

# TRANSFORMING DISCIPLESHIP:

## *A Spirituality for Mission*



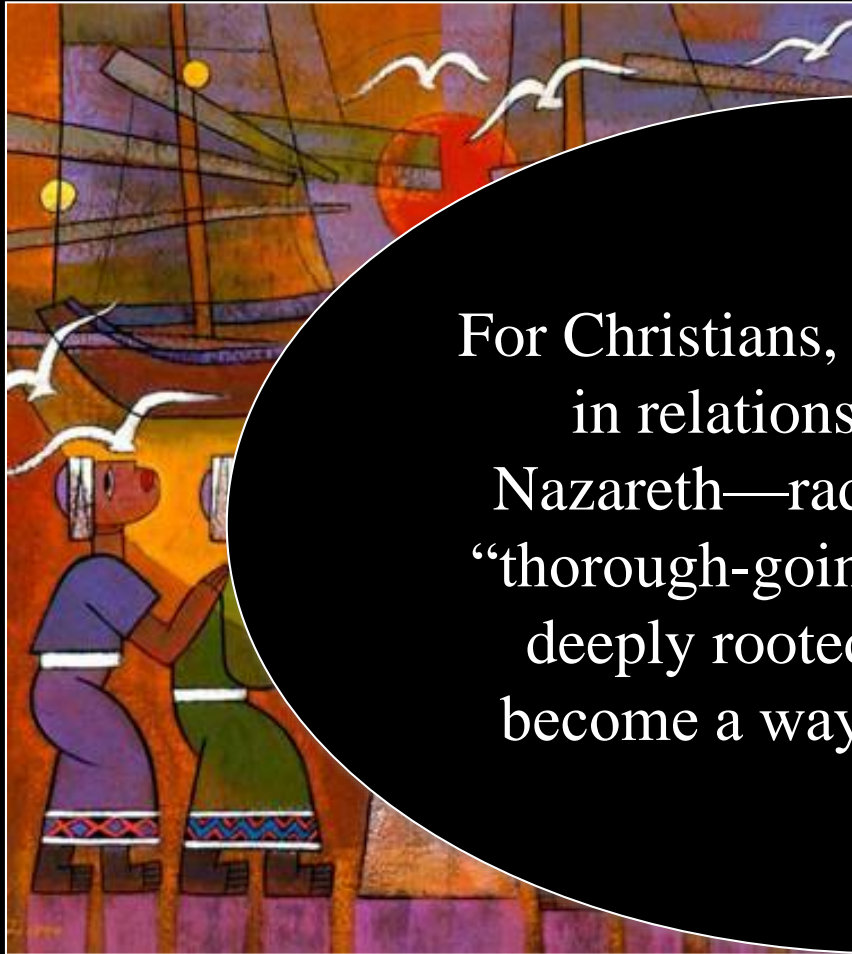
RFC--ForMission  
June 13, 2016



# INTRODUCTION: DISCIPLESHIP



# A rich word, important today



- Mathetes / discipulus—  
mathanein / discere

...ly sits at the feet  
... (magister/

For Christians, discipleship rooted  
in relationship to Jesus of  
Nazareth—radical discipleship!  
“thorough-going, committed, and  
deeply rooted; that is, it must  
become a way of life” (Gittins)

...ourney  
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Learns from teacher's  
wisdom, integrity, way of  
life

