

The **MAST** *Journal*

*The Journal of the
Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology*

*Vol. 26, No. 2
2019*

Cosmology: Embraced by Earth, World and Universe

Cosmology and Spirituality: How Big Is Your World? <i>Carmel Doyle, D.Min.</i>	3
Cosmology and Missional Leadership <i>Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Peddle</i>	10
Cosmology and Ethics <i>Richard C. Singleton, Ph.D.</i>	16
Cosmology and Faith Formation <i>Anne Walsh, D.Min.</i>	22
Cosmology and Liturgy <i>Gerard Whitty, D.Min.</i>	29
Real Presence: An Ecological, Cosmological Heart <i>Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M.</i>	37
Seeing Cosmology Through the Eyes of a Child <i>Mary Tee, R.S.M.</i>	43
Cosmos Mercified into Being <i>Elizabeth Davis, R.S.M.</i>	49
Book Review- Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God For a Planet in Peril <i>Mary Paula Cancienne, R.S.M.</i>	55

Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions, and Friends of Mercy,



It is a particular pleasure to publish this issue on “Cosmology: Our Place in Creation, the World and the Universe.” It was first imagined by Elizabeth Davis, R.S.M., Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland, who should be acknowledged as the guest editor. She was the coordinator who invited her colleagues—men and women, Mercy Sisters, ordained leaders of faith communities, and lay leaders in parishes and dioceses in Newfoundland and Labrador. There is a common personal voice in these articles. Many refer to an experience in childhood that inspired their present work in cosmology. Their articles are thus more than scholarly presentations, for they invite readers to share their own evolution in ministerial consciousness. At the same time, they demonstrate how cosmological themes inspire their ministries and are made concrete in their various pastoral works, administrative roles, church affiliations, and academic specialties. They share the writers who have inspired them. The cohesion of these articles expresses the communion among the writers.

This issue is an example of collaboration and communion among academics and practitioners, men and women, Mercies and co-workers. Some in the “lower 48” might group these concerns under the topic “the environment” or “ecology.” However, to name it “Cosmology” enlarges the horizon. As Elizabeth Davis points out, “In the context of the cosmos, then, communion means communion in God, with the entire human family, with Earth and with the universe itself.”

Carmel Doyle, in “Cosmology and Spirituality—How Big is Your World?” invites readers to expand their consciousness of the world they live in. She explains the “Gaian hypothesis” and the difference a “world theology” makes to our reading of our own scriptural tradition. She encourages wholeheartedness in enlarging our notion that all people in the whole world are included in God’s salvation. In this context, she asks if we understand ourselves as stewards of the earth, and if we are, what are the expanding circles of inclusion that inspire our care for earth, our common home.

Bishop Peddle in “Cosmology and Missional Leadership,” provides an intellectual frame and definition of cosmology. He reviews this theme in the biblical tradition and asks what the implications are for those in church leadership, better understood as “missional leadership.” What does it mean to minister for the sake of the whole world? The commitment to care for creation flows theologically from the Trinity and the Holy Spirit. He cites the inspiration for theologians and church ministers of an activist like Rachel Carson.

Richard Singleton, in “Cosmology and Ethics” develops his thesis that the new cosmology, articulated by Thomas Berry, a Passionist, requires “a revision to our understanding of humanity in relation to all other created things of the world.” Citing Rolheiser, Richard Rohr, Walter Brueggemann, and Ilia Delio, he describes the challenge to the dominant consciousness of “anthropocentric instrumentalism” which has controlled our thinking about the environment in terms of human interests—the physical world in relation to me, rather than I in relation to the universe.

Anne Walsh, in “Cosmology and Faith Formation,” asks how, as a catechist, those who share this ministry can “enter into that transformative conversation in light of the rapidly expanding fields of knowledge in the sciences,” especially cosmology and astrophysics. She discusses the impact of science on faith, and how her own consciousness was formed by growing up after 1961 during the space program. How to integrate faith and space exploration, how to move beyond biblical literalism yet integrate the new sciences with biblical tradition. We must recognize the limitation of language for teaching about God, who is more than “up there.” What is the “big bang,” and did creation happen just once or is it continuous?

Gerard Whitty, in “Cosmology and Liturgy,” remarks on the importance of ritual— “No culture ever developed without ritual.” He outlines six fundamental principles of the Sunday worship according to the Roman Rite and its relation to the themes emerging in the new cosmology. The universe reminds us that everything in creation is interconnected; so too is the community that participates in liturgy. Like creation which is expressed in an

enfolded universe, liturgy unifies and harmonizes the worshippers. Symbolic movements of assembling, reading the word, consecration, communion and dismissal into the world are also movements that mirror and participate in God's continuous creation.

Brenda Peddigrew, in "Real Presence: An Ecological, Cosmological Heart," grounds her theology in a memory of what "real presence" meant to her as a child, and what it has come to mean as an adult. Recalling her childhood vacation periods far from town, spent with family in a small house in the forest, she has returned to that environment as an adult. She prescribes seven actions the reader can practice to establish a closer relationship with the earth, the world and the cosmos, such as, "Look for animals who live in the wild. Pay special attention to birds, squirrels and insects. See the all as integral to the whole of creation and the cosmos."

Mary Tee, in "Seeing Cosmology Through the Eyes of a Child," insists that children "enable us to expand our minds and hearts to think and feel about how we can see all creation in a far different way and to fall in love with all life again." She describes not only her own memories of feeling one with creation, but her observations working with children in her environmental education program. They are contemplative, subject to the gravitational pull of what Brian Swimme calls *allurement*; they have compassion for animals, and their activism, like the Swedish teen Greta Thunberg, is compelling.

Elizabeth Davis, in "Cosmos Mercified Into Being," gives a definition for her article—"cosmology is the study of the origin, evolution and future of the universe." Almost all ancient traditions have a creation story and a description for its beauty—indigenous peoples, and some are recorded in sacred texts like the Jewish scripture and the Muslim Quran. Her review of scholarly quotations from Johnson, de Chardin, Berry, Boff, and the Psalms, could be used for a retreat meditation. She develops the theme of God as merciful, compassionate, gracious, steadfastly loving that is recorded in many faith traditions—the One who creates the cosmos is the God who is "mercifying" it into being. She closes with a re-write of Psalm 104 as applied to the beauty of the world seen from the perspective of indigenous people, the Maori, in New Zealand.

Mary-Paula Cancienne, a contributor from the "lower 48," affirms the theme of this issue by her review of the 2018 book by Elizabeth Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril*.

This issue will surely be received as a gift of reflection, caring and vision to MAST Journal readership. We are both educated and inspired by the harmonious voices of these writers from Newfoundland and Labrador.

Yours,



Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.
Editor, *The MAST Journal*

The Mast Journal begun in 1991, is published three times a year by
the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology
www.mastrsm.org
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Inc., West Midwest Community
535 Sacramento Street, Auburn, CA 95603.
Vol. 26, No. 2, 2019
Annual Subscription \$20 US; \$30 International

Cosmology and Spirituality: “How Big Is Your World?”

Carmel Doyle, D.Min.

July 20, 1969 – The Day the World Changed

It has been 50 years since we first saw Earth from space. Until that moment in July of 1969, we all knew we were citizens of our respective countries, but we did not see ourselves as citizens of one planet. After that July day, we were no longer earthbound. Armstrong’s “One small step for man; one giant leap for mankind,” changed everything. Only then could we look beyond all of what we had previously assumed and make space for the dawning of a new era, a new way of being human – to see that we are one race, one people, on one planet – our common home.

Distance and Leaving Home

We all need to get away on a regular basis to provide the distance of time and space to understand our lives – our experiences, values and dreams.

The same applies to us as a species. We needed to be able to leave home – Earth – before we could begin to comprehend how we understood and valued our existence as a species on a very small blue planet. It was not long after, 1972, that Lovelock and Margulis¹ first presented the Gaian hypothesis which sees the entire planet and all that exists on it as a single entity constantly seeking an optimal environment to sustain contemporary life forms. They furthered an ecological understanding promoting the need for sustainable relationship and balance in our world – both biologically and chemically. Clearly, we are not doing well in our ecological balance.

Nor are we doing well on the spiritual front. Institutional faith—which used to unify populations

into holding similar beliefs and values—is crumbling. Now is a time to step back and get enough distance to understand how our current beliefs, practices and spiritualities may be adding to or detracting from the possibility of a more gentle, sustainable, ecological and spiritual way of living together in relationship with all peoples, all species, and Earth herself.

A Brief Overview of Our Present Spiritual Landscape

Our current ecological imbalance requires that we take a “giant leap” forward in a geopolitical sense. We need to do the same with our spiritual stories, values, beliefs and practices. We have come to a crossroads where our life-styles – based on our beliefs and values – are destroying not only the biosphere, but also our own species.

In our Western world, we find ourselves locked inside loneliness, isolation, anger and fear of the other, often thinking only of ourselves. Our use of personal technology – which ironically offers us a window on the world – has imprisoned at least two generations into an ever-diminishing world of “connection” to those who think, believe, and act just like them – excluding all others, living in a virtual ghetto, cut off from healthy critique and discourse.

Our “connected world” is often a dissociative world in which the values and beliefs that we exercise in one domain do not translate into another. Figure I (see below) presents a graphic illustration of a sample of value and belief influences and fragmentation that individuals and communities encounter on a daily basis.

We have come to a crossroads where our life-styles – based on our beliefs and values – are destroying not only the biosphere, but also our own species.

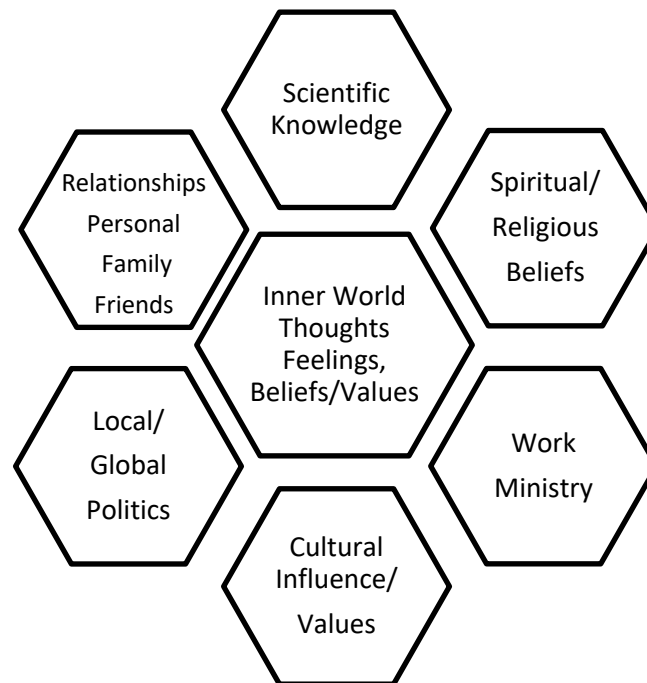


Figure 1 – Sources for the Value and Belief Worldviews in the 21st Century

For the most part, our lives are scattered between these various worlds. As we move within these constructs, we experience different selves: the friend, the relative, the counsellor, the ardent follower, the passionate leader, the community/global advocate, the dreamer. . . . If we are fortunate, this diversity of exposure will lead us to discover depths and breadths of ourselves and others that were previously unknown and unknowable. If we are less fortunate, as is too often the case, we experience a lack of centering and a loss of self.

Adding to this lack of a centering, societally we face growing discontent in our communities, our institutions, our churches, our governments, and our world. Traditional structures are becoming segmented and polarized, enshrined or demonized. Both states – enshrinement or demonization – are so exaggerated that they cripple healthy discourse and relationships. Diversity is judged, excluded and avoided rather than welcomed as necessary for balance and sustainability.

How Big is My World/Worldview?

Globally, we encounter mass migrations of peoples due to climate change and ethnic and religious wars. We are tempted to circle the wagons and protect what is “ours.” In such a climate we must answer the question: “How big is my worldview?”

Some questions for consideration:

1. Is my worldview bounded by the limits of my individual experience, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values? And if it is, does this result in excluding all who think, feel, believe or value differently? Is my inner world large enough to make room for difference, the unknown, the unknowable?
2. Does my world focus on those with whom I daily interact and exclude all others?
3. Does my worldview allow room for other living creatures, for the inanimate world?

4. Am I concerned only about my own home, or am I willing to be interested in and connected to other places and spaces?
5. Does my belief system keep me a willing prisoner with others who share similar beliefs, or am I open to learning about and connecting with those whose beliefs and values differ from mine?

Such questions are a small sampling of the many tools we can bring to bear on the task of discovering our present worldview – how large or small a world we choose to live in.

They help us determine if we are relying too much on old ways of seeing and solving difficulties, if we are becoming more tribal than global as we seek a sustainable way of life, if we are viewing all others who would change that as enemies to be feared and excluded. We are in need, individually, societally and globally of a new way of thinking, seeing and moving forward. We need a new way of understanding who we are, a new worldview that is more concerned with global sustainability than personal satisfaction and survival tactics. We need a spirituality that goes beyond the individual and the “group” to the entire world.

