's time for some new networking in terms of where we stand on issues today, like mother earth and ecology and racial justice and economic justice and gender equality justice," Fox says. Fox is a delightful conversationalist, and the dialogue is dappled with quotes from Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Assisi and Meister Eckhart. He has studied wisdom traditions and indigenous traditions, and was mentored in creation spirituality by the late Father Marie Dominique Chenu. "We have to find the yin-yang balance, the feminine-masculine balance that has been missing from our religions, our community," he says.

In addition to writing and lecturing, Fox founded the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality in Chicago, which eventually moved to Oakland, Calif., and was renamed The Universe of Creation Spirituality. This spiritual school lived under his leadership for 29 years.

Today he is working with inner-city high school students in the YELLAWE project, which stands for Youth and Elders Learning Laboratory for Ancestral Wisdom Education. YELLAWE strives to inject learning with joy through the introduction of creativity, something he believes is sorely missing in the European model of education. His quest to incorporate feminine wisdom, creativity, evolving

scientific principles and a sense of awe into the religious experience has both threatened and enthralled people of many faiths.

"Christianity flies on two wings, the historical Jesus and the cosmic Christ," he says. "That's how you renew Christianity. But many people are finding it necessary to step away from Christianity, and that should not be necessary, and this is where the churches need to shake themselves up."

Fox believes the human capacity for creativity has the power to heal the human race and lead to our sustainable use of resources.

"I see creativity in the context of awe, and letting go, and silence and suffering," Fox explains. "Creativity is the linchpin of the fourfold path of the adult religious path." The traditional three-path spiritual journey as described by Plotinus (A.D. 205-270) is purgation, illumination and union. Fox advocates a journey composed of Four Paths of Creation Spirituality.

The first is Via Positiva, which is the wonder and mystery of all things. Via Negativa is the embrace of darkness, the letting go and letting be. Via Creativa is the path of co-creating with God. Via Transformativa is the release of suffering and the battling of injustice that brings humans together. This creation-centered theology is the opposite of the fall-redemption theology that has dictated much of Western Christian theology since the fourth century.

Fox describes creativity as "at the heart of what we do as a species. It is also at the heart of what we do that is evil." The creative evils Fox names range from creating weapons of war to creating a dependence on resources that leads to environmental destruction.

He yearns for "the sustainability achieved when creativity is honored and practiced not for its own sake, but for justice and compassion's sake."

Fox has seen firsthand the effects of adding creativity to the classroom. "It is scary how little creativity is dealt with in education. Indigenous kids and inner-city kids are dropping out of high school," he says.

He recalls a student at YELLAWE confessing this was the first time anyone had asked him to express himself creatively. "Once creativity is awakened, they can become interested in Shakespeare or algebra," says Fox of his teenage students. The same can apply to adults. Fox describes an engineer who enrolled at The Universe of Creation Spirituality in Oakland because he was burned out. In two weeks he returned to his job and began Engineers without Borders, which currently has 12,000 members.

When asked what he will bring to Charlotte, Fox says: "I hope to bring alive what I'm sure is there, which is people's creativity. Creativity is a good outlet for anger, but it can steer anger in a healthy direction. We can do that, whether it is alternatives to fossil fuel energy, or whether it is forms of education that are not getting the job done."

"The Holy Spirit is still creating and re-creating," he says.

Creation Spirituality

WHO: Matthew Fox.

WHEN: 6:30 p.m. Friday, book signing and registration; 7 p.m. Creation Spirituality lecture; 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. Sept. 25, workshop on "Creativity: Where the Divine and Human Meet."

WHERE: Myers Park Baptist Church, in Heaton Hall, 1900 Queens Road. Co-sponsored by The Olive Branch Center.

DETAILS: \$20 lecture; \$140 workshop; www.theolivebranchcenter.net;
<http://www.matthewfox.org>; 704-332-8933.

Creation Spirituality has the power to fix society's ills, Fox believes. "We have to find the yin-yang balance, the feminine-masculine balance that has been missing from our religions, our community," he says.