

---

## *“I’m Sorry, Please Forgive Me, I Love You, Thank You”*

**An article for the *Cathedral Times* by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith**

“I’m Sorry, Please Forgive Me, I Love You, Thank You.” Those four phrases are the formula for conflict resolution and spiritual ‘cleansing’ that I researched three weeks ago at an introductory workshop called, Ho’oponopono Basic. “Ho’oponopono” (pronounced ho-o po-no po-no) is a Hawaiian word meaning “make” (ho’o) “right-right” (pono-pono). To paraphrase in a lighthearted way it means to really really make something right!

As I religious studies professor I’m privileged to spend my time investigating diverse faith traditions and new religious movements. Happily I’m also a practitioner and teacher of our specific faith tradition here at the Cathedral. How could I resist, therefore, when I came across an indigenous or native spiritual practice that seems so convergent with our own Christian faith and practices? So with keen interest I attended last month’s basic training in the theory and practice of a more contemporary, even ‘New Age’ version of Ho’oponopono.

For several years now I’ve also been concerned about atonement theory and practice in our Christian faith. In theory: how do the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ actually save us and the world from the forces of sin, evil, and destruction? And in practice: How does our following Jesus in the way of suffering love actually achieve the redemption and atonement that we are promised in our scriptures and beliefs? Although this line of inquiry is traditionally known as “the Paschal mystery,” I’m committed to joining others in probing that mystery with as much intelligence as we can muster.

What if there were a more direct, simple, and reliable practice that could enliven and propagate throughout the world the spiritual values and ideals that we espouse? That question expresses the allure of the so-called New Age spiritualities that are available in many forms and fascinating ways today. Part of their attraction is due to the absence or reduced levels of dogma—dogma as codified doctrines that demand assent and that have been inherited over millennia. More engaging for me, however, are innovations that continue to convey ancient wisdom and enduring truths while still being accessible and compelling for us today.

Ho’oponopono is a good candidate for such a ‘way.’ And: “Jesus is the Way that is open to other Ways,” declares John Cobb, one of my favorite theologians of contemporary faith (Source: John B. Cobb Jr., “Beyond Pluralism,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990; p. 91). As an African heritage theologian myself I’m particularly interested in indigenous or native ways—and particularly shamanic or ritual healing ways—that can convey the ‘Good News’ (i.e., Gospel) of Jesus Christ for us today. (See Cobb’s other phrase that attracts me to his work in the title, *Can Christ Become Good News Again?* Chalice Press, 1991.)

Now I’m also concerned as a neo-orthodox Christian to affirm the uniqueness of the Jesus Way among the world’s spiritual options: the way of unconditional love that both acknowledges and redeems humanity’s abysmal captivity to sin, evil, and destruction. “We say confession every day because we need to,” one of my professors said to my class of seminarians in the 1970s. But we also say confession believing, every day, that there is One who forgives and absolves us, and then commands us to cooperate with actions and behaviors that renew all creation consistent with the ideals of unconditional love. May we continue in that way as faithful disciples who have been “trained for the kingdom of heaven,” and who are “like the master

of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matthew 13:52).

---

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*