A Brief Reminder and Gentle Refocusing of Our Common Scriptural Story

And so, we, with the insights of today’s science, as inheritors of the Judeo-Christian tradition, will begin to refocus by going back to our mothers and fathers in faith.

Let us begin with Psalm 8.

When I see the heavens, the work of your hands,
The moon and the stars which you have made,
What is man that you should keep him in mind?
Mortal man that you care for him? ²

If we consider Psalm 8, we can see that from early times within our tradition there has been an

awareness, an opening to go beyond planet Earth, to the moon and the stars to determine our identity and value. Often that awareness has been little more than a backdrop, a rather vague unknown that is the space and place of mystery.

**We are in need,
individually,
societally and
globally of a new
way of thinking,
seeing and
moving forward.**

Within the past 100 years, we have learned more about the moon and stars and with this knowledge has come a new appreciation of the wonder of creation and of creation’s source, the Holy, the “I AM.” Genesis opens with the stirring of God’s breath over the face of the waters, and the

creation of light in a void of darkness. It is only on the third and fourth days that dry land and the moon and stars are created. While the order of creation is not significant in this reflection, the presupposition of a material world that gradually evolves and is pronounced “good” by God is significant.

Why mention this in an article on cosmology and spirituality? To recall the fact that as a religious tradition, Christianity has not always taken the goodness of creation as a given. Indeed, for centuries, it was often seen as nothing more than a place of suffering, trial and temptation until we attained our true dwelling place with God, in Heaven. Earth was to be escaped since the true spiritual world was beyond the material. Thus, those who were striving to be more like God placed very little value on this world in their quest to become holy.

Where such a spirituality is practiced, the real/significant world is limited to what I do or say. It is a spiritual world that revolves around the individual and that individual’s intentions. It is a rather small world. Not necessarily a completely bad world – but a small one, nonetheless.

This individualized spirituality is reflected in the way that, in many faith communities, reflection on the Hebrew and Christian scriptures

is addressed to the individual rather than the community. Homilies are often geared to what we as *individuals* are to do – thus keeping the power of God's Word much, much smaller than it was ever meant to be. Rarely, does it cross into the more dangerous territory of what it calls us as Christian community to do.

The understanding that permeated the Hebrew world was that the Law and the Prophets were meant to be guiding texts for the "*People of God*" – the gathered community. If we were to adopt such an awareness, it would catapult us into a world that is larger than the individual and make it big enough to include our sisters and brothers – the whole community. We could go beyond the limitations of self and begin to be as yeast in bread.

A quick reflection on the Patriarchs and Hebrew prophets will help us realize that, from very early times, there were those who understood that the "chosen people" were not chosen for themselves – that their purpose was to be bigger than that and that their holiness was to go beyond ritual holiness. Major and Minor prophets do

agree that the LORD was not pleased with a way of life that was closed to outsiders, that consisted of knowing the right words, and offering the right sacrifices. Isaiah and Micah³ told the people in plain words that such was not the case. Their spiritual existence as a people was only for the sake of others – so that others could see God by seeing what it meant to live peacefully together.

Early in Hebrew tradition the call was outward, larger, to a world that included strangers and aliens. It was to go beyond the physical borders of the land governed by priests, prophets and kings to include outsiders. And not just to bring them in so that they could belong to the inside group. It was to be an example of how humans were to live in unity – whatever their origin.

It was Cyrus, the King of Persia, who not only freed the exiles, but ordered that the Temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt. The outsider, the foreigner, the enemy was part of God's plan, of God's people. The world was getting bigger all the time as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

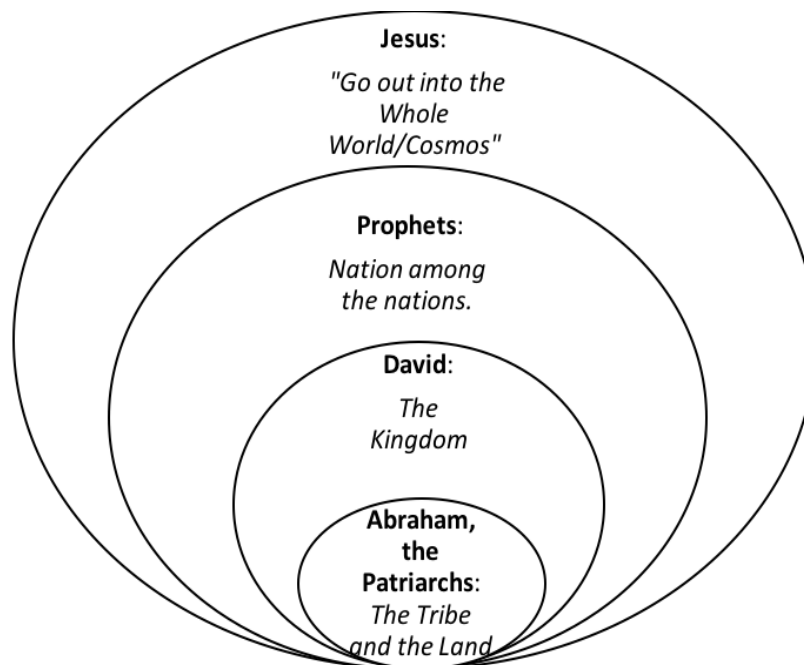


Figure 2. The Expansion of the Judeo-Christian World/Worldview

Then came Jesus, prophet, teacher and healer, who challenged his own people to understand that all, especially the weak and the poor, were brothers and sisters. They could not hear the message because they were caught in a smaller worldview. That failure, the inability to expand their religious and spiritual horizon beyond the Law, was the starting point for the movement known as “The Way” which ultimately morphed into Christianity as we know it today. Although the prophet Isaiah imagined a world in which all people created by God would eventually be drawn to the God of Israel, it was not a common view in the first century Mediterranean that Romans and pagans, sinners and outsiders would be included with God’s chosen. Jesus went to the outsiders on the margins of society, as an expression of God’s desire that all people be saved.

The Risen Christ instructed his followers to go into the *whole world*. Perhaps it is time for revisiting the Great Commission considering how we can bring the *Good News* of inclusion, equality and justice into all the world. Perhaps Figure 2 above has room for one more leap into a new understanding of Jesus’ ultimate message which clearly re-echoes the key elements of the opening story of the Hebrew Scriptures – all is from the one source, all is good, all needs tending, all is to be shared justly, all are to be included.

A Bigger Story – Cosmic Spirituality

Each year the *Exultet* rings out in our churches as we bring light into darkness and proclaim “Oh, happy fault, oh necessary sin of Adam, that wrought for us so great a redeemer!” What if this “happy fault” referred to humanity’s inability to go beyond the bounds of caring for the desires of the self, the family, the tribe before the needs of all? Civilizations, rulers, countries and empires have eaten of that fruit by setting

boundaries which excluded others: none were successful, none have lasted. Likewise, at the individual and community level, when we end up wanting to control our world by excluding others, we sow the seeds of our own demise.

Likewise, at the individual and community level, when we end up wanting to control our world by excluding others, we sow the seeds of our own demise.

Spirituality, as it is commonly understood today, involves more than religious beliefs. It includes room for the naming of underlying values and primal motivators or elements mentioned in the Great Commandment – heart, soul, mind and strength – all of which need to be engaged if we are to combat the great forces that are

assaulting the planet and all its creatures.

Spirituality includes our beliefs, aspirations, dreams, values and actions to create unity of personality, culture, and global community. Though it deals with the intangible, it is very much rooted in the tangible elements of our past and oriented towards our hopes for the future. It is above all practical in the everyday actions and decisions of our lives together as community.

Brené Brown, a well-known contemporary writer, states:

Spirituality emerged as a fundamental guidepost in Wholeheartedness. Not religiosity but the deeply held belief that we are inextricably connected to one another by a force greater than ourselves--a force grounded in love and compassion. For some of us that's God, for others it's nature, art, or even human soulfulness. I believe that owning our worthiness is the act of acknowledging that we are sacred. Perhaps embracing and overcoming numbing is ultimately about the care and feeding of our spirits.⁴

This wholeheartedness honors our past experiences and allows room for a future that we can only dream of – the kin-dom⁵ spoken of by Jesus – where the same Spirit of God that brooded

over the water of creation will lead us to recognize that all is holy/sacred, where all are kin – sisters and brothers. Christianity offers such a vision and hope, and how we name our hope, our future, plays a crucial role in how we will live into such a future.

Cosmology may hold such a promise for it looks backwards as well as forwards and is based, like the Hebrew Scriptures, on understanding the origin and purpose of the created world. It can also become a valuable partner in helping us envision the “kin-dom” – a central theme of Jesus, the man from backward Nazareth. Though his origins were extremely local, his message was for all of humanity. Teilhard de Chardin, in the early 60’s, believed that Jesus’ expanded consciousness of our unity as children of the one God, will be the only thing that can answer the spiritual needs and dreams of all people and for the continued existence of Earth, our common home.

Pope Francis capitalizes on Earth as our common home in *Laudato Si’*. Like the early astronauts who realized just how small and fragile our planet is and how in space there are no borders, Francis makes it quite clear that we all breathe the same air and drink the same water. Consequently, earth’s problems are our problems. Only by working together can we allow space for the creativity, resources and ingenuity required to address the catastrophes that are becoming daily more evident – especially for the poorest of those on our planet. Francis urgently appeals

... for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all.

**We need a
conversation which
includes everyone,
since the
environmental
challenge we are
undergoing, and its
human roots, concern
and affect us all.**

The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all.

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change.⁶

And Now the Leap . . .

Today’s science shows that the carbon dioxide we pump into our atmosphere is driving climate change. We know that we are losing an increasing variety of species due to human activity:

Braulio Dias, executive secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, says: “We know that the drivers behind species loss are mostly increasing - land conversion and degradation, pollution, climate change. And of course, the human population is still growing, and consumption is growing--and most of that consumption is not sustainable.”⁷

Our question, as inheritors and keepers of the covenant of caring for the planet, is “Are we being good stewards of creation?” The current answer is clear: we are not.

Which brings us to the most important spiritual as well as ecological question of the present moment: What are we, as people of faith, going to do about it?

That is a larger and more challenging question. One that we cannot answer on our own. As this article has tried to lay out, God’s message of inclusion, love and transformation began small, with one man and his family and workers, grew into a clan, a people, a chosen people, a nation and ultimately a world-wide movement known as Christianity. The circles of inclusion grew ever larger in response to stressors, oppression, travel, war, famine, and

weather events on a large scale. Each time the people had the choice of remaining isolated and small and risking extinction, or of reaching out beyond their religion, their nationality, and their borders to begin something new. Only by trusting the foreigner and finding ways of living together could God's Spirit – the *Ruah* that brooded over the waters of chaos – find new life-giving options.

We live in such a time. We can choose to remain small, to protect our various borders of faith, ethnicity, economy and thought. Or, we can decide that the fate of the planet is a challenge worth risking walking with those whose beliefs, lifestyles and economic systems differ from our own. We can try to do our small bit by recycling, reducing, reusing but that is not nearly enough. We are all called to do our part in speaking the truth to power and urging politicians, scientists, leaders in business and industry to sit at a common table and take stock of where we are as inhabitants of a very small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all drink the same water.

To do this we need to return to our ancient stories for courage and inspiration so that we may see that, to embrace the new wholeheartedly, we must first be willing to let go of a limiting present. We must simultaneously reach out across barriers of race, religion and politics that divide us, and care for Earth, our common home. Perhaps the time has come for us to go global as Jesus challenged us so that all “may have life and have it to the full.”⁸ ♦

Endnotes

¹Initially received with hostility by the scientific community, the Gaian hypothesis is now studied in the disciplines of geophysics and Earth system science, and some of its principles have been adopted in fields like biogeochemistry and systems ecology. This ecological hypothesis has also inspired analogies and various interpretations in social sciences, politics, and religion. <https://courses.seas.harvard.edu/climate/eli/Courses/EPS281r/Sources/Gaia/Gaia-hypothesis-wikipedia.pdf>. Accessed August 2, 2019.

²Joseph Gelineau, S.J., created psalmody that allowed simultaneous singing of the same text in a variety of languages. He was also one of the translators of *La Bible de Jerusalem*, (1959).

Today's translation of that same verse has been broadened to a more inclusive “What are we that you should keep us in mind? Men and women that you care for us?” But just as there is something that is gained by the more recent translation, so too there is something that is lost – the sense of “man” as one species among many.

³Isaiah 1: 11-16; Micah 6:8.

⁴Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. (Avery: Penguin Books, New York. 1st edition, September 11, 2012).

⁵Ada Maria Isaia-Diaz, a feminist Latina theologian first heard the term from Georgene Wilson, a Franciscan. See <https://sojo.net/articles/kin-dom-christ>. Accessed July 11, 2019.

⁶Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, (Vatican City, 2015): §14, §23, §13.

⁷Richard Knight, *BBC News Magazine* (April 23, 2012). <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-17826898>. Accessed July 14, 2019.

⁸John 10:10.

Visit the MAST website!