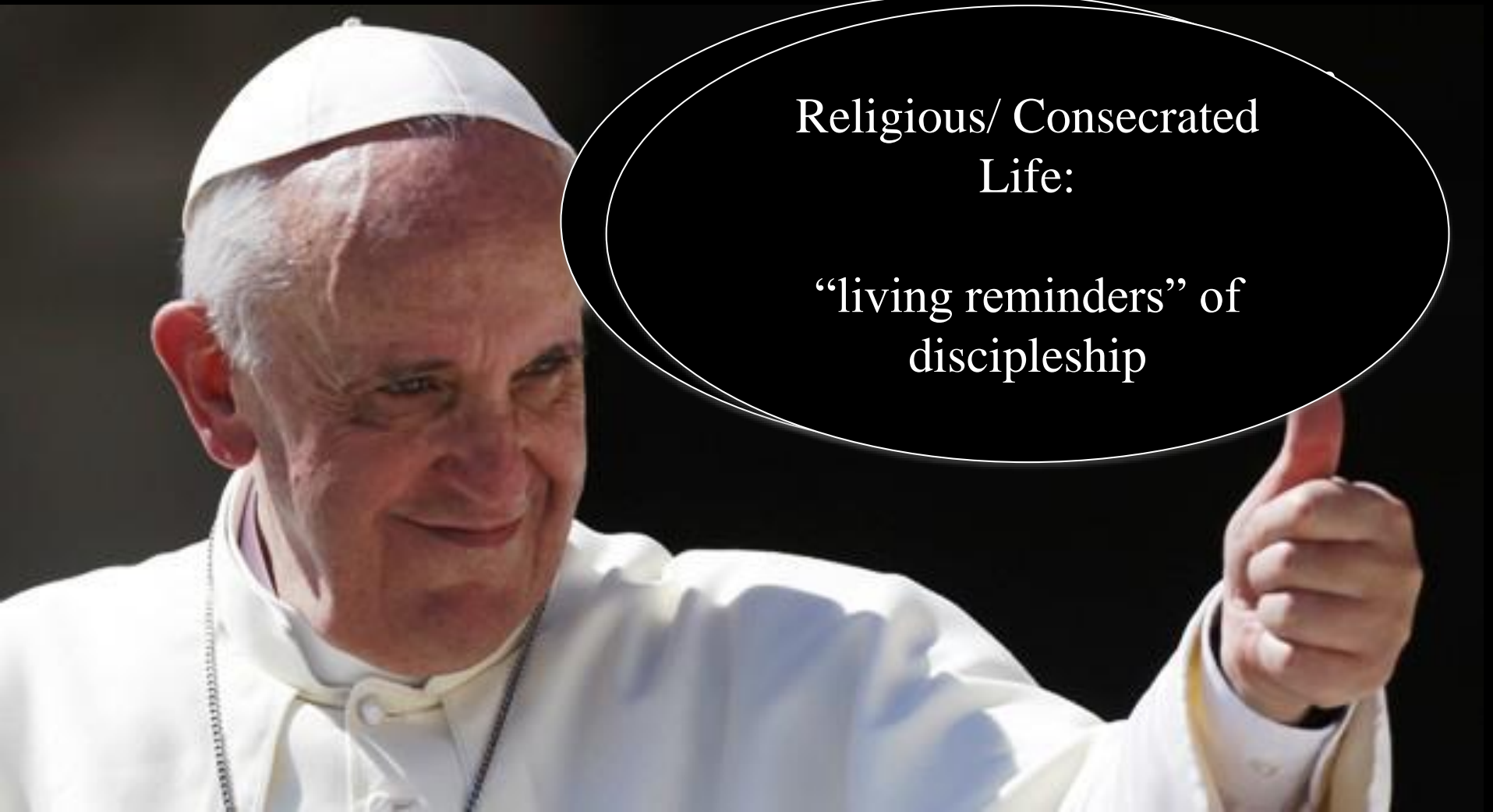


For Roman Catholic ecclesiology, best way to describe  
fundamental equality of Christians



A person's discipleship, not being a  
lay person, religious, or ordained, that  
distinguishes a person as Christian

# “Community of Missionary Disciples” (EG 24)



Religious/ Consecrated  
Life:

