

## Article

# Mystic Christianity and Cosmic Integration: On a Pilgrim Trail with John Moriarty

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**Abstract:** This essay takes initial steps on a journey with an Irish eco-spiritual philosopher, the late John Moriarty. As a gateway into his broader oeuvre and way of thinking, we explore Moriarty's image of the Christian mystical Easter journey—the Triduum Sacrum—as a vision for humanity and the planet. After briefly reviewing his spiritual biography, we consider Moriarty's re-framing of the story as a journey to the bottom of a symbolic Grand Canyon, a mystical trail beyond historical time to a primordial unity before the evolution of the species. There, the total integration of the natural ecumene is experienced. For Moriarty, this journey leads not only into the past, but prefigures a pilgrimage that everyone can—and should—take. Analyzing primarily his own writing, we highlight the intercultural roots and ecumenical connections of Moriarty's work, which draws extensively on spiritual traditions and contemporary debates from across the world. On that basis, we sign-post directions for further research into a potential post-Christian ecology as a new way of thinking about the earth and our role on it, based on an attitude of *Gelassenheit*.

**Keywords:** cosmic Christ; Easter journey; ecumene; ecological integration; evolution; pilgrimage



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## 1. Introduction

In his book *Poacher's Pilgrimage: An Island Journey*, Alastair McIntosh (2016) recounts a twelve-day pilgrimage to the island of his childhood, describing a journey through space and time, across a physical landscape and into a spiritual one. Pilgrims often seek out places of spiritual significance. The Scottish island of Iona, for example, is a centre of Christian pilgrimage especially significant for followers of St Columba/Colmcille (Nic Craith 2013) and was previously a place of pilgrimage for Druids (Newell 2021). Beyond significant places, spiritual meaning may arise from the pilgrim journey. The Celtic Christian tradition knew the concept of *peregrinatio*, where the destination is unknown (White 1992). However, the concept of pilgrimage is not confined to Christianity (see, e.g., Cobbold 2009; Maclean 2003; Reader 1999). Nor is pilgrimage necessarily based on religious motivation. Consider, for example, the association of *Morgenlandfahrer* (Hesse 1932), whose journey, while spiritual, was philosophical rather than theological; as were the quest for the elusive 'Blue Flower' of *Wandervogel* and *bündische Jugend*, and the 'social sculpture' of Joseph Beuys, which were also experiments in cultural renewal in 20th century Germany (Kockel 2007). In each instance, the journey, however distinct, is a quest associated with transformation and insight.

This essay takes us on a pilgrim journey with an Irish Eco-Spiritual philosopher, the late John Moriarty. We focus on Moriarty's vision of the Christian mystical Easter journey—the Triduum Sacrum—as an endurance for the sake of transformation and insight, and its significance for cultural and ecological renewal. Having introduced this theme in his first book, *Dreamtime* (Moriarty 1994), Moriarty re-frames the Triduum Sacrum in terms of a mystical trail that has been pioneered by Jesus. He re-imagines the historical journey of

Jesus as one where the Christ travels to the bottom of the Grand Canyon—beyond historical time and beyond the evolution of the species to a time of unity. It was here that Christ experienced total integration of the world, a vision in many ways anticipating the ‘Integral Ecology’ of *Laudato Si’* (Pope Francis 2015). Moriarty sees this pilgrimage as a ritual journey that everyone can and indeed should take in the face of cultural and ecological crises. As human beings, “we each have it in us to undergo Gethsemane” (Durcan 2003, p. 47). The pilgrimage culminates in a kind of *kenosis* (“an ‘emptying’ of self”; see Armstrong 2023, p. 101) as the pilgrim endures the abyss: “All who enter the darkness of Good Friday on Golgatha endure it” (Moriarty [1998] 2013, p. 457). This spiritual experience facilitates consciousness of the integration of the species, and the realisation that there is no ‘them’ and ‘us’—instead, there is just ‘we’. In consequence—which has implications for how we experience, and address, climate change—we acquire a new way of thinking about the earth and our role on it (Moriarty [1997] 2013, p. 22):

Heidegger says that in the age of the worlds’ night someone must endure the abyss. For purely human reasons . . . Gilgamesh endured it and . . . he lost. For universal reasons, Jesus crossed the Kedron and, as *A’noshma* Jesu, he endured it, and with him there came ashore a new way of seeing and being in the world.