Read *MAST Journal* issues from 1990-2018 for free.

Go to our website at www.mastrsm.org

Click on “Archive.”

Current issues are available to subscribers.

Cosmology and Missional Leadership

Rt. Rev. Dr. Geoffrey Peddle

“Begin at the beginning,” the King said, very gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

--Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

Cosmology

The study of cosmology truly... does begin at the beginning, really does extend all the way to the end, and includes everything in between. Although considered a relatively new branch of physical science, the questions posed by cosmology are among the oldest ever pondered by humans. Those questions regarding the origin of the universe and its unfolding over time have been posed and answered in countless ways for millennia.

Religious Cosmology discusses the nature of the universe from a religious perspective, not restricted to observation and theory, and includes questions of meaning, purpose and design, particularly as they relate to human beings. Creation myths abound among the world religions to account for the universe as adherents believe it to be. The accounts are expressed in mythological language with a considerable amount of anthropomorphism, putting the human species at the center of the story. Biblical Cosmology is the particular understanding of the universe as contained in Holy Scripture. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the Book of Genesis contains a well-formed creation narrative that starts with the words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

The religious world view and its accompanying cosmologies remained relatively entrenched for centuries. They affirm a God of creation who not only created but appointed all things to their appropriate place, including humans

The Age of Reason and the dawn of science, with its emphasis upon observation and deduction, led to a revolution in cosmology, for it became possible to posit a universe without God.

What is the Place of Humans?

Modern cosmology has been shaped by thinkers such as Newton and Einstein and is largely built around the concept of the Big Bang which was followed by the expansion of space and time along with immutable laws to govern the process. Most contemporary religious thought affirms a Creator-God alongside a moral and ethical imperative grounded in the intention of that God for creation. Religious thinkers seek meaning and purpose in their world today consistent with their understanding of the universe as a divine creation. An emerging

problem that remains, however, is the proper place of humans *within* that sacred order. The care of creation in light of the wholesale destruction of much of the natural world by one species is a matter of great urgency. To quote James Conlon:

The Universe Story is our sacred story. It began with a great flash of light that filled the Universe. From the extreme heat, helium and hydrogen were born. Galaxies and stars emerged. Earth came into existence and gave birth to oceans, forests and a profusion of living species. The human species marked a new era of the great unfolding story. Today we are challenged to

The care of
creation in light of
the wholesale
destruction of
much of the
natural world by
one species is a
matter of great
urgency.

participate in the Earth community.

The Universe Story comes to us not in words but rather in the language of the cosmos. The cosmos speaks a colorful language of image and sound, touch and taste, fragrance and movement, daily and seasonal rhythms together with the deep wisdom obtained through the unfolding dynamics of the Universe and insights into the mystery that lies at the heart of matter.

Each of us has experienced the sacred nature of the Universe. As we learn more through the wisdom of the ancients and the new science, the story reveals a new vision of reality, one that can heal our alienation and replace this uneasy illusion of separation with a sense of community. We create a vessel of radical inclusiveness for all life and open ourselves to the Divine presence that manifests itself in all things and in all species.¹

Thomas Berry also frames the discussion in religious terms and proposes a liturgical approach to this new awareness whereby “moments of cosmic transformation” are celebrated. He begins with the creation (“emergent moment”) of the universe followed by the “range of events whereby the universe took shape” including photosynthesis and the beginning of the human species:

Only such a sequence of religious celebrations could enable the cosmology of religions to come into being in any effective manner. If the sacred history of the biblical world is recounted with such reverence, so too should be the recounting of the sacred history of the universe and the planet Earth. In all of this we can observe the continuity of the human religious process with the emergent process of the universe itself, with the shaping of the planet Earth, with the emergence of life, and the appearance of the human.²

Berry ties together religious and cosmological thought in a compelling way:

**If the sacred
history of the
biblical world is
recounted with
such reverence, so
too should be the
recounting of the
sacred history of
the universe and
the planet Earth.**

What is arising in human awareness is our nature as a species, which has emerged out of planetary processes. This awareness is beginning to reshape our religious imagination. This concept implies a prior sense of the religious dimension of the natural world. If the Earth is an economic mode of being as well as a biological mode of being, then it might not be too difficult to think of the earth as having a religious mode of being.³

The unfolding beauty of the universe over time, a beauty which includes all human life, led Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel to describe humanity, because of its unique consciousness of this mystery, as the “cantor of the universe.” As “cantors,” we have the privilege of giving praise and worship to the Creator of all, on behalf of all:

Whose ear has ever heard how all trees sing to God? Has our reason ever thought of calling upon the sun to praise the Lord? And yet, what the ear fails to perceive, what reason fails to conceive, our prayer makes clear to our souls. It is a higher truth, to be grasped by the spirit:

‘All Thy works praise Thee’ (Psalm 145:10)

We are not alone in our acts of praise. Wherever there is life, there is silent worship. The world is always on the verge of becoming one in adoration. It is man who is the cantor of the universe, and in whose life the secret of cosmic prayer is disclosed.⁴

It is not possible to overstate the immense contribution to conversations around cosmology being made today by the Indigenous Peoples of the world through their sacred stories and their connection with the natural world. As a bishop who divides his time between the island of Newfoundland and the “big land” of Labrador, I am reminded of this important perspective every time I travel back and forth. Newfoundlanders, because of their history as seafarers and fishers,

always define themselves by the surrounding North Atlantic Ocean, but Labradoreans (of whom a great many are Indigenous) always speak of being “on the land.” Their place on that land and within the natural order is intrinsic to their self-understanding. A recent conversation shared online at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity involving multiple Indigenous participants is informative:

Rob Cardinal outlined that the idea of everything being inter-related is becoming more of a discussion in western science recently (albeit quietly) but has been talked about for millennia in Indigenous thought. Though the adoption of Indigenous thinking by western-trained scientists may not change the scientific method, Cardinal felt that Indigenous ideas encourage scientists to view the objects they study with more respect... “When you look at the world you see people, plants, trees, sky. But, where did this all come from? We know the earth was inhospitable... life sprung from stone and we got here. We can’t agree how it happened, but we know these rocks led to the solar system and the creation of us. We are dust from a previous generation of stars, in a sense we are related to the stars.”⁵

From cosmology and our understanding of our place in the universe, we are challenged today as never before to ponder our responsibilities as humans toward the created order. The recent documentary, *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch*, has been publicized as “A cinematic meditation on humanity’s massive reengineering of the planet” and asserts that humans are the first of all the species to have destructively altered their natural environment. Climate change is but one devastating feature of this alteration. A shift is

needed in both thought and action because time really is running out.

Cosmology and Missional Leadership

For Christians today, Missional Leadership must call us beyond the church. Christian Mission should be less about the Community of the Faithful – the institution of the church – and more about full participation in the life of God. A true missional church will minister for the sake of the whole world and not just for its own ends.

According to Jurgen Moltmann, “It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church.”⁶

In the book, *Christian Mission*, Steven Spencer discusses Christian Mission and the different ways in which it has been viewed over the years by the Christian Church, naming such things as social action, church growth, and public witness.⁷ Spencer identifies

There is an urgent
need for leadership
that is both
visionary and
missional if humans
are to recover a
proper and
responsible place on
the planet.

correctly that all of these understandings of mission are incomplete for, if we are to talk about Christian Mission, we need to begin with God. The Mission of God came first, and the church was created as a response to that mission. In that sense, the church is a product of mission rather than mission being a product of the church. “‘Mission’ therefore is not ‘the Church going out and saving people’. Rather, it is *God creating and saving the world*, and this includes not only creating and saving people but the natural world and indeed [the] cosmos as a whole.”⁸ According to Spencer, “To be a part of mission, then, is not just to be an agent, at arm’s length, of someone else’s project: it is to participate in the very heart of who God is, to be caught up *within* and contribute *to* the interactive and flowing interrelationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a

relationship that gives life and gives it more abundantly.”⁹

Spencer draws upon the work of Karl Barth in locating the Mission of the Church within the wider Mission of God or *Missio Dei*. The resolution from the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council reflected Barth’s emphasis upon the initiative of God in Christian Mission:

The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God himself. Out of the depths of his love for us, the Father has sent forth his own beloved Son to reconcile all things to himself ... We who have been chosen in Christ ... are committed to full participation in his redeeming mission. There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world. That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world-mission.¹⁰

Lesslie Newbigin’s approach to the question of Christian Mission was also very Trinitarian in that he saw mission flowing from the Holy Trinity. The Trinity has a mission and the church, and its members are invited to be part of it. Craig Van Gelder draws upon the work of Newbigin in his book, *The Open Secret*,¹¹ and describes Newbigin’s thinking in this way:

Central to his understanding of mission is the work of the Triune God in calling and sending the church through the Spirit into the world to participate fully in God’s mission within all of creation. In this theological understanding, the church is understood to be the creation of the Spirit. It exists in the world as a “sign” that the redemptive reign of God’s kingdom is present. It serves as a “foretaste” of the eschatological future of the redemptive reign that has already begun. It also serves as an “instrument” under the

leadership of the Spirit to bring that redemption reign to bear on every dimension of life.¹²

Commitment to Care for Creation

Alongside the wide-ranging efforts across much of the world to bring about a cleaner and healthier planet there has emerged within faith communities a parallel concern grounded in their understandings of creation and the abiding presence of the Creator. For Christians, a primary platform for this conversation remains the Christian Church in all of its complexity and diversity worldwide. Nonetheless, a point of remarkable agreement among Christians today, regardless of persuasion, is the need (quoting from Pope Francis) to “care for our common home.” In that sense, the mission to which we are all called is greater than any one church and even greater

In that sense, the mission to which we are all called is greater than any one church and even greater than all of our churches together.

than all of our churches together. It is a mission that comes from God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and while it includes the Christian Church, it also includes all of creation. Such a realization urgently demands a new way of thinking about mission.

The problem before us cannot be explained in purely secular terms because it is also very much a spiritual concern affecting all people. There is a realization among Christians that Humanity is detached from its source in God, and human life and divine life need to be united once more as they are in Christ. As Pope Francis has written:

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the word “creation” has a broader meaning than “nature”, for it has to do with God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us

together into universal communion.¹³

Sister Donna Geernaert writes: “When creation is conceived as an ongoing evolution that will be complete only at the end of time, every interrelated cosmic element has a unique and unrepeatably contribution to make. A God whose very essence is to be the world’s open future is an infinitely liberating source of new possibilities and new life.”¹⁴ Judy Cannato reflects upon the interrelatedness of all things, spiritual and material, in this way:

More and more my spirituality has been rooted in the belief that unity is God’s vision and desire. This has challenged me to uproot many of the habitual ways of thinking and acting that caused me to see myself as separate and disconnected from others. I continue to grapple with the personal implications of the new cosmology, continue to look for vestiges of what Einstein called the delusion of separation, continue to wrestle with my own ineptitude at living the vision. Because the old mechanical view of the cosmos no longer works for me, I pray for the grace to live out of the unity and connectedness that I intuitively know is the truth.¹⁵

Missional Leadership

Missional Leadership as it relates to cosmology and our place in creation may not always be inspired by faith but can arise from other motivations, notably an environmental consciousness. In her book, *Forged in Crisis: The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times*¹⁶, Nancy Koehn discusses Rachel Carson and her concern for the natural world in a chapter entitled, “Protect the Earth and Its Creatures.” Long before the environmental movements we know today had emerged, Carson sounded the alarm on the way in which humanity was abusing nature rather than seeking to live in rhythm with nature. Notably, in the 1950’s she

confronted chemical companies over their production of pesticides, culminating in her best-known work, *Silent Spring*.¹⁷

Decades earlier Rachel Carson wrote of the interrelatedness of all life:

Every living thing of the ocean, plant and animal alike, returns to the water at the end of its own life... Thus, there descends into the depths a gentle, never-ending rain of the disintegrating particles of what once were living creatures of the sunlit waters, or of those twilight regions beneath... Thus, individual elements are lost to view, only to reappear again and again in different incarnations in a kind of material immortality.¹⁸

Carson’s missional leadership in challenging rigid and fiercely-held conclusions about the right of science to harness and subdue all life on earth led her into conflict with many and yet she doggedly pursued her passion. She is given credit for inspiring a ban on DDT. In the United States, just years after her death, she is also credited for inspiring legislation to create the Environmental Protection Agency, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Endangered Species Act. Rachel Carson’s life is a testament to the missional influence a single life can bring to bear on vital issues. Koehn assesses Carson’s enduring importance in this way:

The scientist and author gave voice to the ecological view of the natural world that has underpinned both our thinking about [our] relationship with the earth and related research for more than fifty years. Like Henry David Thoreau writing about Walden Pond more than a century and a half ago, Carson called attention to the right that every person has to participate in nature and to the obligation that such a prerogative entails. These two powerful ideas – that all life on earth is interdependent and that its citizens are responsible for the stewardship

A God whose very
essence is to be
the world’s open
future is an
infinitely liberating
source of new
possibilities and
new life.

of sustainable life – have become more relevant as threats to the global environment have multiplied and grown more serious.¹⁹

Without using the word “cosmology,” the Anglican Communion’s Five Marks of Mission are steeped in the thinking that has emerged from modern discussions of cosmology and a renewed appreciation for the place of humanity within the greater cosmos. The Fifth Mark of Mission is: **“To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.”** The Anglican Church of Canada has, since 2013, incorporated it as a question to the Candidate for Holy Baptism in the *Book of Alternative Services*: **“Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God’s creation, and respect, sustain and renew the life of the Earth?”** Notably, this part of the Baptismal Covenant is repeated by the worshipping congregation at every service of Holy Baptism. And yet, despite this emphasis upon Creation and the Care of Creation, there appears to be little real difference between the members of the Anglican Church of Canada and the wider population of Canada when it comes to their environmental consciousness. Herein arises a good example of the need for true Missional Leadership so that what is promised in worship may be practiced in life. Christians, by virtue of their baptisms, are missionary disciples. It is time their lives reflected that discipleship. ♦

Endnotes

¹ James Conlon, *Beauty, Wonder and Belonging: A Book of Hours for the Monastery of the Cosmos* (Lima, Ohio: Wyndham Hall Press, 2009): 23-24.

² Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009): 124-126.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* (Santa Fe: Aurora Press, 1998): 82.

⁵ Rob Cardinal, *Challenging the Chance of the Cheshire Cat’s Smile*. Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. Posted April 14, 2015.

<https://www.banffcentre.ca/articles/challenging-chance-cheshire-cats-smile>.

⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1977): 65.

⁷ Stephen Spencer, *SCM Study Guide to Christian Mission: Historic Types and Contemporary Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11. Spencer quotes from Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission* (London: T&T Clark, 2005) p. 5.

¹¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978).

¹² Craig Van Gelder, ed., *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007):3. Van Gelder quotes from Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, p. 124.

¹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: Praise Be To You. Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home* (Ottawa: St. Joseph Communications: 2015): 52.

¹⁴ Donna Geernaert, *The New Cosmology and Christian Faith* (2013: Halifax: The Sisters of Charity):8.

¹⁵ Judy Cannato, *Radical Amazement: Contemplative Lessons from Black Holes, Supernovas, and other Wonders of the Universe* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2006): 34-35.

¹⁶ Nancy Koehn, *Forged in Crisis: The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times*. (New York: Scribner, 2017).

¹⁷ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

¹⁸ Koehn, p. 388.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4

Cosmology and Ethics

Richard C. Singleton, Ph.D.

"Sow a thought, and you reap an act; Sow an act, and you reap a habit; Sow a habit, and you reap a character; Sow a character, and you reap a destiny".¹ Though the origin of this quote is uncertain, it lays out the influence of thoughts on actions and attitudes, both individually and collectively. Thus, it is relevant to our consideration of the relationship between cosmology and ethics. In this essay, I intend to show that our understanding of the origin of the universe gives shape to how we think about many things, including humanity, and how that way of thinking influences our values, and thus our ethics. I will include some discussion of how an embrace of the new cosmology and new Christology can come to action through prophetic imagination, pastoral imagination, and personal imagination.

We know from mythology and ancient writings that humans have always tried to understand their world, and they have always tried to understand and explain the origin of the universe, thus they have always proposed cosmological theories. Higher powers, represented by gods or other forms of deity have been central in many cosmological theories, and certainly in the major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), where God is the sole *ex nihilo* (from nothing) creator and maintainer of the universe, in a way, as Isaac Newton said, that is "not blind and fortuitous, but very skilled in mechanics and geometry".² The scientific advances in physics and astronomy since the nineteenth century bring new questions and deeper theological discussion on traditional cosmologies and how the new cosmology informs or renews the older cosmologies. Participants in or spectators of the new cosmology debate include

the scope from physicists using rigorous scientific models in laboratories to preachers of rigorous religious fundamentalism. When all is said and the done, the questions of cosmology remain the same: Did the universe come into existence at a precise point in time? Will the universe come to an end? How and why did life forms come about? And of course, why is there a cosmos?

The new cosmology / cosmologies that inform our thinking, situates the universe in time and space. It establishes that our world is much older and larger and dynamic than our medieval-based understanding of the world. Scientific modelling establishes the beginnings of the universe at about 13.7 billion years and predicts that it can continue to exist for at least 100 trillion years. The earth is not the world, nor is it the center of the universe. It revolves around the Sun,

**Our world view,
often referred to as
a *paradigm*, is
essential in sorting,
considering and
appreciating matters
of relevance.**

a medium-sized star near the edge of a medium-sized galaxy, the Milky Way, which contains about 200 billion stars. The Milky Way is about 100,000 light years in diameter. Furthermore, it is one of 100 billion galaxies in the universe.³ By purely scientific models, we (humans) are shrunk and do not appear to be the center

of everything or anything.

World view

Our world view is our embedded way of thinking, in 'information technology' lingo, we might think of it as the default settings that govern the processing and analysis of all we take in. Our world view, often referred to as a paradigm, is essential in sorting, considering and appreciating matters of relevance. It gives shape to the decisions we make and how we engage in the world and with the world.

Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest of the Passionist order, cultural historian and eco-theologian, suggests that the insights from science and technology calls us to make a paradigm shift to the new cosmology. Berry succinctly describes the new cosmology of science as well as the implicit understanding of what it is to be human.

The Story of the Universe is the story of the emergence of a galactic system in which each new level of being emerges through the urgency of self-transcendence. Hydrogen ... emerges into helium ... stars eventually explode into the stardust out of which the solar system and the earth take shape. Earth gives unique expression of itself in its rock and crystalline structures and in the variety and splendor of living forms until man appears as the moment in which the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself. Man emerges not only as an earthling but also as a worldling. He bears the universe in his being as the universe bears him in its being. Both have a total presence to each other.

Berry suggests the new world view for both scientists and believers is bringing a new perspective on what it is to be human. A new perspective that is both exciting and painful. One aspect of this change involves the shift in the earth-human relationship, for humans now, in large measure, determines the earth process that once determined them. In a more integral way we could say that the earth that controlled itself directly in the former period, now, to an extensive degree, is controlled by humans.⁴ Our world is drastically compromised by the widely held world view that allow exploitation of the earth, nature, resources and people.

Anthropology

The new cosmology requires a revision to our understanding of humanity in relation to all other created things of the world. The dominant world view, strongly rooted in Christian and Jewish scriptures "...establishes the human being as created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) – a creature who is, moreover, high point of creation (created last, as the best) and thus given dominion over other creatures (Gen. 1:28) whose purpose it is (or so it is assumed) to instrumentally serve the human."⁵ The position that humanity is the crown of creation is reasoned by the view that humans only are rational and have a soul, thus made in the image and likeness of God.

This perspective brings with it a regard for human beings as the privileged creatures. All other creatures are not only subject to humans but also have their value in being of service or purpose to humans. The dominance by the rational, soul-possessing humans over creatures whose end-purpose is at will and use of humans is referred to as "anthropocentric instrumentalism."⁶

The notion that humans can dominate all, is now regarded as a grave error that has grave consequences. Pope Francis makes the connection, "The human root of ecological crisis lies therefore in human freedom, which can choose a tyrannical anthropocentrism"⁷ Pope Francis shows that many of the environmental and other problems within the world are a reflection of the misunderstanding of humanity.

The most provocative question for the Christian believer shifting to a cosmic world view is the realignment of their understanding of Jesus Christ. An emerging theology on the Cosmic Christ provides an explanation, though challenging

for some, yet inspiring for many. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, says Christ is much more than the historical person who walked the earth for 33 years and is recorded as a great teacher, miracle worker, and moral example. Christ is more than his crucifixion, death and resurrection. He says, Christ is "... also someone and something within the very structure of the cosmos itself, the pattern on which the universe was conceived, is built, and is now developing". Rolheiser refers to St. Paul, in Colossians 1: 15 - 20, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together..." This shows Christ as the very root, of not only spiritual and moral frameworks, but also at the root of the physical, chemical, biophysical, and cosmic worlds.⁸

Richard Rohr suggests in many places that we can better appreciate the fullness of Christ when we separate the historical Jesus, as presented in the Gospels from the eternal Christ, the anointed one, spoken of by St. Paul in Colossian and Ephesians, and the start of both St. John's Gospel and the first letter of John. Rolheiser explains how all creation, large and small, animate and inanimate, all efforts, impulses, thoughts, words and deeds are "ultimately part of one and the same thing, the unfolding of creation as made in the image of Christ and as revealing the invisible God" He quotes Teilhard de Chardin's defense of his theology when summoned to Rome. He said "I am trying to write a Christology that is wide enough to incorporate Christ. Christ isn't just an anthropological phenomenon with significance for humanity, but

Christ is also a cosmic event with Significance for the planet."⁹

The anthropology suitable to the new cosmology and new Christology draws on the established regard for humans as possessing particular dignity that requires esteem and respect all people. The unity and regard we have as people comes from our shared origin and destiny, alongside all other created things. Our anthropology must include our bond with other humans and with all creation. This anthropology protects us from the risk of individualism and promotes a mature stewardship that truly protects and advances the common good, not only the local or human common good. It must include the dynamic of being one in the Christ, the source and unity of all, including a unity through reconciliation and redemption by self-giving and sacrifice.

Values

Values are the priorities of life. They are powerful forces that actually provide the reason why we make choices. They are the yardsticks by which we judge and decide on what is important to us. Philosophy and ethics make many distinctions in types of values. Most relevant here is the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values. A matter of intrinsic value is an end in itself and carries a moral duty to protect it or at least not harm it. Instrumental value is the worth of something as a means to achieve an end or goal.

The value system that emerged from the traditional cosmology and anthropology reflects the intrinsic value of human life. It supported a human dominance of nature with a higher purpose to advance. Advancement is somewhat subjective, it can be civilization, economics, politics, or ownership. For Christians, it would include to

The advancement-based values have been disruptive and disturbing to peace, justice and joy, as manifested in dominance, adversity and greed.

pleasing God and bringing about, through advancement of knowledge, development of skills and use of technology, a perfect world, and preparing for heaven. The advancement-based values have been disruptive and disturbing to peace, justice and joy, as manifested in dominance, adversity and greed.

The new cosmology that summons a revision of our anthropology and Christology, is like having an updated prescription for eyeglasses, as Richard Rohr says, there is clearer vision and awareness of how blurred things had been. The all-encompassing Christ, through whom all came to be, the Alpha and Omega ... from which all came and all is destined. The value from the new cosmology, the value to underlie the ethics for the new cosmology and new Christology is Unity. Unity that embraces all other forms of attraction from gravity to sexual attraction, from electromagnetic fields to forgiveness of offences, volunteerism to DNA. Words like love, integrity, passion and compassion, service and sacrifice reflect Unity. Unity that is intimate and creative, the image of God ... the unity of the Trinity.

The consideration of cosmology and ethics through examination of world view, anthropology and values prompts further reflection on how we might bring insights to others in way that might make a difference at some level. I propose consideration of influence through prophetic imagination, pastoral imagination and personal imagination.

Prophetic Imagination

A prophet is one who stirs a consciousness of matters beyond the present and likely beyond the dominant culture and context. While often associated with predicting the future, the prophet is more of an interpreter of the present with insight to what will come about. Walter Brueggemann says

the prophet's contribution "... serves to criticize in dismantling the dominant consciousness. To that extent, it attempts to do what the liberal tendency has done: engage in a rejection and delegitimizing of the present ordering of things. On the other hand, that alternative consciousness to be nurtured serves to energize persons and communities by its promise of another time and situation toward which the community of faith may move. To that extent, it attempts to do what the conservative tendency has done, to live in fervent anticipation of the newness that God has promised and will surely give. ...¹⁰

The prophet who announces the new cosmology cannot do so without stirring the desire for Unity that triggers reconciliation at personal, communal, racial, international, and species level. The prophetic imagination, likewise, must stir a new and fresh regard for the earth, for the environment, and the universe. The prophet cannot help but articulate the error and consequence of the dominant consciousness of anthropocentric instrumentalism. The prophet of

**The prophetic
imagination,
likewise, must stir a
new and fresh regard
for the earth, for the
environment, and
the universe.**

the new cosmology, like the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, must call for new order that allows humans to engage, not as dominant species of the earth, but as the consciousness of the universe in bringing about justice, peace and joy, which is how St. Paul described the Kingdom of God (Ro. 14:17).