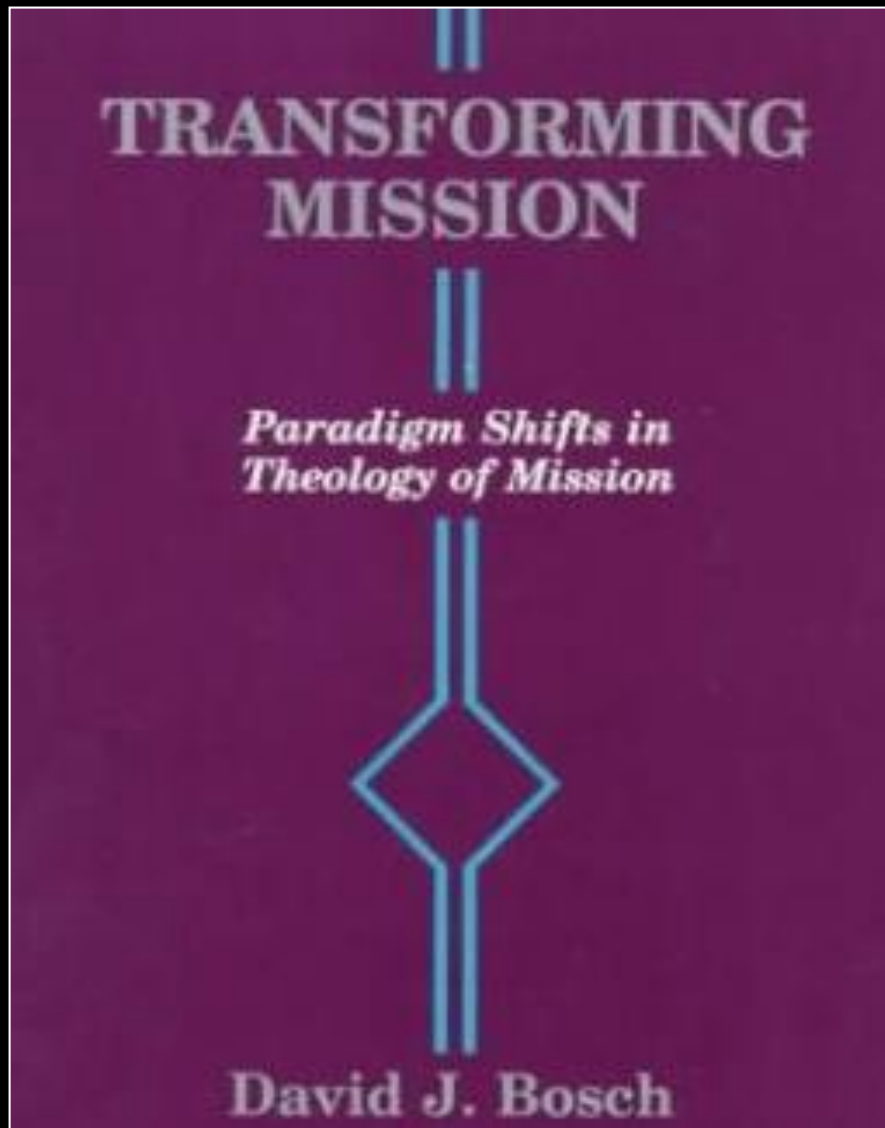
“living reminders” of  
discipleship

# TRANSFORMING DISCIPLESHIP





# An “Ambiguous” Title!



- On the one hand book about the transforming of mission
- History of mission— history of its transformation
- On the other hand, about the transforming *work* of mission
- More than saving souls; about transformation of the world
- Transforming *mission* is *transforming* mission!

# In the same way...

*“To know Jesus is to follow Jesus” (Sobrinó)*



TTL: “The Church, as the communion of Christ’s disciples, must become an inclusive community, and exists to bring healing and reconciliation to the world” (10)

- EG: no longer “missionaries” and “disciples” but “missionary disciples” (120)
- Not just about personal holiness or personal relationship with Jesus



# This is why

- A transformed discipleship is a *transforming* discipleship
- In the same way that Bosch speaks of mission: “at its most profound level ... to transform reality around it”...
- Church as “community of missionary disciples”...
- “gift of God to the world for its transformation” (TTL 10)
- Rest of this presentation—look at each aspect in some more detail