His designation of the Christ as *A’noshma* (‘Turtle’) indicates the compass of Moriarty’s cosmic vision, detailed in his three-volume *Turtle Was Gone a Long Time* (1996–1998), in which he frequently refers to Heidegger’s 1946 essay “What Are Poets For?” (Heidegger 1971). His re-imagination of the Triduum Sacrum is replete with references to a range of spiritual and indigenous traditions as well as contemporary debates from across the world that cannot be explored in-depth within a single essay. We therefore concentrate here on the story itself, as conceived by John Moriarty. The Canyon metaphor he used to convey it, and the Journey metaphor are primarily considered in relation to this. Connections that deserve particular attention, especially the Journey theme, the Pauline vision of a Cosmic Christ, the ecological spirituality of thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin, or Moriarty’s engagement with the eco-philosophy and ontotheology of Martin Heidegger, are introduced in the discussion as pointers for further exploration, but their detailed treatment must be left for another occasion. Given that many readers of this journal may be unfamiliar with John Moriarty and his work, we begin with a brief review of his spiritual life-journey.

## 2. John Moriarty’s Spiritual Voyage

John Moriarty was born into a traditional Irish Catholic home in Moyvane, in North Kerry, Ireland, in 1938. Although not exactly a scenic place, John’s love of nature and animals and stories was nourished in this landscape, and his sense of the mystical in the natural world blossomed. In his autobiography, Moriarty tells of his early connection between nature and the Divine. He writes: “More often than not now, I’d go off through the fields on my own. There were fields that I loved. Fields with a sward of natural, wild herbs. In the Hill Meadow I saw hints of Paradise” (Moriarty 2001, p. 13). Moriarty writes of the transformation that occurs when a beautiful yellow buttercup emerges from the brown soil, and he wonders “what else is down there” (Moriarty 2001, p. 13). He compares the act of smelling a primrose with the Eucharist, but one without any suggestion of blood or bloodshed. And the experience of breathing in the fragrance radiated down to the soles of his feet: “Then I could walk the earth without hurting it. Then I could walk in Paradise” (Moriarty 2001, p. 13f).

For Moriarty, spirituality and care of the earth were one, but from an early age he became aware of the separation between humans and animals in the Christian tradition. He was appalled one Christmas Eve when he realised that animals were not included in the Christmas experience. Although a donkey commonly appears in cribs, the farmyard animals in the outhouses were unaware of the excitement. “Christmas didn’t happen in the outhouses. Christmas didn’t happen to the animals. The animals were left out. And since the animals were left out, so, inside me somewhere, was I” (Moriarty 2001, p. 6). This experience would shape his future thinking about integration.

From a very early age Moriarty's vision was what we can only call mystical, in the tradition of thinkers—such as St. John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, Lao Tzu, William Blake, William Wordsworth, or the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh—who saw a mystical dimension in the natural world, instinctively aware, as Wordsworth (1798) put it, of 'something far more deeply interfused', of something 'immanent' that was so obvious in, and central to, the world view of our pre-Christian ancestors.

Moriarty's faith in traditional Irish Christianity was shattered at the age of 17 when he read Darwin. The sheltering mythology of his youth was blown apart. John went into the despair of nihilism and in effect abandoned the traditional form of Christianity that he had grown up with. In his first year training as a primary teacher, he encountered Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. He described the book as a Christmas gift to someone in despair. "Given what ailed me I could be given no better Christmas gift than this, the knowledge that someone else had experienced the shudder and the horror, the knowledge that someone else's world had opened at the seams and left him to fend for himself in the purely unseeing, purely unknowing overwhelming of Saturn's grey chaos" (Moriarty 2001, p. 31). Moriarty subsequently studied philosophy to degree level at UCD, and from then on philosophy infused all his writings.

In 1965, Moriarty was appointed to the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. In preparing for this appointment, he read the history of colonial dispossession and was confronted with a moral dilemma: Was he now complicit in the conquest? Might a native medicine man once have stood in the place he now occupied? His first encounter with a Cree reinforced this sense of unease. The man completely refused to engage with him, and Moriarty was both upset and challenged. Moriarty determined to break this barrier, he would learn more, and so began his journey into the cultures and beliefs of indigenous peoples—native American, Inuit, and Aborigines. He immersed himself in these, while simultaneously exploring the mainstream religious systems of Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. He began to see the similarities between visionaries in all of these traditions, and to recognise the truth of what Aldous Huxley (1990) called 'the perennial philosophy'. "His contemplation of religion and belief systems was deep including Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Sufism, Buddhism, Taoism, the Upanishads, Celtic Nature and Otherworld beliefs, Native American beliefs, Inuit and Aztec Cultures, Minoan civilisation among others" (Ó Ciaráin 2020). During his six years in Canada, he also took the opportunity to travel throughout the USA and Mexico. In his final year in Canada (1970–1971), Moriarty took a road trip from Manitoba through the mid-western United States to the Grand Canyon in Arizona, which left a lasting impression and shaped his thinking.