Ilia Delio, a Franciscan sister and scientist, is a good example of a prophet of new cosmology and new Christology. She writes: "We're reaching a fork in the road; two paths are diverging on planet Earth, and the one we choose will make all the difference for the life of the planet. Shall we continue our medieval religious practices in a medieval paradigm and mechanistic culture and undergo extinction? Or shall we wake up to this

dynamic, evolutionary universe and the rise of consciousness toward an integral wholeness?"¹¹

Pastoral Imagination

The pastoral ministries such as shepherding, guiding, consoling, counselling and so on, provides great opportunities to influence individuals and communities. If inspired by the new cosmology and Christology, the Unity of all can be life giving in every regard. It can reflect the beautiful articulation attributed to St. Irenaeus, "For the glory of God is a (hu)man fully alive; and the glory of the (hu)man consists in the vision of God". What pastoral opportunities there are, if one approaches a situation with skills and insight that bring the consolation and awe that only mystery allows. If one approaches the pastoral situation with the value of Unity ... manifested in friendship, listening, compassion, and mercy. In the pastoral context, rather than complex explanations and perplexing questions, the consolation can come from immersion in the mystery, immersion through contemplation and silence ... especially by the one providing the pastoral ministry. Then, the genuine unity, i.e. love, may allow the courage and resilience to tackle deeper ethical issues and search for options and make decisions appropriate to bring about what is right and good.

The pastoral imagination can work with the prophetic imagination to influence leaders and decision makers. Through proclamation of the Word and other opportunities for dialogue, individuals and groups can be guided to consider deeper and more substantial matters pertaining to creation and justice. The corporate executives and community leaders can be influenced to appreciate that the awesome unity of the cosmos calls us to justice and peace. Corporate decisions regarding investments and pursuit of profit, political decisions regarding immigration, resource development, health care and education

must be considered in light of the larger and longer impact on this world of ours.

Pope Francis, with both a prophetic and a pastoral imagination, in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, connects the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. He suggests that threats to the environment and accompanying poverty remain hidden because "many professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centers of power, being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems."¹² It seems the world view of Pope Francis reflects the value of unity. Again in *Laudato Si*, he repeatedly talks about the earth as a connected system, with human beings "part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand." As such, Francis says no single challenge, whether economic, political, or environmental, can be solved in isolation.¹³ Genuine unity requires consultation, collaboration and engagement.

The pastoral imagination must be nurtured by education and contemplation. Pastoral agents, particularly those in full-time congregational ministries, are well placed to advance the world view that prompts ethical decision making that aligns with building the Kingdom of God and allows for the contemplation that inspires the unity with the creator and all creation.

Personal Imagination

The new cosmology is intriguing, the new Christology is awesome. It can be an opportunity for any individual to explore within and beyond themselves through a new lens. The worldview of the oneness of the entire universe and connection with eternity can cast new directions, purpose and meaning to one's life, vocation and tasks. It draws us to deep contemplation where silence connects us to all that is, as described in the poem from an anonymous poet, found at Roosenberg Abbey, Netherlands (translated from the Dutch).

Silence

Silence that vibrates is creation
 Silence that flows is love
 Silence shared is friendship
 To see silence is infinity
 To hear silence is prayer
 To express silence is beauty
 To preserve silence is strength
 To waste silence is suffering
 To allow silence is rest
 To record silence is writing
 To safeguard silence is tradition
 To enter silence is joy
 To perceive silence is insight
 To be silence is fulfillment
 Pure silence is

Genuine silence, contemplative listening, can bring an individual to thoughts of God and mission, thoughts of love and justice, thoughts of gratitude and reconciliation. Such thoughts dispose us to consider and process other matters and do things that advance the unity and oneness from within ourselves to others, and all creation on our earth and beyond. From personal contemplation and conversion, flow the thoughts, the acts, the habits, the character and the destiny that bring us and all to the union with Christ.

The personal imagination, influenced by the new cosmology and the cosmic Christ, appreciates that “the ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God...rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures....Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.”¹⁴

Conclusion

This study, will by no means, exhaust the discussion of cosmology and ethics. But, I hope it makes a case for the need and benefit of shifting some of our ways of looking at the world,

and ensuring that Christ continues to be central to our revisions and efforts. The environment crisis of our generation requires new thinking and approaches. The new cosmology inspires prophetic, pastoral and personal imagination and action, which for the Christian disciple, will help “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph. 1:10)◆

Endnotes

¹ Wikipedia attributes the quote, different forms to William James, Samuel Smiles, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Stephen R. Covey.

² I. Cohen, *Isaac Newton's Papers and Letters on Natural Philosophy and Related Documents*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978): 282.

³ Beyond our Solar System.

<https://solarsystem.nasa.gov/solar-system/beyond/in-depth/>

⁴ Thomas Berry, “The New Story,” in *Worldviews, Religion and the Environment: A Global Anthology*, ed. by Richard C. Foltz (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 2008): 529.

⁵ Michelle Rebidoux, “Nine Responses to the Ecological Crisis,” *Analecta Hermeneutica*. Volume 9 (2017): 1- 2.

⁶ Anthropocentric instrumentalism is explained by Rebidoux. She cites Lynn White, Jr., *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis* (1967) and Joseph Sittler, *A Theology of Earth* (1954), p. 2.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 2015) §68.

⁸ Ron Rolheiser, “The Cosmic Christ,” *The Western Catholic Reporter* (November 25, 2001), <https://ronrolheiser.com/the-cosmic-christ/>

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001):8-9.

¹¹ Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* (New York: Orbis Books, 2013): xxii-xxiii.

¹² *Laudato Si'*, § 49.

¹³ *Ibid.*, §138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, § 83.

Cosmology and Faith Formation

Anne Walsh, D.Min.

Many moments, people, encounters and forces have shaped my spirituality, my formation in faith and the way in which I enter into my role as a catechist, working with adults, children and youth. The word “catechesis” is often used with its Latin connotation of “to give oral instruction.” I have a greater affinity for its Greek connotation. There, “catechesis” means “to echo, or to resound.” I understand my role as a catechist as a call to transformative conversation, to echo the wonderful works of God, and to open spaces in which others may make their own response to these wonders, and the One who is in all, and through all and with all.

How are we to enter into that transformative conversation in light of the rapidly expanding fields of knowledge in the sciences? In particular, how does the work being done in the field of cosmology and astrophysics affect catechesis?

Two Vignettes

July 1969

The July sky was still quite light. I had just turned eight years of age, and I was very excited to be allowed to stay up past 8:00 pm. The reason for this remarkable departure from normal household routine was quite extraordinary. Neil Armstrong was about to set foot on the moon! My dad and I had followed the Apollo space missions ever since I could remember. I knew who the engineers on these missions were, who the astronauts were, and the basic theory describing the thrust of the massive three-stage Saturn V rockets. I had watched the lunar landing earlier in the afternoon, and now eagerly awaited this second history-making moment.

We watched Armstrong’s careful descent down the ladder. The words that he spoke upon reaching the surface have been etched in my memory ever since: “One small step...One giant leap...” As the poet Magee said, we had “slipped the surly bonds of earth and danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings... trod the high untrespassed sanctity of space, put out (our) hand, and touched the face of God.” My child’s spirit recognized this as a mystical moment.¹

November 1989

The November night was still, and the sky was so clear that the Milky Way was visible and inviting. So, I pulled a quilt over my shoulders and went out to sit on my fence and look. The sky over

the little harbor was alive, not only with the stars, but with the northern lights, blue, white, pink and green, dancing in ribbons from which, every now and then, a ray of light would project upwards. The words of the Psalmist rang in my mind:

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork (Ps. 19:1).

**In particular,
how does the
work being done
in the field of
cosmology and
astrophysics
affect
catechesis?**

I found myself singing the words of Genesis 15:5, as they are quoted in the St. Louis Jesuits’ hymn from my teenage years, “Look up, and see the heavens, and count the stars—if you can!” And I remembered how those words came from a song that recalled the constant faithfulness of our God. I sat on that fence for a couple of hours, until the twirling northern lights disappeared. For me, it was a privileged experience, a moment of encounter between me and the God who made the universe. My adult spirit recognized this as

a mystical moment.

Beginning to Unpack These Experiences

These two moments of profound encounter with God stand out among the moments that have shaped my spirituality and the trajectory of my formation in

faith. In my life-long spiral of conversion, seeking ever-deeper encounter with God, and also seeking to understand the meaning and implications of that encounter, I have returned again and again to each of these moments. Each time, I have plumbed the experiences for greater and deeper meaning. Each time, I have discovered new aspects of my call to care for my sisters and brothers, particularly those most abandoned, and our common home.

Once upon a time, I understood the term “our common home” to refer to earth, and particularly earth’s living creatures. Today, I understand this term to be more expansive, including all of creation-- the rocks, the water, the air and the entire universe. I understand myself to be integrally connected and interconnected with all that is, whether I am fully aware of “all that is,” or not.

“Faith,” as I understand it, and as many have described it, is both a gift of God and the human response to that invitation. The process of coming to faith, of “conversion” is a life-long turning, ever more fully, toward God, the true, the good, and the beautiful, often involving a quest for meaning. Each individual is a searcher, searching for meaning; we search in our own hearts and in our own experiences. We also engage in this search for meaning in and through relationships and in communities.

Challenge to Catechists: Impact of Science on Faith

At the outset, let’s make one thing clear. I am a catechist, not an astrophysicist. This distinction

has to do with expertise, certainly. It also has to do with perspective.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “cosmology” as “The science of the origin and development of the universe.” Immediately following this basic definition, we find the following phrase: “Modern cosmology is dominated by the Big Bang theory, which brings together observational astronomy and particle physics.”²

Though we are not astrophysicists, any person or community involved in catechesis or faith formation in today must take into account the discoveries of the scientific community. From the time of Galileo in the 16th century, to Fr. Georges Lemaître, Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking in the 20th century, discoveries in science, particularly in the area of cosmology, have posed challenges to people of faith. The primary challenge posed by cosmology to faith formation lies in the scientific awareness of an expanding universe. This calls us not to close our minds and

hearts, but to open them, to broaden our horizons. Developments in cosmology call us to open ourselves to a God who is far more vast--both intimately knowable and profoundly unknowable--than we can ever conceive.

Until the early 20th century, human thought about the origin and evolution of the universe centered around the Aristotelian notion that the universe was eternal, unchanging, not evolving, with

neither beginning nor end. Many people thought of God and Creation in an analogous manner. The development of the scientific field known as “cosmology” challenges these long-held suppositions about the universe, creation, God and what it might mean to be human.

The human response to such challenges to previously-held understanding is often one of fear.

I understand myself
to be integrally
connected and
interconnected
with all that is,
whether I am fully
aware of “all that
is,” or not.

I believe that the second great challenge to catechists in light of scientific developments is finding ways of walking with people, leading them out of fear, and into wonder. A wise spiritual director once said to me, “Fear is never from God.” The God we have come to know through Scripture and human experience is One who invites, who calls us to more, and who leads us and accompanies us on our journeys of exploration and growth. I believe that the challenge for catechists and others who accompany adults in faith formation today is to find ways of walking with them as they make links between the intellect and the spirit. Thus, the role of the catechist has elements of both education (in its pure sense of *educere*, meaning “to lead out”) and mysticism. Centuries ago, Galileo framed the challenge well: “I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use.”

Implications of My Generational Moment for Faith Formation

I was born in 1961. My life and the life of the Apollo space program began in the same year. My entire life has been framed and shaped by the expanding boundaries of mind, heart and faith required by the epoch of space travel and of the rapid development of science and technology. It also means that I soaked in the hope and idealism of the early years of space travel. My generation is the “Star Trek” generation. We dreamed of “boldly going where no one has gone before.” At the same time, we lived with the paradox of an intense, cold competition between the United States and the former Soviet Union. There was equally intense debate and eventual agreement, through the Outer Space Treaty (1967), that outer

space was not to be coopted for military purposes.³ Now, we watch with trepidation the erosion of the Outer Space Treaty, as discussions have surfaced about “Star Wars”- type military uses for satellites, and the use of space for intelligence-gathering and espionage. These elements of experience have implications for faith formation.

First, the reality of space travel, and of constant improvements in technology that enable

**Religions strive to
break through the
physical limits that
cut human existence
off from the
mysterious worlds to
which their symbols
and stories point.**

us to see far, far into the reaches of the universe, challenges us to reconsider how we think about and talk about our own origins, the origins of our planet and the origins of the universe. As we look out into the universe through our ever-more-powerful telescopes and other tools, cosmologists tell us that we are really looking back in time. Can we actually see the “Big Bang”? Not really; what we can

see is evidence that points to the validity of the “Big Bang” as a model for understanding or interpreting what we are seeing.⁴

As catechists, not cosmologists, we are called to integrate into faith formation efforts today the insight that science and faith are two complementary ways of knowing, not necessarily opposed to one another. The question becomes, “Do we see in this new story of an expanding and accelerating universe the absence of God, or can we discern hints of the activity of a God who is far more than we had ever imagined?”

A second implication of cosmology for faith formation is that it challenges us to move beyond any biblical catechesis that leans to literal interpretations. My own early catechesis tended to the literal, particularly in the interpretations of the creation stories told in the Book of Genesis, although I was being taught in other courses to consider the theory of evolution through natural selection, and to ponder Einstein’s theory of

general relativity and early forays into quantum theory. Dr. David Wilkinson, theologian and cosmologist, in a lecture delivered in 2013, wisely quoted Galileo, who told us, "The Scriptures are meant to tell us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go." ⁵A third implication of our understanding of cosmology on faith formation has to do with the limitations of language, and how we speak of God and where God dwells. I grew up with language that depicted God's dwelling place as "up there," and space as "out there," while it was becoming more and more obvious that the universe is not "up there" at all, but around us, within us, the stuff of our very being. Likewise, while I was formed using language that depicted Heaven, where God dwells, as a place, as "up there," my studies in theology led me to the understanding of Heaven not a place, but as a state of being. This is challenging for the catechist. Like the very universe from which we are learning, we are being called to expand our language, our images and our horizons.