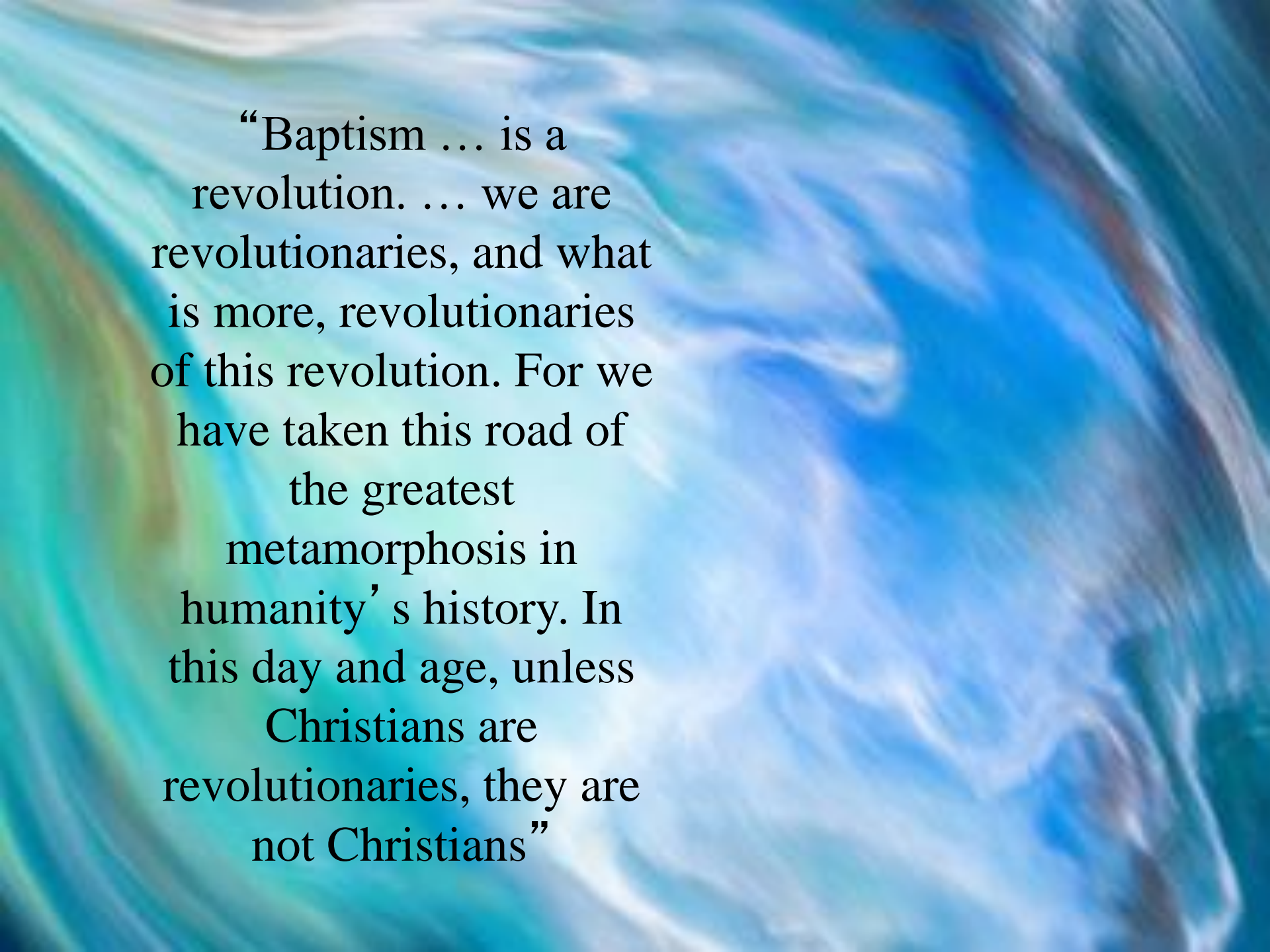


# TRANSFORMING *DISCIPLESHIP*:

*Theosis and the “Revolution” of Baptism*







“Baptism ... is a revolution. ... we are revolutionaries, and what is more, revolutionaries of this revolution. For we have taken this road of the greatest metamorphosis in humanity’ s history. In this day and age, unless Christians are revolutionaries, they are not Christians”




A photograph of a stone baptismal font, likely made of sandstone or limestone, set against a rough-hewn stone wall. The font has a central basin with three steps leading up to it. The text is overlaid on the image in a white serif font.

Words of Pope Francis in April, 2013

Point to the transforming power of Baptism

In liturgy of Roman Catholic Church  
Revolutionary, transforming character of  
Baptism expressed in a great panoply of  
symbols



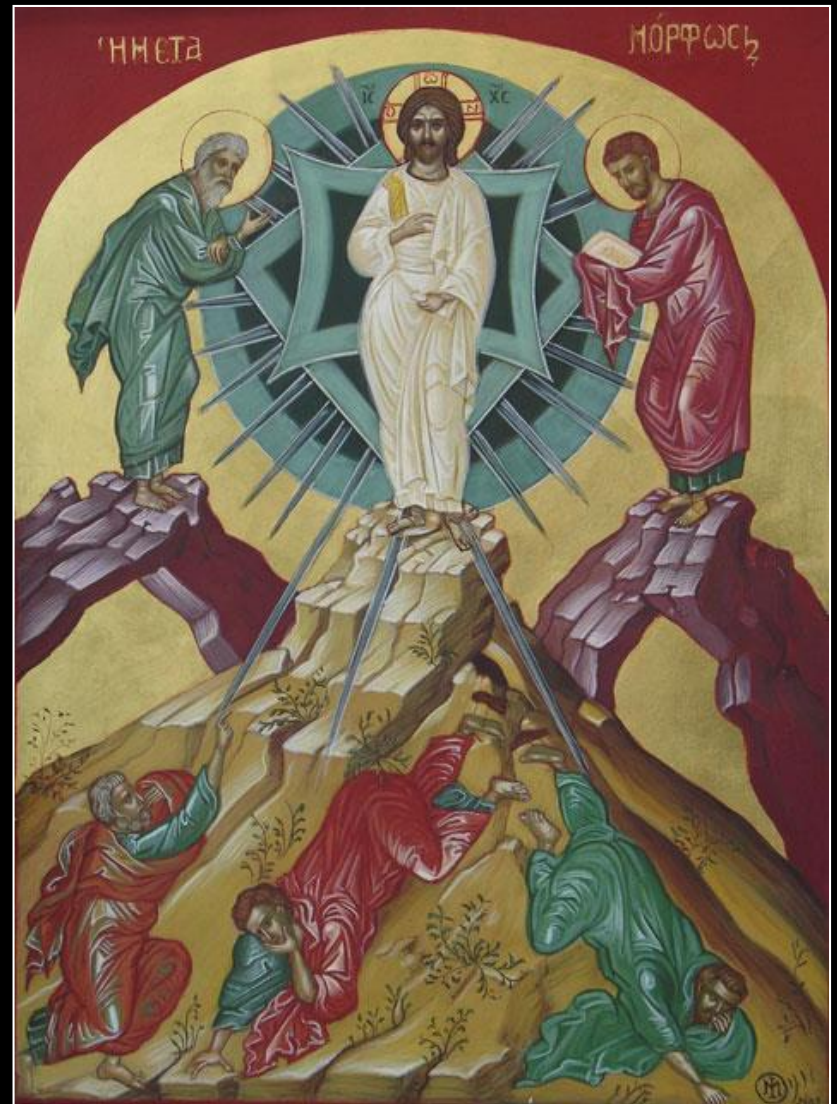


*“in virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples”*

Baptism transforms us  
into transformed  
disciples, transforming  
our understanding of  
discipleship