At the age of thirty-three, Moriarty decided to abandon his academic career and to return to the west coast of Ireland. He believed that he was 'in danger of becoming an intellectual' and desired to learn to live in the world without the conditioning of his education and of his religion; he was keen to erase the European inheritance of 'Jerusalem, Athens and Rome'. He wanted to find his 'bush soul', his soul outside of society. While this endeavour was initially very uplifting, ultimately it proved a perilous undertaking and resulted in what can only be described as a spiritual breakdown. It involved tremendous psychological suffering, which he somehow recognised as 'the dark night of the soul'. He found himself saying the old prayers. "Surprised, almost managing a smile of embarrassment, I was a Christian. Not a 'Christian again'. I was a Christian for the first time" (Moriarty 2001, p. 522).

It was not to the traditional form of the Christianity of his youth that Moriarty returned. Instead, he imagined a renewed mystical Christianity that was informed by his encounters with other spiritual traditions. It was a form of Christianity that goes beyond (and possibly against) the church and embraces the mystical dimension of all traditions, whatever their provenance. Aidan Mathews (1998), an Irish broadcaster, once described it in the following terms: "There was something magnificent about his single-minded oppositional stance

in our deconsecrated world; and to watch him perform his rain-dance on the astro-turf is to witness an ecumenical invocation of all human spiritual authority, North, South, East, and West, against the power and dominion of technocratic consumerism, of the liberal laboratory outlook". Moriarty re-imagines a version of Christianity that is broad, ecumenical, and mystical. It is a "pan-Christian labour that incorporates the wisdom tradition of all faiths" (Higgins and Aherne 2019, p. XX). This is not the Christianity of Moriarty's childhood, but it is one that has deep consequences for the earth. In this essay we focus on a key element of this re-imagined spirituality, the journey to the depths of the earth, and its implications for our approach to climate crisis.

### 3. Towards a 'Canyon Christianity'

Moriarty re-framed the Easter story as a mystical trail that has been pioneered by Jesus. He drew parallels with a range of Hindu tales—in part to explain his meaning, but also to draw other spiritual traditions into his pan-Christian narrative. Moving beyond a literal interpretation of the Gospel to a mystical interpretation, he mapped an experiential trail that, if undertaken, takes us back before historical time, before the evolution of species, to the very source of life. This journey returns us to the embryonic potential, the seed potential, the creative source, to our deepest roots, where we can start afresh.

#### 3.1. *The Mystical Trail*

Moriarty divides the Easter journey into distinct phases. Although in the Christian tradition the Easter journey usually begins in the Garden of Gethsemane, he focuses on the crossing of the Kedron as the initial point. The crossing of rivers has symbolic significance both historically—Caesar started the Roman civil war by crossing the Rubicon, Napoleon crossed the Nemunas with his Grande Armée en route to Moscow—and in myth: the Swan Maidens warning the Burgundians against crossing the Danube en route to the Court of Etzel, King of the Huns, or, perhaps most resembling Moriarty's Kedron, the river where Siddhartha (Hesse 1922) becomes a ferryman.

The Kedron—where John begins the re-imagining of the Easter journey—features on several occasions in the Bible. Running through a valley to the east of Jerusalem, and part of the city's sewage system, it formed a boundary that Jesus must often have crossed en route to the Mount of Olives and to Bethany. Although geographically a small river, Moriarty re-imagines it geologically akin to the Colorado, a river flowing at the bottom of the deep canyon it has cut, teeming with the karma—the total of good and bad deeds—of all the world, including that of Jesus. As he traverses that water, Jesus absorbs all this karma and successfully inherits and integrates it into his own being as he journeys towards Gethsemane. "To cross the Kedron as Lamb of God, for Lamb of God reasons, is to cross it where it is Colorado-river deep in the world's karma, it is to absorb willingly that karma, all of it, into oneself, and to climb with it, carrying it to an abyssal summit of Moksha Mountain called Golgotha" (Moriarty 1994, p. 27).

Christ is accompanied to the Garden of Gethsemane by three apostles. Although Peter, James, and John have come to the garden with Jesus, they do not partake in Christ's suffering. Instead, they fall asleep. While this may be a natural outcome of tiredness, it may also be a form of protection from the enormity of the sufferings that Christ is enduring. Three times he returns to his friends, finding them asleep, and on each occasion, Christ resumes his journey through the different geozoic eras of the earth.