Guy Consolmagno, S.J., Director of the Vatican Observatory, recently put it this way: "God is bigger than planet Earth, and the blue sky overhead is not some sort of boundary between Heaven and Earth... and all the bits we don't even know enough to imagine yet." ⁶

The Importance of Stories of Creation

Catechists are, essentially, storytellers, echoing The Story that is constantly being told by the Storyteller. Our task, our great work, is to draw people into the mystery and the love that is God, and to empower and encourage them to put their own stories, their own experiences, their own questions, into dialogue with this great Story of Love, Expansion and Ultimate Mystery.

Humanity has always used stories to help ourselves to grasp meaning, to understand why things are the way they are. Over the centuries, we

have told these stories, sung them, carved them, painted them, and brought them to life through objects and dance. Stories are ways of expressing meaning, of conveying and interpreting experience. A story is seldom "right" or "wrong." An illustration of this is the fact that there is more than one creation story told among the Indigenous Peoples of North America. In fact, there is often more than one story for each nation. No one story is the "right" one, they are versions adapted by the people in different places, interpreting the knowledge passed on to them from past generations.

Faith communities tell stories to try to explain origins, the ways things are, and to try to connect people to wider realities. John Haught says:

Ever since the earliest stories and oral traditions, most people have had an intuition that the world is large enough to include spirits, gods, and long-departed ancestors. Religions strive to break through the physical limits that cut human existence off from the mysterious worlds to which their symbols and stories point. Religions seek to mend the sense of broken connection that stems from the experience of meaninglessness, guilt, pain, and death. ⁷

John Haught proposes that there are three ways in which people of faith might respond to the varying stories that we might tell today, to challenges posed by cosmology and the other sciences:

1. The first is *conflict*, through which we assert that the natural sciences and religious faith are incompatible.
2. The second is *contrast*, the assertion that science and faith are concerned with different kinds of questions.
3. The third is *convergence*, through which we propose that science and faith inevitably interact.

The
Christian of
the future
will be a
mystic or
will not exist
at all.

The challenge to catechists today is to tell the story of creation in a manner that invites people into convergence. Science and history, religions and faith communities share a common search: Both seek to understand how and why things are the way they are.

Some Questions Posed to Catechists in Light of Cosmology

There are countless questions that rise up within us as we ponder the relationship between cosmology and faith development, and how the knowledge gleaned through science affects our belief in, and relationship with, God. For the purposes of this article, I will briefly address just three of the many questions.

Can God be known and, if so, how can God be known?

The search of religions and faith communities has, at its heart, a simple, yet profound question. David Wilkinson, theologian and astrophysicist, puts the question, and his answer, in this way:

How can a finite mind ever understand an infinite God? What if the infinite God has decided to reveal God's self to the finite mind in a way that the finite mind could understand? This is the central point of the Christian faith-- The Christian point of view is that the infinite God has decided to reveal Himself to us. God has revealed Himself in many ways, but in a privileged way in the Person of Jesus.⁸

More simply put, *Can* God be known and, if so, *how* can God be known? The Christian insight has always been twofold. God can indeed be known, but never fully, for God is both intimately know-able and infinitely Other. And God, who is Love, has chosen to reveal God's Self in and through Creation and, in a very particular way, in and through Jesus Christ.

Karl Rahner once claimed, with great insight and foresight: "The Christian of the future will be

a mystic or will not exist at all." Rahner may not have had cosmology on his mind, but his words ring true. David Wilkinson asks, "From M-theory to an accelerating universe, do we see an absence of God or pointers to a deeper story?"⁹ Read in the light of faith, the story unfolding for us calls us either away from belief or to an encounter with a God who is *more than*—a God who is infinitely more than we could have imagined, beyond all knowing and yet begging to be known, constantly revealing God's self, constantly creating.

Is "the Big Bang" a denial of the existence of God?

The "Big Bang" is a term misused by many, and not only in the field of faith formation. The popular TV show title reinforced the principle that the "Big Bang" is a *theory* of how the universe came into being. On the contrary, the "Big Bang" is not a *theory*, but a *model*. Paul Sutter, in an article in *America* in July 2019, put it very clearly: "The Big Bang is not a *theory* of the origins of the universe. In fact, we have no scientific theory of the origins of the universe. The Big Bang is a *model* of the early history of the universe based on abundant observations." One element of this model is that it posits, and gives evidence for, a universe that is expanding, with the distances between galaxies becoming ever greater. We can infer from this that, in the far distant past, galaxies and celestial bodies were closer together. The further back we go in time, according to this model, the closer things were together.¹⁰

Scientific models neither prove nor disprove the existence of God, for they are not theological or catechetical in nature. One of the challenges posed to catechists is to help people to see this distinction. In this time of ready availability of and access to an overwhelming body of scientific knowledge, catechists are called to assist people in the process of meaning-making.

God is not
something one
arrives to at the
end of scientific
research, but
rather its
starting point.

The perspective of the seeker must be this, as Guy Consolmagno, S.J. has said: God “is not something one arrives to at the end of scientific research, but rather its starting point. In that way, “we then can see the hand of God in how we observe the universe.”¹¹

Did Creation happen just once, or...?

We have already observed that many of us received a religious formation that included a literal interpretation of either Genesis 1 or perhaps, as in my own case, a curious amalgam of both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. If we were fortunate enough to have encountered a catechist who was not a literalist, we probably learned that God’s work of creation took far longer than seven days. Msgr. Georges Lemaître, who posited the Big Bang, added a dimension to this insight that catechists today would do well to mine for its richness. Lemaître’s insight, re-framed by Guy Consolmagno, S.J., is that God’s creation of the universe wasn’t just a one-time occurrence but an event “that occurs continually.” God did not just light the match that got the whole thing going. God continues to create. God’s ongoing work of creating goes on in the wider universe, in the changing world in which we live, and in persons. God is still at work, still creating.¹²

This truth, once scientific, theological and mystical is, I think, captured best in a poem/prayer by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. (1881-1955).

Patient Trust

Above all, trust in the slow work of God.
We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way
to something unknown, something new.
Yet it is the law of all progress that is made
by passing through some stages of instability
and that may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you.
Your ideas mature gradually. Let them grow.
Let them shape themselves without undue haste.
Do not try to force them on
as though you could be today what time
-- that is to say, grace --
and circumstances
-- acting on your own good will --
will make you tomorrow.
Only God could say what this new Spirit
gradually forming in you will be.

Give our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.
Above all, trust in the slow work of God,
our loving vine-dresser. Amen.¹³

Conclusion

Walking with people of faith seeking understanding and meaning today, catechists share in the creative work of God, leading people out of darkness into light, out of the slavery of literalism into the freedom of the daughters and sons of God, out of fear into wonder and awe. Glory be to God, whose power “at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20-21). ♦

Endnotes

- ¹ John Gillespie Magee, Jr., “High Flight,” http://www.yourdailypoem.com/listpoem.jsp?poem_id=819
- ² “Cosmology” accessed at <https://www.lexico.com/en>
- ³ See information on the Outer Space Treaty at <http://www.unoosa.org/>
- ⁴ See information on the Big Bang at https://www.iscast.org/resources/faith_hope_and_quarks
- ⁵ David Wilkinson, quoted at https://www.iscast.org/resources/faith_hope_and_quarks
- ⁶ On comments by Guy Consolmagno, S.J., director of the Vatican Observatory, see <https://cruxnow.com/interviews/2019/07/18/>

⁷ John Haught at

<https://www.khanacademy.org/partner-content/big-history-project/what-is-big-history/origin-stories/a/cosmology-and-faith>

⁸ David Wilkinson at https://www.iscast.org/resources/faith_hope_and_quarks

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Paul Sutter in America (July, 2019)

<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/07/12/why-big-bang-isnt-what-you-think-it>.

¹¹ Guy Consolmagno, S.J., quoted at

<https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/05/08/vatican-hosts-cosmology-conference-to-dispel-faith-science-conflict/>

¹² On the theory of God's continuous creation, see <https://catholicherald.co.uk/news/2017/05/08/vatican-hosts-cosmology-conference-to-dispel-faith-science-conflict/>

¹³ Teilard de Chardin, "Patient Trust," *Translated by Michael Harter* © *The Institute of Jesuit Sources, St. Louis, MO. All rights reserved.*

MERCY ASSOCIATION IN SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

MAST, The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines. This work is meant to serve women, the Church, and the Institute.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Julie Upton, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST's Executive Director. MAST will hold its next **Annual Meeting at Mercy Heritage Center, Belmont, NC, June 19-21, 2020**. Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list, contact the association's Executive Director, Julie Upton, R.S.M. by e-mail at uptonj@stjohns.edu or by mail at 600 Convent Road, Syosset, NY 11791.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to association Treasurer, Marilyn King, R.S.M., 220 Laura Lane, Lebanon, KY, 40033-8155. E-mail mheleneking@windstream.net.

Since 1991, The MAST Journal has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have, over the years, taken on responsibility to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.

Cosmology and Liturgy

Gerard Whitty, D.Min.

Introduction

When I was first introduced to the Universe story, my immediate response was: How do we pray this? How and where is this story in our liturgical symbols and ritual? What are the implications of the universe story for the formal liturgy of the Roman church? This article explores the connection between the universe story and the ritual and symbolic nature of liturgy in the Roman Rite. I will assume that readers are acquainted with the universe story and with the rites of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ritual Activity

Ritual (cult) and culture come from the same root which means to cultivate the earth. “No culture ever developed without ritual.”¹ The purpose of liturgical worship according to the encyclical *Mediator Dei* and *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) is to glorify God and sanctify people. According to the SC, God is glorified, and we are made holy “by signs and symbols perceptible to the human senses.” These signs and symbols constitute our ritual activity. Ritual is the way we negotiate time, space and everyday life in the cosmos. Consequently, Christian worship sanctifies time, space and our lives. Most of our rituals correspond to the rhythms of the cosmos: Lauds at sunrise, Vespers at sunset, Christmas time when the sun gets stronger and Easter as the first Sunday after the full moon after the spring equinox.

In this article, I will focus on time. The Roman Rite sanctifies time by using the day, the week and the year. The liturgical rite for the feast day is the Sunday Eucharist. The liturgical ritual for the week is the Liturgy of the Hours.

The liturgical rites for the year are the seasons of Advent-Christmas, Lent-Easter and Ordinary Time. My focus here is Sunday, the primal feast day, and the ritual of Eucharist.

Fundamental Principles of Ritual Liturgical Celebration

Let us explore some fundamental principles of ritual worship in the Roman Rite and see how a dialogue may be possible between these two stories and see if they are parabolic or mythical.

The **first liturgical principle** in Christian worship is that all worship in the Roman tradition is Trinitarian, addressed to the Father through the risen Christ in the Spirit. From the perspective of the Roman Rite, “the mystical body of Christ, head and members” (SC§7) exults, blesses and offers praise to the Trinity. Recent Trinitarian theology describes this Three-in-One God as relational and intentional, an outpouring of love. It is more a verb than a noun, more action than thing. We believe that this

Trinity created the universe in their own image. It is not surprising then that the universe is also one and many at the same time. In other words, the universe reflects Trinitarian life. In the universe story, everything in the cosmos is related to everything else. In the words of Richard Rohr,

Whatever is going on in God is a flow, a radical relatedness, a perfect communion between the Three – a circle dance of love. God is Absolute Friendship. God is not just a dancer; God is the dance itself. This pattern mirrors the perpetual orbit of electron, proton and neutron that creates every atom which is the substratum of the universe ... everything is indeed in the image

Whatever is going
on in God is a flow,
a radical
relatedness, a
perfect communion
between the Three
– a circle dance
of love.

and likeness of God (Gen.1:26-27).²

The second liturgical principle of Christian worship is its paschal focus, always centered on Christ and the possibility of an encounter with the dying and rising Christ. All sacramental liturgies celebrate the paschal mystery, the dying and rising of Jesus Christ. Our initiation into that mystery comes through a life-giving process of Spirit, conversion and faith lived out in the Spirit community symbolized in water baptism, touching with oil, and Eucharistic dining. The evolutionary story emphasizes that everything evolves. Something must die so the new can emerge. Liturgy and the new cosmology story share this same paschal dynamic of dying to the old and rising to new life. This process is on-going, never ending and evident in the dying process that our church community in the Western world is experiencing today.