# In the theology of Orthodoxy

- Transformation of the disciple expressed as
- Deification or *theosis*
- Not strictly scriptural term, but has deep roots
- In Paul—adopted sonship/daughterhood;
- Body of Christ, Temple of Spirit
- Comformed, transformed into, put on mind of Christ
- John—vine and branches, “abiding”
- 2Peter 1:4—partakers in divine nature





# Strong in Patristic Witness



- Norman Russell—a sampler:
- Irenaeus: Son of God “became what we are in order to make us what he is himself”
- Clement of Alexandria: “The Word of God became human so that you too may learn from a human how it is even possible for a human to become God.”
- Athanasius: Christ “became human that we might become divine”

# Often understood in personal, static sense



- The *disciple* is transformed, but not discipleship as such
- However, there is a clear strand in the theology of theosis understanding it as transforming discipleship
- My studies not extensive, but...
- Still, *theosis* is an exciting way to deepen “transforming discipleship”



# For example:

- Norman Russell: *theosis* “is not simply the remedying of our defective human state. It is nothing less than our entering into partnership with God, our becoming fellow workers with [God]”
- Petros Vassiliadis: in Orthodoxy, “human nature was never considered as a closed, autonomous, and static entity; its very existence was always determined by its *relationship* to God. Guided, therefore, by a vision of how to ‘know’ God, and



‘participate’ in [God’s] life, Christian witness is closely connected with the notion of a *synergetic* theology of *theosis* or *deification*”



Michael J. Gorman:

“Theosis, we have argued, is helpful language to describe the reality of participation in the life and mission of God, and thus becoming like God; Paul’s notion of theosis, or transformative participation, is inherently missional”



# Understanding the revolutionary nature of Baptism...

- ...and the equally revolutionary notion of *theosis*
- are indeed ways of transforming discipleship
- From these perspectives
- Discipleship, the following of Christ
- Can only be a missionary discipleship, one that is committed to transforming the world
- Constant growth, conformity to a tradition
- Franciscan, Ignatian, Dominican, Benedictine, etc.