Initially, Christ sinks into the Kainozoic (the last 66 million years of Earth's history) where "standing there alone on the Canyon floor, he breathes Kainozoic air, the same air that lizard and fox and egret and bighorn and humming bird and owl and moth and butterfly and squirrel and wood louse and rattlesnake breathe" (Moriarty 2006, p. 8). Subsequently, he descends into the Mesozoic (the middle era 252–66 million years ago), breathing "Mesozoic air, the same air that ichthyosaurus and tyrannosaurus and styracosaurus and ornithomimus and meganeura and mischoptera and archaeopteryx breathe" (Moriarty 2006, p. 8). On the third occasion, he sinks down into the Palaeozoic (ancient life, 541–252 million

years ago) and breathes the same air “that sponge and jellyfish and crinoid and ammonite and trilobite and brachiopod breathe” (Moriarty 2006, p. 8f). The journey is very painful as the bad blood of humanity, originating from ‘the sin of the world’ in these eras, boils over in Jesus. In his agony, he sweats out the bad karma of humanity: “And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

Moriarty uses the metaphor of a trail to the bottom of the Grand Canyon to illustrate the Christ’s journey in a new way. Drawing on his previous engagement with First Nation spirituality, Moriarty imagines Christ descending the Bright Angel Trail to the floor of the Grand or Karmic Canyon in Arizona. Christ’s journey is not a descent just through various geological ages but also involves “going down below humanity, down below mammal, down below reptile, down below amphibian, down below fish, down below ammonite, down below alga down below the first protein” (O’Donoghue 2013). On the floor of the Karmic Canyon, Christ is invited by Bright Angel to drink from the rockpool that mirrors aeons of stratified karma. Initially reluctant to drink, Christ begs his Father to remove the cup but agrees nevertheless to do his Father’s will. Cupping his hands, he drinks the water and takes unto himself the Earth’s karma and all its dark energies. The act of drinking the water sanctifies the Earth’s karma, and Christ experiences total integration of his human and other-than-human nature.

Good Friday is associated primarily with the death of Christ. In many accounts of the crucifixion narrative, the focus is on the death of the human Christ, but a deeper inspection suggests that this is not actually an anthropocentric story. Rather, the whole of creation is involved. Both Mark 15:33 and Luke 23:44 note the darkness that comes over the earth for about three hours. Norman Habel (2009, p. 111) remarks that this is an expression of sympathy from the earth that is reminiscent of Jeremiah 4:28 announcing that the earth mourns, and the skies grow dark. Susan Millar (2008) writes that the “voice of Earth is heard through the descent of darkness”. Alan Cadwallader (2004, p. 53) regards this darkness as reflecting the empathy of the earth. The Golgotha experience has a total cosmic setting. The crucifixion of Christ has Earth as its centre. On Good Friday, Jesus exits his physical body and dis-engages with the Earth. It is a process of dis-illusionment, resembling the transcendence of Māyā as understood in the Upanishads (Mitra 2020). Reality as the human Jesus knows it disappears and even his God disappears—hence his cry “my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

The Hebrew word ‘Golgotha’ is translated as the place of the skull. Moriarty imagines a tableau where Jesus is looking down into Adam’s empty skull. It is a state of total emptiness. The old is completely gone. This is a time of dereliction and fear, of existential void experienced by the disciples on the Sabbath, a liminal time-space between crucifixion and resurrection. McDonagh (2017, p. 17) reminds us of the fundamental importance of this ‘empty’ time-space for Creation, which “does not end at Genesis 1:32 with the creation of humans: it ends rather in Genesis 2:3 with the Sabbath rest of God”. Pope Francis (2015: 71) also highlights the significance of the Sabbath, and the Jubilee, for renewal, recreation, and redistribution. In this existential void we may glimpse ‘the rich nought’ (Moore 2009), the nothingness beyond being and becoming that could ground allegories of the Divine reconnecting God to the Earth (Heisig 2019, p. 104).