The **third liturgical principle** is that incarnation of Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, in the womb of Mary. In this mystery, in assuming a human nature, God becomes stardust. As a result, all matter can carry the Divine Presence. Because of the incarnation, our sanctification is accomplished through sensible signs and symbols. Our sanctification takes place inside creation, not from above or outside the universe. Sanctification comes through Christ's incarnation, or presence of the Cosmic Christ, as Matthew Fox names it. If this is not true, then the humanity of Jesus cannot carry the weight of his divinity. Here it is important to reflect on the centrality of signs and symbols and their functioning in worship. God's presence in ritual activity is always sacramental presence under the guise of matter. In the new cosmology literature, there is a focus on the Cosmic Christ which simply means that there is the image of God in all

matter.³ The emphasis on the Trinity and Cosmic Christ challenges our dualistic theology. From the incarnation of Jesus onwards, there can be no dualistic separation of God and humanity but always both/and.

**Liturgy and the
new cosmology
story share this
same paschal
dynamic of
dying to the old
and rising to
new life.**

Ritual, Symbol and Incarnation

To get a better grasp of this incarnation principle, we must refresh our understanding about the nature of ritual and symbol. Symbols are earthly realities grounded in creation and the body. They are relational and intentional, presuming community. They facilitate encounter with mystery and transform people. They give rise to thought and are actions and verbs, not things or objects. Ritual symbolic activity is constructed. Basic to understanding the nature of symbol or sign is earthiness, a reality accessible to our senses.

Such insights are also descriptive of the universe story which is complex, involves the body, demands readiness, transforms people and their relationships, and facilitates an encounter with mystery and transcendence. Because it is evolutionary, it is active and creative, the new cosmology directs attention to the subjectivity of persons individually and communally.

With the destruction of planet Earth through climate change, destruction of habitat and the loss of species, can we use earthy signs and symbols in the future for ritual worship? Can we use water if it becomes scarce and contaminated? Can we use wheat if the soil becomes toxic with chemicals?

The **fourth liturgical principle** is that all ritual worship is communal and personal rather than private and individual. Ritual worship presumes a community that offers hospitality, openness, welcome and inclusiveness. There is a growing tendency today to privatize and individualize every major event whether marriage,

funeral, initiation or baptism. Ritual is counter-cultural by its very nature. The new cosmology emphasizes that the earth and the universe belong to everyone and cannot be any one person's private possession or property. This implies that care of the earth is the responsibility of every community that makes up the social fabric of the world. Ritual worship and the universe story are complementary.

The fifth principle of liturgy is that all sacramental actions are Pneumatological or Spirit-infused. Nothing happens in our worship, either from the stance of glorifying God or sanctifying people, without the action of the Holy Spirit. Water in baptism is useless for sanctifying a person unless it is Spirit-filled water. All is gift and received as gift. Otherwise, it would be a human project not a grace-filled event. In the new cosmology, there is a dynamic energy of love energizing the heart of our planet and the whole universe that began with the Big Bang. Everything that we observe in the universe is a gift to be received and treasured, from whales in the ocean to the lowly earwig crawling under a stone!

The **sixth principle of liturgy** is that, while there may be substantial unity, there is also great diversity in liturgical expression. Uniformity is never the ideal state for ritual activity either in worship or culture. An inculturated liturgy is crucial. If we go back to pre-Reformation, we find that diversity not uniformity was the norm. In Western Christianity, there was the Roman rite, the North African in Carthage, the Ambrosian in Milan, the Mozarabic rite in Spain, the Gallican in Gaul, the Sarum in England, and the Celtic in Scotland and Ireland. In Eastern Christianity, there is the Alexandrian Rite which includes the Coptic and Ethiopian; the Antiochene which includes the

Syrian, Maronite and Malankara; the Byzantine; Armenian; and the Persian which includes Chaldean and Malabar Rites. In modern Christianity, there is a move away from a rigid, static European liturgy with its emphasis on uniformity. The challenge is to form an ecclesial community that is diverse, hospitable and inclusive of ritual worship styles that reflect its actual history and present richness of expression. As in Trinitarian life and in the universe story, the emphasis is not on uniformity but on diversity.

The Flow of Liturgy

Given these principles, we look more closely at ritual symbolic activity in worship on the Sunday feast day. Almost all sacramental actions and ritual symbolic activity in the Roman Rite have a certain flow. The rituals usually follow four

Everything that
we observe in the
universe is a gift
to be received and
treasured, from
whales in the
ocean to the lowly
earwig crawling
under a stone!

movements: (i) an assembling of people; (ii) storytelling, normally a proclamation of the Word of God taken from Scripture; (iii) the sacramental, symbolic action; and (iv) a sending forth, an act of mission to live what we celebrate. As we explore each of these four symbolic movements, I invite the reader to engage in a dialogue between the liturgical action and the universe story.

The Act of Assembling

The church is never fully gathered but is always in the process of being gathered. This community is a Spirit community, an action of God's Spirit and a response to the Spirit's impulse. It is a verb, a dynamic changing assembly. The rites that gather us then are crucial. The church organizes the gathering rites in such a way that an encounter with the Divine Presence is a possibility in a community of embodied persons.

For a long time, I thought that creation was "out there." It took some time to see that creation

is within me, that my body is part of creation. The church calls people with bodies to worship, praise, bless and thank the Beloved Trinity as a celebrating, open and hospitable community. Liturgy as ritual and symbol presumes persons who have some experience of God in everyday life. We do not worship as isolated individuals. Community is not a voluntary association of individuals. Formation of community implies a welcoming stance, shared life, a surrender of individuality, unity and oneness amid diversity and, above all, interconnectedness among people.

The universe constantly reminds us that everything in creation is also interconnected and unified. Because the subject of liturgy is the community, the act of gathering is a call to active, conscious participation by all. Communal worship is a challenge for us because of the emphasis in our society on the individual in all our cultural institutions-- legal, economic, social, political and financial. Our gathering ritual is, in the words of John Dominic Crossan, more mythical than parabolic. "As myth it confirms the status quo whereas if it functioned as a parable it would undermine the *status quo* and reveal its contradictions"⁴ Rather than forming a worshipping assembly, our present ritual activity can leave people isolated. A value placed on silence or reverence can result in people not being invited to speak to one another, to be hospitable or open to others. Many worshipers might resist any call for gathering if they think of worship as their private time with God.

The universe narrative tells us that emphasis on individuality and privacy not only destroys the act of assembling at worship. Individualizing or privatizing affects our everyday life, causing a rift between faith and life. It affirms a stance, "I can do what I like, when I like and how I like,

especially if it is convenient." This leads to actions that can have devastating effects on the planet's health with little care about ecology and environment.

Part of the process of forming a worship community and being a Christian community is reconciliation. Our ritual worship usually begins with a call for us to admit our sins as a community, seek forgiveness, trust the mercy and compassion of God. Evil invades our lives and finds a home in our hearts. Again, the universe narrative could be an invitation for our gathering rites to be more parabolic and less a myth. There

**The universe
narrative is an
invitation and a
challenge for
our gathering
rites to be more
prophetic, more
parabolic and
less mythical.**

is a growing recognition that ecology is not only an economic, social or political issue--but a moral one. John Paul II, in his 1990 letter on World Peace insisted that "the ecological crisis is a moral issue that respect for life and for the dignity of the human person extends to the rest of creation."⁵ Both the liturgy and universe story depend on interconnectedness and unity. The universe narrative is an invitation and a challenge for our gathering rites to be more prophetic, more parabolic and less mythical.

Storytelling: The Liturgy of the Word

The second symbolic movement in liturgy is storytelling. An image for this movement is God's holy people gathered around the Master Storyteller's table to be fed and nourished. Every time Christians gather for worship, there is a proclamation of the Word, and its focus is Jesus Christ who is present in human speech. He is the fullness of Scripture and of the liturgy. When Christians speak about the Word, they primarily mean the person of Jesus Christ and his kingdom message. Again, the Spirit brings home to us what God wants us to hear. It is a Spirit-filled proclamation in a Spirit filled community.

We know from the new cosmology that the universe, the cosmos, the first incarnation of the Divine is dynamic, vibrating with life.⁶ We are also aware that the Word is alive and dynamic. It is creative: "Let there be light; and there was light" (Gen 1:2). It is a living reality, accomplishing what it sets out to do. The Word never returns to God empty. All liturgies are based in creation and on the creative Word. When the Divine shares a Word with us, it is expected that we respond, and become doers not just hearers. Why is it then, when we hear that God saw that creation was very good, we fail to reverence it, to appreciate it? Why instead, do we feel free to despoil and destroy it? The universe story challenges us to see the proclamation of the Word in our liturgy as parabolic.

There is a shadow side to our proclamation of the Word stemming from a misinterpretation of God's command, "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). As John Paul said in *The Redeemer of Man*, we have taken this to mean "heedless exploiter and destroyer," not an intelligent guardian.⁷ This dark side expresses itself, in the view of the Pope, as arrogance in thinking that we are absolute owners who have a divine right to devastate the earth. Arrogance leads to the greatest environmental disasters. To come to a deep awareness of the Divine Presence and serve that Presence demands humility, the opposite of arrogance. The Liturgy is an act of blessing the Divine for all of creation. Looking through a microscope or gazing on the mountains and valleys can engender in us a sense of awe and reverence and can lead us to contemplative praise and thanks. In yet another way, the universe story is more parabolic than mythic!

The Creed is integral to the Liturgy of the Word. Science, especially in the form of the

universe story challenges the traditional metaphors we use in God-talk and God-language. James Fowler, the pioneer in adult faith theory, observes that traditional metaphors no longer shock the imagination because we have literalized them, turned them into ideas and dogmas. One example is the title "Sovereign." This metaphor comes out of a culture and context of monarchy and empire giving us the language of God as omnipotent, other, distant, connoting power, dominance and patriarchy. "This is not the face of God in Jesus ... compassionate, loving presence, kind to all creation."⁸ If these metaphors and models are dying then it is time, in the words of John Philip Newell, for rebirthing. As we learn from the universe story, we must let go of some of the metaphorical symbolic language and allow new ones to evolve.

Collecting money is a ritual action that is practical and symbolic. In Jewish tradition, the offering of first fruits symbolized the whole harvest. Our monetary gift can function as a generous return, a portion symbolizing our gratitude for all that God gives to us. We may not give everything, but what we offer represents the whole. The collection reminds us that all we have is a gift from God and does not belong to us. We are reminding ourselves that all the gifts of this good earth are our gifts to be used for the kingdom of God especially for the poor.

Putting together the universe story with this small ritual action has profound implications. For one thing, the right to private property whether corporate or individual is not absolute. Human beings do not have total ownership of creation; we are stewards not owners, charged with proper care and maintenance of the earth. The earth is given by God for all people. St Ambrose of Milan reminds us, "Nature produces a common right, but

**As we learn from
the universe story,
we must let go of
some of the
metaphorical
symbolic language
and allow new
ones to evolve.**

greed has made it into a private right.”⁹

Sacramental Symbolic Action

Having been gathered by the Spirit and had the opportunity to encounter the Risen Christ in the community and in the proclamation of Word, at the great Thanksgiving Eucharistic Prayer we have the possibility of an encounter with Christ in the four symbolic gestures that were given to us at the Lord's Supper on the night before he died, namely, the act of taking bread and wine, blessing it, breaking and pouring, eating and drinking communally. Bread and wine are gifts taken from creation with the understanding that the actions of dining at table can carry the weight of the Divine. These symbolic actions presume a relationship to the whole earth community; they come from creation. Bread assumes good soil, fine weather, harvesters, processors, human hands and work to become flour in someone's kitchen to be kneaded and baked and, finally, to be placed on our altars as a gift from God used as a symbol of our lives offered to God. The same can be said of the cup of wine.

The Eucharistic Prayer is not a series of prayers but one unified prayer of blessing and thanksgiving for Divine action and presence in the world. Traditionally, this prayer opens with blessing God for creation. According to the psalmist, the whole creation blesses God: plants, animals, mountains, trees etc. Our present Eucharistic Prayers are very minimalistic, clerical and static when it comes to naming what we are blessing God for in creation. Compare it with ancient Eucharist Prayers.

In the *Apostolic Constitutions Book VIII*, this blessing goes on for seven paragraphs starting with heavenly bodies, continuing with the four elements of air, fire, earth and water.¹⁰ The prayer

continues with the creation of men and women. The Sanctus only comes after the twenty-second paragraph! Every Eucharistic Prayer begins with creation as a subject of blessing and thanksgiving. Praise and thanksgiving flow from awe and reverence of the sacredness of the earth which in turn evokes a response in our lives. When we acquire a sense of awe in creation, we give praise that leads to a respect for creation, a respect that impels us to care for and not destroy such a gift from the Creator. It fosters a more contemplative prayer. Regular participation in liturgy and worship forms and teaches us to live in gratitude for all creation, and to care for the environment rather than abuse it. In future revisions of this prayer, the universe story will pressure the church to be much more expansive in its blessing God for all of creation.

Having praised the Trinity for this first incarnation, this prayer moves to blessing God for Jesus, the second incarnation of the Trinity's love. We give thanks for the mission and ministry of Jesus. It is Jesus now who, as he did the night before he died, gathers his

disciples, is present among them and nourishes them with his body and blood. He is the host of this meal. Every Sunday is an Emmaus event. The prayer moves to a laying on of hands over the bread and wine and over the people invoking the Holy Spirit, to transform both the elements and the people into the Body of Christ. Sadly, this action gets lost in our present Eucharistic prayers, yet without the Spirit's action nothing happens.