# TRANSFORMING DISCIPLESHIP:

*Working Together Towards Life*

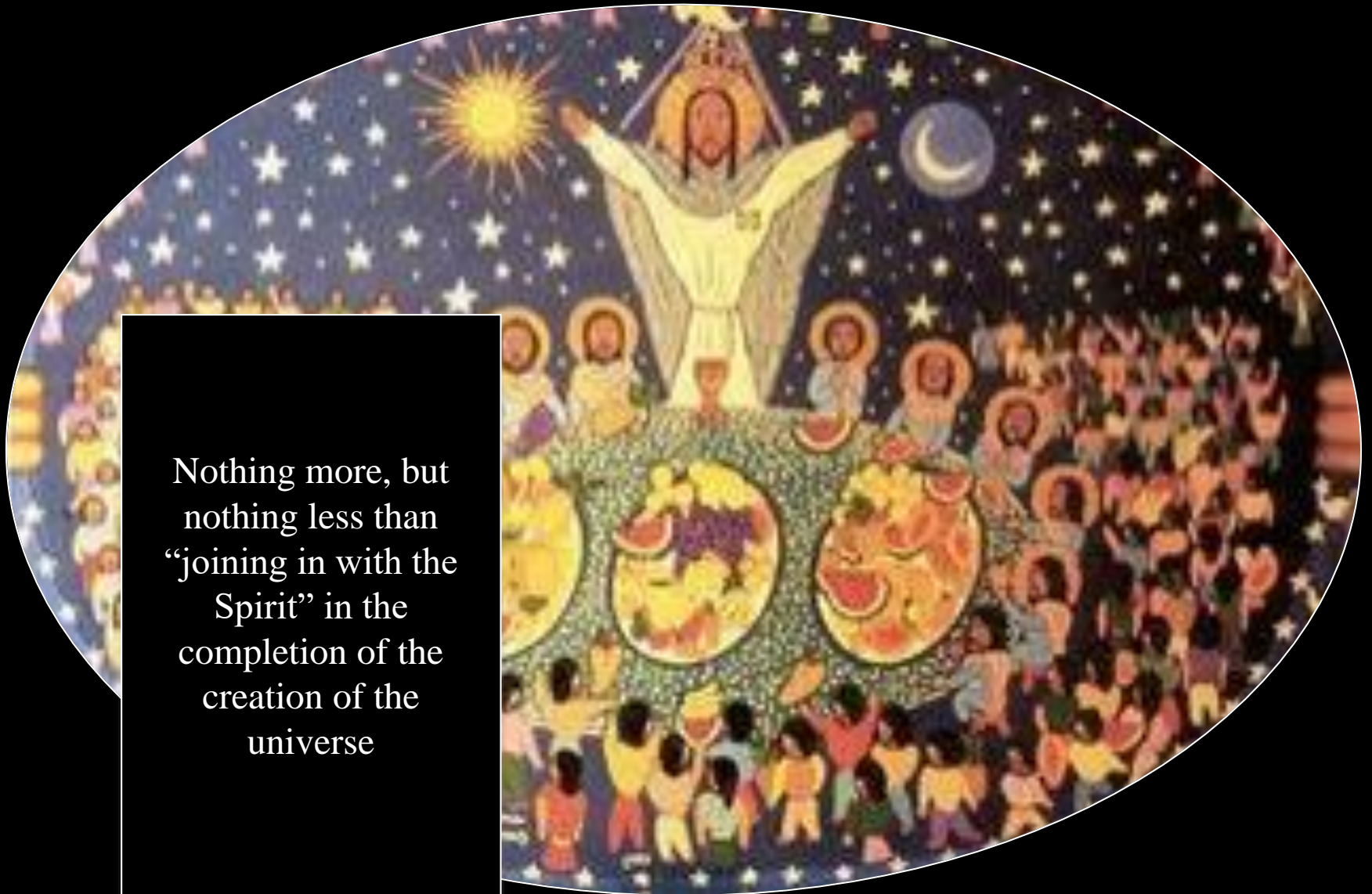


Safina—“The Seven Days of Creation”



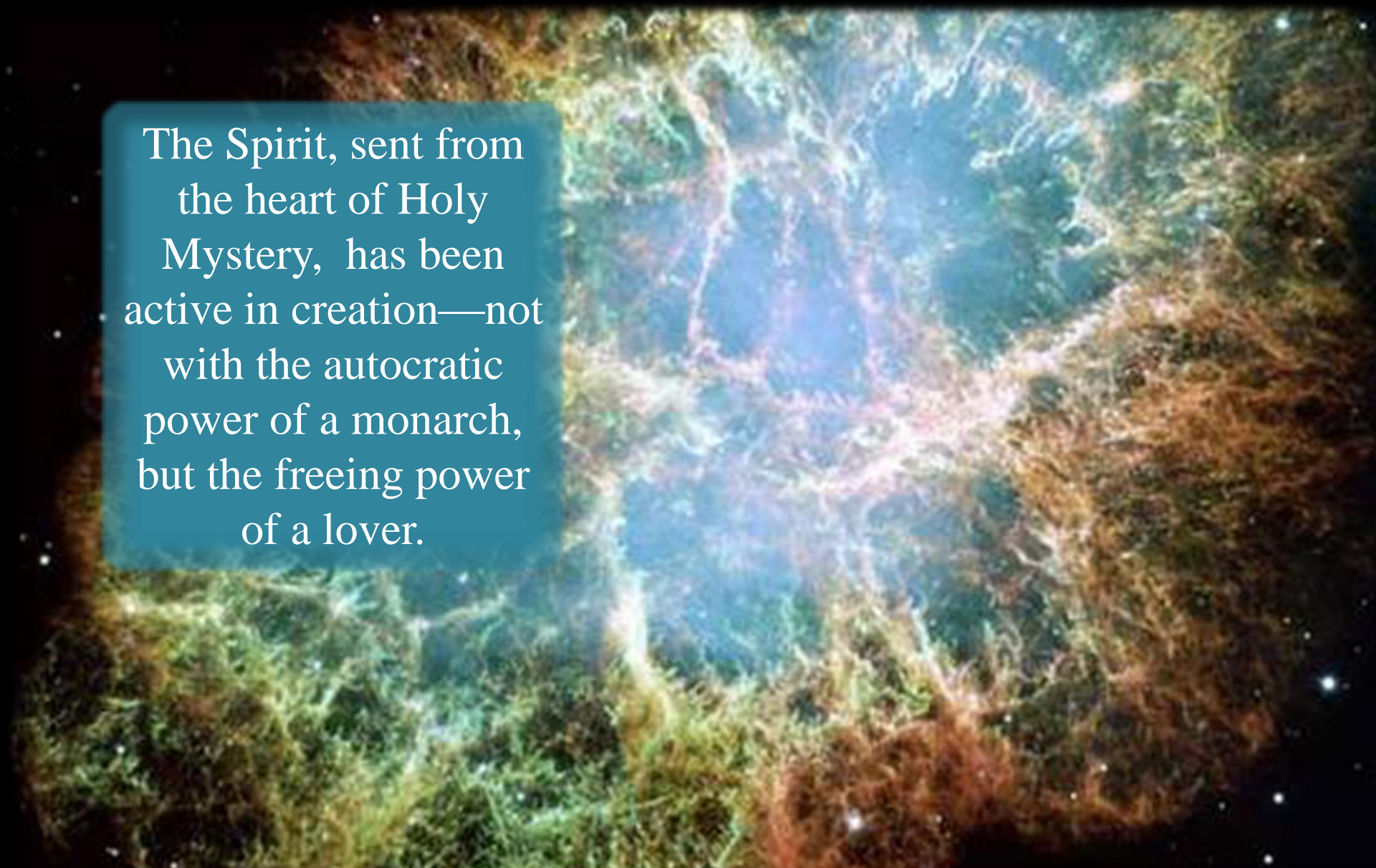
# Christian Missionary Discipleship

Nothing more, but  
nothing less than  
“joining in with the  
Spirit” in the  
completion of the  
creation of the  
universe