The empty skull is symbolic of the emptiness that is at the core of Moriarty’s understanding of the Easter journey. Drawing on the lens of Hinduism, Moriarty frames the Hill of the Cross as the “Hill of the Koshaless Skull”. Kosha denotes a veil or an obstruction, and a Kosha-less skull is one without the veil of the senses that hinder rather than facilitate our experience of reality (Raina 2016). Moriarty advocates letting go of our sensual and empirical experience of reality, to transcend the ego and any sense of selfhood. Prepared by the night of Gethsemane, Christ lets go of everything related to the senses. His journey to the depths of Golgotha is an evolutionary step—the foreshadowing of entry to what Moriarty calls the Divine *Ungrund*. Introduced by the German mystic Jacob Boehme, the *Ungrund* designates the atypical Nothingness that engenders Something. For Boehme, as

later for Heidegger, this “Nothingness or nihilation . . . gives rise to Being” and is thus “required for the ‘letting-be’ of beings, for the un-concealment of Being” (Koenker 1971, p. 44). We will come back to Heidegger and his idea of ‘letting-be’.

### 3.2. *The Journey towards Integration*

While drawing on other spiritual traditions, Moriarty reframes the Easter journey as one towards the experience of total integration. The movement was more in time than space. Moriarty identified a new metaphor for Jesus. Going back through the ages, Jesus drinks the karma of the species and joins in the sufferings of the earth over time. The geological epochs are not separate but blend into one another. “Eating the bitter herbs of history, of humanity, was an image for him of facing up to the totality of human nature and was at the core of his own philosophy of inclusion and integration” (McGillicuddy 2018, p. 114). During the historical event, Christ experienced the integration of all our evolutionary processes.

The total integration Jesus experienced on arriving at his destination meant there was no separation of animals from humans or of plants from animals. It was a “consciousness that isn’t fenced off from other consciousness. . . . a consciousness not fenced off from the consciousness of cheucau or fox, iguana or finch, not fenced off for that matter from rock and star” (Moriarty 2001, p. 687). For this reason, Moriarty (2009, p. 143) called Jesus

our hero of integration. He has enabled us, now again, to drink from the well of commonage consciousness in the crypt, a well a Pleistocene shaman might have drunk from, a well Cernunnos might have drunk from. Grand-Canyon deep in the earth’s karma, Jesus has enabled us to be incarnate. He has enabled us who, hitherto, were only on the earth, to be of the earth.

Thus understood, the Triduum Sacrum—agony in the garden of Gethsemane, endurance of the abyss on Golgatha, resurrection in the garden of the Sepulchre—enables our new perception. Through this pilgrimage, “Jesus brought redemption to the whole of creation . . . It follows that we have responsibility for all life on the planet with which we are interrelated and interdependent” (Ó Ciaráin 2020). This is a move from the personal ‘I’ to a collective ‘we’, and to a place where the animals also experience Christmas.

Moriarty saw Christ’s suffering on the cross as for the benefit of all creation for all times. The whole earth throughout the ages has undergone the passion of Christ. This was a truly cosmic Christ. This image, often associated with Teilhard de Chardin’s attempt to reconcile science and religion, has its roots in the letters of St Paul. Balabanski (2022) and considers “the Pauline eschatological vision of cosmic liberation and renewal ecologically as reconciling all things, not just the rift between God and humanity”. This cosmic Christ did neither prioritise contemporary human life over previous lives, nor human life over that of other creatures. His act of redemption initiated a healing process for the whole earth, achieved through a process of integration. The Canyon experience was the first step away from ego- and anthropocentrism. In consequence of such “awful passes” of suffering, the individual ego was transcended, and Jesus was enabled “to live fully in unity with others and with nature” (Charleton 2008).

Integration was at the heart of Moriarty’s thinking against anthropocentrism. In his re-framing of the Easter journey, Moriarty offers an alternative vision where all things live ecumenically with one another, uniting humanity with nature, magic, and the divine. During the Easter journey, Christ experienced a strong sense of mutuality with all life (human and non-human). There was no divide between humans and the rest of the world. “Like Naess, Moriarty viewed the development of what he called ‘commonage consciousness’ as a progression or maturation of the ego which involves a gradual transition from an atomistic identity to one that incorporates a greater and greater range of beings” (Ward 2022, p. 7). The deep ecological unity of nature is represented by Moriarty with the symbol of the empty skull. The cross is empty. The tomb is empty, and the skull is empty. There is no atomistic sense of self. Instead, there is a strong sense of being at one with nature.

That sense of collective unity with nature has been echoed by other ecologists. In a life episode reminiscent of the dramatic ending of Chingiz Aitmatov's (1989) novel *The Place of the Skull*, the American ecologist Aldo Leopold, having shot a female wolf, recalled the fire die in her eyes—a fire that suggests to him a knowledge shared between the animal and the mountain. He perceived an empathy between the wolf and her *οἰκουμένη*—her habitat—undiscovered by human beings. Leopold advocated that humans need to learn how to 'think like a mountain' (Leopold 2021) in an effort to overcome the anthropocentric insistence that the world is revolving around 'us'.