# From the first nanosecond of creation

The Spirit, sent from the heart of Holy Mystery, has been active in creation—not with the autocratic power of a monarch, but the freeing power of a lover.







It was the same Creator Spirit who anointed Jesus for his mission of proclaiming, manifesting, and embodying the loving and tender mercy of God

He came that all might have life, and be transformed by that life

# When Jesus' transforming vision of life was rejected and he was executed

- The God of life raised him up
- As the first fruits of creation's completion
- The same Spirit that had anointed him for mission
- Anointed the women and men who had been his disciples
- To continue his mission until God is "all in all" and creation completed





# From creation's first moment

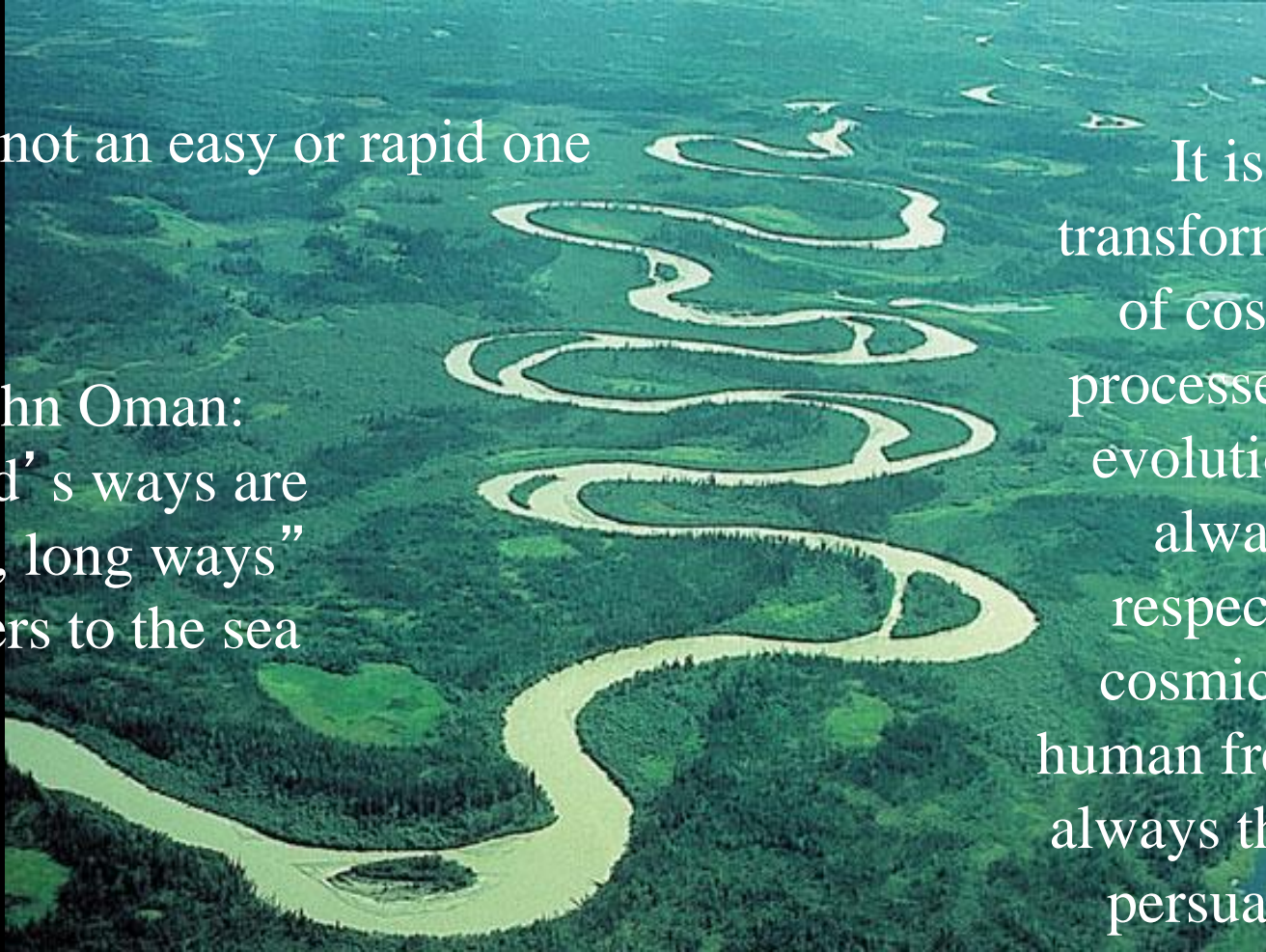
- God through the Spirit has been about transformation
- And now the church, God's community of transformed missionary disciples
- Is about transformation as well
- The church is called to journey together towards life
- As a community of transforming disciples