For Moriarty, the transformative journey from 'I' to 'we' can be undertaken by all Christians (in the broad ecumenical sense) who journey with Christ through the Triduum Sacrum. The Jesus event did not begin on Holy Thursday and end on Easter Sunday more than 2000 years ago. It is a continuous process. It is flowing like a fountain of living water for those who wish to drink of it. The trail to that living water is open for those who choose to cross their Kedron. This is not a physical journey, but more like a Vision Quest. Contemporary Christians are not expected to literally walk a trail across the real Kedron, into the Garden of Gethsemane and onto Golgotha, any more than they need to descend into the Colorado's Grand Canyon. Instead, this is a mystical journey with Christ: "With him not in the sense of walking beside him or after him. With him in the sense of sacramental assimilation to him" (Moriarty 2006, p. 146). Taking this route, Christians are with Jesus the sacrament rather than Jesus the person. "Existing independently of him, his achievement in the Karmic Canyon, drinking from the cup and the skull within it, is an inheritance we can appropriate into the roots and auroras of who we are" (Moriarty 2006, p. 146).

Mysticism is an experience, not a doctrine or creed; something Christians undergo like a caterpillar entering the cocoon stage—not a series of external events but a transformative private initiation. As Christians journey through the Triduum Sacrum, they move towards self-loss in the Divine, the heavens mirrored in the depths. Christians go through a process of dis-integration that involves "unlearning the separations, categorizations, and instrumentalizations of achievement, production, and supremacy" (Gillespie 2022). Having taken this in, they emerge into non-dualizing consciousness. There is no separation in the Divine. This is a state of unitive awareness represented by the empty skull, the empty tomb, and the empty cross. Like a butterfly emerging from its spent chrysalis, post-Triduum Christians are a new creation. They emerge from the Canyon into a robust, capacious and compassionate Christianity, a religion that could embrace and encompass all that we are, unlike the religion Moriarty had experienced as shunning much of our human nature.

Realising soul in themselves, these Christians see soul in all creation. They are open to behold the miraculous in everyday life. This leads to an ecumenical as opposed to dominating way of being-in-the-world. The fences come down. Christians surrender to reality as unconcealed—not as they have been conditioned to see it: There is no hierarchy of species, and Christians can gradually emerge into a 'commonage consciousness'. Humans are not separate from the elements or the biosphere around them. Humans are one with their fellow creatures within their habitats. "The world does not only 'environ' us, but we are also it, it is in us and we in it" (Moriarty 2005). This is not traditional Church Christianity. It is a new Christianity that replaces an ailing tradition. In its metaphors and symbols, in its rituals and its vision, Moriarty saw this Church Christianity as no longer nourishing the needs of humans or the Earth, a Christianity that has failed to integrate its own shadow, its own instincts, and has set itself apart from animal nature as well as from the Divine.

This severance, partially expressed in the Christian tradition's concept of 'sin', has its roots in a misleading interpretation of the Scriptures. For centuries, God's command in Gen. 1:28 has been read as a licence to exploit the natural world "according to any human whim or fancy", whereas "dominion" is, in fact, "a challenge to human beings to imitate God's loving kindness and faithfulness" (McDonagh 2017, p. 17) towards our commons and the relations that sustain it. The interconnectedness of this commons as a 'web of relations' is

the red thread running through the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis 2015), which speaks also of a “sense of deep communion with the rest of nature” (91) as we proceed on our “pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has . . . [for all] . . . and which . . . unites us . . . with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (92). There is much in this encyclical that Moriarty might have been heartened by, not least of all the postulate of an Integral Ecology (137–162), with its emphasis on heritage (143), home, belonging and rootedness (151), and a notion of the common good inseparable from a comprehensively understood human ecology (156–158).

#### 4. The Evolutionary Context

The concept of integration we find at the heart of Moriarty’s vision is commonly associated with indigenous peoples and probably reflects Moriarty’s encounters with First Nations during his time in Manitoba, as well as his lifelong engagement as a gifted storyteller with indigenous stories. Indigeneity, whether with a small or a capital ‘I’, is intrinsically connected with roots in place (Kockel 2012, 2024), and with dwelling therein, often referred to as human ecology. “Dwelling is an act of resistance against the cultural homogenisation and self-abstraction made possible by technology” (McGrath 2021, p. 99)—that is, against modern egocentrism. Thinking meditatively and dwelling authentically engenders an attitude of what Heidegger called *Gelassenheit* (letting-be-ness; see Davis 2009) that supports relationality and kinship. The German mystic Meister Eckhardt is credited with coining this concept (Lipič 2021) to explain how the human soul may recover its *unio mystica* with the Divine, the unity of creature and creator, soul and being. Keith Basso (1996) points to a sense of integration Native Americans experience whose dwelling consists of multiple “lived relationships”. Deborah Bird Rose (2013) uses the concept of kinship in a similar way. Moriarty’s mysticism is infused with indigenous mythology. *Dreamtime* was the title of his first published monograph, and the titles of his later books explicitly reference indigenous narratives. These include the three-volume *Turtle Was Gone a Long Time* (Moriarty 1996, 1997, 1998), the title of which refers to the diver myth found in Siberia and North America, in particular among the Maidu of California.

However, this integration was also the worldview in pre-colonial Ireland, encapsulated in the Gaelic word *dúchas* (heritage). *Dúchas* encodes a particular way of thinking about humans and nature that is multi-species rather than anthropocentric (Nic Craith 2023). In the Gaelic world, humans and non-humans were not separated. There was an ecological balance between all beings. Kinship and unity are prevalent in all mythology that John draws on heavily. Inevitably, these concerns infused the writings of Celtic Christians. Pelagius (360–430 AD) argued that “when Jesus commands us to love our neighbors, he does not only mean our human neighbors; he means all the animals and birds, insects and plants amongst whom we live” (Van de Weyer 1996, p. 72).

This ecological connectedness was also the vision of some Christian thinkers prior to and since Moriarty’s writings, from Martin Luther’s reading of Paul’s epistles to more contemporary engagements of Christian spirituality with science, such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin ([1969] 1971). McIntosh (2023) critiques the faith of Thomas Berry with whom Moriarty would have agreed on many points. Like Moriarty, Berry argued that “we are involved in a profound cultural pathology. Because we refuse to deal with this cultural pathology, we are in a state of denial” (Berry et al. 1991, p. 46). We do not engage with nature. “We are talking to ourselves. We are not talking to the river, we are not listening to the river. We have broken the great conversation [and] shattered the universe” (Berry et al. 1991, p. 20). And just like Moriarty, Berry argued for a changed set of relationships between humankind and the Earth, which would honour and recognise the kinship between all the elements. “Each atomic particle is in communion with every other atom in the vast web of the universe. This web of relationships throughout the universe is what first impinges on the waking consciousness of the human from the beginning” (Berry 1978).

Echoing *Laudato Si'*, the human ecologist Alastair McIntosh (2023) argues that “[t]he Earth must not be approached in a fragmentary manner, but in an ‘integral’ or holistic

manner, as ‘a single reality’’. This would not be easily achieved. Just as Christ had suffered the passion, we also need to suffer. “What is needed is a deep cultural therapy. It is like addiction. We are not going to get out of this until we undertake the agonies that drug addicts have to undergo. ... There is no death without renewal” (Berry et al. 1991, p. 46). This is not a Christianity of “bells and smells”; instead, “a theology that faces up to cosmotheandric crucifixion can only find its realization from the depth of the second day on the cross, when, as it is expressed in the Apostles’ Creed: ‘He descended into hell’” (McIntosh 2023).

While there are similarities between Moriarty’s work and Teilhard’s endeavour to bridge the chasm between science and religion, especially in relation to their Christology, cosmic vision, and continuing evolution, Moriarty makes little reference to Teilhard in his writing. Tucker (2005, p. 13) noted that, thanks to Teilhard, it had now become possible to recover the cosmological sense of Christ, present in the letters of St. Paul, which had waned since the early Christian era: “We may now reintegrate a focus on the historical Christ of social justice with the Cosmic Christ, the Logos at the heart of the universe”. Along with Teilhard’s vision of “the unity of life that resituates the human in the whole cosmic order ... [and] ... provides a means of reciprocity and reverence with the natural world” (Tucker 2005, p. 9), this suggests considerable common ground. However, the two writers appear to have diverged in their perspective on evolution, and on the value of complexity. Teilhard adapted (see Shoshitaishvili 2021) the concept of ‘noosphere’ to capture the increasing complexity of human awareness evolving towards the ‘Omega Point’ (Teilhard de Chardin 1959)—his chiffre for the Cosmic Christ. By contrast, Moriarty (2001, p. 1069) referred to Teilhard’s ‘noosphere’ as a “thing” that was suffocating our spirituality, “closing ever more thickly above us and about us. We are asphyxiating in our own psychic exhaust”.