# The transformation that is God's mission, however...

...is not an easy or rapid one

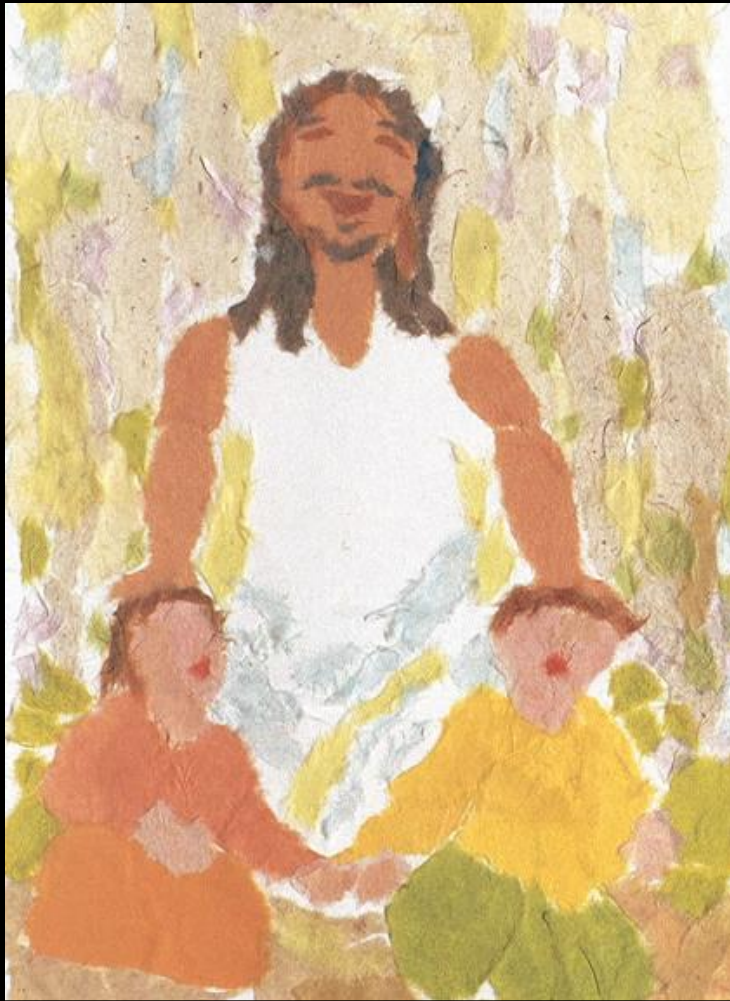
John Oman:  
“God's ways are  
long, long ways”  
Rivers to the sea



It is a transformation of cosmic processes and evolution—always respecting cosmic and human freedom, always through persuasion



# If Jesus' disciples are to be transforming disciples



- They must be disciples “in Christ’s way”
- Serving with the same loving, persuasive, and yet determined patience of their teacher

# What are we, as transforming disciples, called to transform?

- As we join in with the Spirit
- And work together towards Life
- As we strive to be “living reminders” of discipleship





# First, we are called to transform the church



a church that, before it speaks, proves itself to be credible, open, vulnerable

When it speaks, speaks words of comfort, encouragement, testifying to the mercy it has received

Religious, by prophetic witness of our lives

# Second, we are called to transform the disunity of the church

- Thus reversing the scandal that has rightly been a stumbling block for so many people
- “practically as well as theologically, mission and unity belong together” (TTL 60)
- Beyond Christian unity...peoples of faith, humanity, whole creation (see TTL 61)





# In order to transform the chaos of interreligious rivalry and hatred



- Need to transform ourselves into women and men of dialogue
- Prophetic dialogue
- Open to the Other with a heart “so open the wind blows through it”
- Not a bland “all religions are the same”
- But joyful in our identity (see EG 251)

# In order to transform the chaos of human disunity

- Need to work at eradicating its root causes
- Any kind of injustice, oppression, racism, or economic greed
- Need to become disciples who are “poor and for the poor”



- Let the poor, marginalized evangelize us



# In order to transform the chaos caused by abuse

- Of the “non-human” world
- Animals, other forms of life, the world beyond our earth
- Need to commit ourselves to protecting all of creation
- Understanding that we are *part of* not over it





Our work...

We pray that we can become  
Transforming Disciples  
“Living Reminders” of discipleship  
As was prayed at the end of the Porto  
Alegre Assembly of the WCC:  
“God, in your grace, transform the  
world!”