In one of his last writings, Teilhard suggested Christianity “is reaching the end of one of the natural cycles of its existences. ... After what will soon be two thousand years, Christ must be born again” (Teilhard de Chardin [1969] 1971). Yet this ‘second coming’ may be not what human interpretations expect, as Chinghiz Aitmatov (1989, p. 142) has Jesus explain in a fictional dialogue with Pilate: “It is not I ... who will return, resurrected; it is [humanity], who will come again to live in Christ ... I will return in [humanity], through my suffering”. Moriarty’s Triduum Sacrum points in a similar direction. Aitmatov’s Christ continues: “I will be your future, left thousands of years behind in the chronological past: this is the Almighty’s plan, to raise [humanity] in this way onto the throne of [its] true calling, ... to goodness and beauty”.

Berry called for a new and expanded form of Christianity. Scientific developments have led us to understand the evolutionary process in a different way from early Christian thinkers, and we must articulate our Christian belief differently. We have, in our new understanding of the universe, new ways of understanding the divine manifestation in the natural world. We have a new type of revelation (Berry et al. 1991, p. 54). As McIntosh (2023) summarises it: “Early Christianity, he suggests, shaped a theology that went beyond the gospels, and we must do the same today”.

Moriarty also called for a new form of Christianity—one that goes beyond the Church and integrates and takes account of the wider ecumene. His argument is that if we can integrate that realization, grow that vision, then we will never be able to hurt the earth we walk on, and will instead walk in beauty. For us, what is extraordinary about Moriarty’s work is that he has made the passion of Christ central to the process of what he sees as “our further and final evolution” (Moriarty 2006). It is only with the evolution of the compassionate spirit that the world will change; while this is a Buddhist insight, Moriarty’s Jesus internalises and integrates our animal nature and our human savageries, brings them to the surface and blesses them.

Moriarty was keen that Christianity would expand beyond its traditional boundaries. His was a form of spirituality that drew upon all the resources he had accumulated over a lifetime (Ó Ciaráin 2020):

Moriarty called repeatedly for genuine ecumenism with all beliefs and religions. He sought a new Christianity which draws from native wisdom such as that of the Aztec people, the first Native American tribes, and indeed the ancient native mythology of Ireland: the oldest vernacular literature in Western Europe.

It was a form of Christianity epitomised in the person of Black Elk (Moriarty 2007):

I think of him (Black Elk) as a new kind of Christian. A Christian who, as his name suggests, is ecumenical with elk, that meaning all animals, living and extinct. A Christian who is ecumenical with lightning. A Christian who, before he converted to Christianity, concluded the rituals he performed with the words *mitakuye oyasin*, meaning all my relatives, in other words, everything that exists, and it might well be that a ritual is effective only when it is pan-ecumenical, only when it is in and from and with and through all things.

This would break the boundaries of our thinking as well as those of different forms of spirituality. Moriarty was not thinking in traditional terms. Instead, his challenge is for us to re-imagine Christianity within a cosmology of inclusion of the whole earth, encompassing all creeds, all cosmologies, and all ideologies. Moriarty (1994, p. 26) wrote:

We are most humbly, heirs with Hindus to Upanishads.

We are most humbly, heirs with Buddhists to Sutras.

We are most humbly, heirs with Taoists to the Tao  
Te Ching.

We are, most humbly, heirs with Christians to  
Evangel and Evangelanta.

We are, most humbly, heirs with Jews to heard of and unheard of  
Books of Splendour.

We are, most humbly, heirs with Sufis to Bezels of Wisdom.

We are, most humbly, heirs with Navajo to sacred circles and songs.

We are, most humbly, heirs with Siberian, Inuit and Aboriginal shamans  
to sacred songs.

For Moriarty, the Triduum Sacrum is the final stage in the process of evolution, but it is not just the evolution of the earth that is at stake. It is also the evolution of Christianity, which Moriarty felt had stopped growing with the New Testament. His is a mystical Christianity—he sometimes called it ‘Canyon Christianity’ (drawing on his metaphor of the Grand Canyon). It is an ecumenical Christianity that might, in its relational, cosmological, and ecological integration, sustain a “morally oriented *Gelassenheit*” to “usher in a new world” (McGrath 2021, p. 102f)—an attitude reflecting the spirit of *mitakuye oyasin*. Cultivating such a *Gelassenheit* might well help us “prevent the coming eco-catastrophe” if we can “conceive both nature and humanity differently” (Huttunen and Kakkori 2022, p. 639). What sources this *Gelassenheit* may draw on was left open by its proponent Heidegger, and it remains a moot point; Moriarty’s intercultural spiritual intuition may be one of them.

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