The Eucharistic Prayer then moves to blessing God for the whole paschal mystery: Jesus' life, his dying, rising, Spirit sending, his coming in glory and our initiation into the mystery through Spirit, conversion and faith. We bless God for those who have gone before us and for all who minister in the church. The prayer culminates in the Great Amen,

In future revisions
of this prayer, the
universe story will
pressure the
church to be much
more expansive in
its blessing God for
all of creation.

our assent in faith. The Eucharistic Prayer is the original creed. When we reflect on the universe story, the perquisite for life is dying; otherwise there is no emergence to new life. The paschal mystery is built into the very fabric of the universe.

Go in Peace

There is a growing emphasis on mission and discipleship in Christian circles. As in the gospel, the Spirit sends us out. It is not a human project. The universe story as it influences liturgy challenges our call to mission in many ways. It challenges us to be more contemplative in our day to day lives, contemplation overflowing into our liturgy. Liturgy teaches, forms, transforms and shapes our attitudes toward the whole earth community slowly and gradually over time. The universe story places much emphasis on the importance of symbols, e.g., habitat, spotted owls, whales. We worship with signs and symbols. Symbols place images in our minds, our emotions and hearts. The fuller the symbol, the better they speak. Minimalism, legalism and clericalism kill symbol and ritual. Liturgy and the universe story challenge us to handle symbols with care.

There are simple ways in which the universe story helps us enhance our liturgy and worship. Let us celebrate water, fire, air and earth! Let us celebrate Rogation Days around spring planting, praying for a good harvest, blessing seeds, praying for protection from famine and hunger, supporting farmers, blessing fishing boats. Let us re-create Rogation Days not only for rural people but also for urban dwellers. At harvest time, let us give thanks, bless and praise God. Let us plan a Service of Lament and seek reconciliation for the way we treat indigenous people, for our destruction of the fishery and

oceans, and for our part in the destruction of our planet earth. Let us prepare penitential services based on ecology and plan liturgies for World Environment Day on June 5, for World Food Day on October 16, and for the feast of St Francis of Assisi on October 4. Let us find special times to bless animals as carriers of the sacredness of the earth and of the Divine Presence.

Let us investigate the environment in and around our churches as a sacred space. Open the space to nature with real plants instead of plastic ones. Have parishioners walk through a garden of trees, shrubs and flowers to get into the worship space. Research how your parish recycles, handles trash at picnics, dances, socials. Do we have environmentally friendly cooling systems, lighting patterns, and heating systems?

Every Eucharist sends us out for mission and action in the world. Every Eucharist dismisses with the words, "Go and serve the Lord in the world." A Christian bases his or her approach to planet earth on the dual commandment of Christ to love God and neighbor. Love of God demands respect for God's gifts and for God's will for creation; love of neighbor requires justice which prohibits selfish destruction of the environment without regard for the needs of people today or for future generations. We are told to go and live what we celebrate. This act of mission calls for decisions. Our

**Our worship
challenges us to
adopt a counter-
cultural set of
values to shape our
lives, and to
transform all
of life.**

worship challenges us to adopt a counter-cultural set of values to shape our lives, and to transform all of life. It is time for our liturgy to be more parabolic! ♦

Endnotes

¹ Bastiaan Bann, *Sources of Religious Worship: A History of Ritual from the Stone Age to the Present Day* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2018): 8.

² Richard Rohr, "Trinity: MIA," *Daily Meditation*

Sunday May 5, 2019. Accessed at

<https://cac.org/trinity-mia-2019-05-05/>.

³ Matthew Fox, "An Evolving Spirituality," *Painting the Stars: Science, Religion and an Evolving Faith*, Online DVD Curriculum Series (Living the Questions.com, 2013), part 7.

⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 220-224. Quoted by Albert Nolan, "Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom" (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 53.

⁵ John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator – Peace with all of Creation*, message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, Vatican website, January 1, 1990, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html, sec.

15, 16.

⁶ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Incarnation: A New Evolutionary Threshold* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 25.

⁷ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, March 4, 1979, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html, sec. 15.

⁸ James W. Fowler, *Weaving the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 58.

⁹ Quoted in John C. Cort, *Christian Socialism: An Informal History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 47.

¹⁰ R.C.D. Jasper and G.J. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 103.

MAST EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

The Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology publishes the MAST JOURNAL begun in 1991, three times a year. Members of the Editorial Board are: Sisters Eloise Rosenblatt, Editor, (West Midwest), Patricia Talone, (Mid-Atlantic), Marilyn King, (West Midwest), Aline Paris, (Northeast), Sharon Kerrigan, (West Midwest), Mary Paula Cancienne, (Mid-Atlantic), and Doris Gottemoeller, (South Central).

Subscriptions and correspondence to Julie Upton, R.S.M., 600 Convent Road, Syosset, NY 11791. Email: uptonj@stjohns.edu.

Manuscript submissions to Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. at 1600 Petersen Ave. #40, San Jose, CA 95129. Email: eloros@sbcglobal.net.

Ellen Smith, R.S.M. layout, and printing by Firespring, Omaha, NE.

Real Presence: An Ecological, Cosmological Heart

Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M.

When I began formal school, at the age of six, one of the first teachings we received was about "the Real Presence" of God. Every Friday morning at 9am-- this was our catechism class for the day -- we marched in twos to the large basilica close to the school. It was a Sisters of Mercy school. We were brought to the front pews to be as close as we could to the huge sanctuary. There, our 22-year-old teacher, a junior professed, asked us to close our eyes and to invite Jesus (who lived all the time in the tabernacle --His Real Presence) to come into our hearts. I would picture him making the quick journey from the tabernacle to our hearts, dividing himself up in the process. We would all sit in silence, holding him in our hearts for fifteen minutes --a long time for six-year-olds! But there was hardly a stir.

Thus, we learned of Presence, both near and far off, what was then called then the "Real Presence" of Jesus in the tabernacle of Catholic churches. What a long way, what a long journey we have all made from those times, the early 1950's. And yet the shining thread of God's Presence stayed with me all those years, expanding and deepening, and now opening doors to the Cosmos itself.

The term "Real Presence" now has many meanings, multi-layered. It has extended far beyond a tabernacle into the knowable and yet-to-be discovered, unimaginable dimensions of the Cosmos itself. Cosmology and ecology are two realities we are honored to know and live with at this moment in history. We now choose to explore the intuitive and scientific knowledge available to us in these exploding times. They are the manifestations of God's Real Presence as we are coming to know it today.

We track the reality of our present planetary predicament. We pay attention to it, read the latest scientific findings when we can understand them, and we look for hope amid the mess that the "news" serves up many times a day. I deliberately restrict my exposure to what is called "news" in our time.

But a memory from fifty-three years ago, when I was nineteen and a novice in my community, stays with me. It is as vivid now as then--when I viewed a seven-minute animated film by the National Film Board of Canada. For me, it represents the essence of cosmology and ecology. The film opens with a drawing of a caterpillar on a boy's finger, and simply expands outward, slowly imaging the whole of the earth, then expanding into sky, stars, planets, sun, moon --all in four minutes.

At some point I do not now recall, the image begins to contract, slowly shrinking, following the path it took into space, but now back again towards its origin, back to and through our familiar sky, and down to the very point where it began-- a caterpillar on one boy's finger. This memory, so clear and vivid, reminds me of the words of Meister Eckhart: "If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature --even a caterpillar--I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature."¹

My Forest Identity

This miniscule image leads me into my own experience of living close to the natural world. I was born into and grew up in a city, but it was a small city. On the last day of school each year our family moved to a small house just outside the city, in a forest. This is where my father's siblings-

Cosmology and ecology are two realities we are honored to know and live with at this moment in history.

-all eight--lived with their families all year round. We were the only "townies." But for two months every year until I was twelve, I was steeped in the freedom and exploration of the natural world. I consider this my "formation in nature." I was free and not time-bound every day until dark. I was exploring forests, swimming spontaneously in pure ponds, building bough-houses and finding a visceral kinship with trees. I consider this childhood experience to be what actually defined my way of being in the world for the rest of my life.

Thus it is, that now, at the age of seventy-two, I again live in a forest, nourished by its silence, its rhythms, and claiming kinship with its other inhabitants, including bears, birds, foxes, fish, deer, rabbits, squirrels and moose.

It is my hope that this essay will help readers understand Earth's essence-- our ecology. I see that the Earth contains and belongs to the whole of creation, known and yet to be discovered-- our cosmology. I have always resonated with Teilhard de Chardin when he says: "To understand the world is not enough. You must see it, touch it, live in its presence, and drink the vital heart of existence in the very heart of reality."²

Thus we come to the poet of God today, the one who - above all, expresses so simply, so invitingly, that even science must smile and agree. Mary Oliver's poetic reflection on Psalm 145, "On Thy Wondrous Works Will I Meditate":³

So it is not hard to understand
 where God's body is, it is
 everywhere and everything; shore and vast
 fields of water, the accidental and the
 intended
 over here, over there. And I bow down
 participative and attentive

it is so dense and apparent. And all the same I am still

unsatisfied...where do you suppose, is His pale and wonderful mind?...

I would be good, oh, I would be upright and good.

To what purpose?...But to enter the other Kingdom: grace, and imagination.

"Grace and imagination" are what are asked of all of us now --the opening to grace, the honoring of imagination, and the trusting of both. There is much to be read about the earth, about the Universe, but the danger of reading too much about it is the very trap that has brought us to this exact place we are now trying to change. All that we know stays in the mind and does not translate into either action or an engaged heart/body relationship with the earth and the cosmos itself.

So how do we actually, physically and heartfully relate to the Universe, and to the Earth herself? As a beginning I offer seven actions that can initiate us into the many dimensions of earth/universe:

1. As often as possible, daily if you can, go outside alone into a forest, a park, a grove of trees, a bush, the hedge around your garden, and interiorly ask to receive from where you are and what surrounds you. Most importantly, don't think about where you are and what you see. Simply be, and open to receive.
2. Experiment with "Earthwalking"⁴ as a specific practice offered by our indigenous brothers and sisters.
3. Intentionally choose four or five individual plants and/or trees to befriend. Visit them,

To understand the
 world is not
 enough. You must
 see it, touch it,
 live in its
 presence, and
 drink the vital
 heart of existence
 in the very heart
 of reality.

touch them, and ask for guidance from them every day.

4. If you own an I-Pad, phone or computer, download the free app called "SkyGuide." Raising your screen to the night sky (but also even in the day), the real-time sky with all the stars and constellations will appear, giving you their names, positions, seasons, and movements.
5. Read John Haught's *The New Cosmic Story* for his challenging and stretching reflection on this quote: "The epic of the universe, I argue, is no less a story about emerging subjectivity than about the movement of atoms, molecules, cells and social groups." Make cosmic encounters part of your daily interior and exterior life.⁵
6. Look for animals who live in the wild. Pay special attention to birds, squirrels and insects. See them all as integral to the whole of creation and the cosmos.
7. Begin to deliberately see your own body as a manifestation of the universe in all integral parts: mind, body, spirit, soul...and find ways to honor and respect your totality, not just use it. Every person is a manifestation of God's body.

Speaking of a vision of the unity in nature, Nadine Artemis says:

There is a wholeness in creation: a unity in design, pattern, ratio and energy. And this wholeness and unity occur at all scales, from micro particles to the cosmos. This unity in form is called "sacred geometry." By studying the meta-form of nature, we learn about the physical properties of each thing and recognize that they are metaphysical symbols of

interconnectedness, the relationship of all things to the whole.⁶

If we want to pursue this deepening of heart connection to Earth and Universe, resources abound. Both science and spirituality offer numerous guides, and both expand our present capacities for knowing. But it is experiencing, along with knowing, that deepens our capacity to feel ourselves an expression of the earth and of the cosmos. Real Presence includes both. We live on the earth and are held in place by the cosmos.

Recently, I heard a scientific weekly CBC radio program called "Quirks and Quarks" that focused on an hour of interviews with ordinary people who are even now volunteering to be among the first non-astronauts to be flown to Mars. They are offering to live there, with no desire or intention to come back to earth. The threads begin to connect us--aside from scientists and astronauts --with the possibility of actually inhabiting other planets. Slowly, but very steadily, science is opening the universe to human beings. The cosmos is becoming more real to humans, we who once thought ourselves the center of the universe. Many still do.

Robert Sardello, in his workshop at the Christine Center in northern Wisconsin in April 2017, said, "An alternate cosmology is coming about now. Galaxies create new stars;

expansion is creating new stars." Sardello teaches that silence is the necessary ground to listen and receive; receive-- not create or direct. We are being created. We are being directed by the universal energies we can as yet hardly be aware of, nor perceive."⁷ Furthermore, echoing Teilhard de Chardin, Sardello states, "Love is spaciousness; creation is spaciousness. These are the same as utter stillness. Earth is creating so fast that everything seems still...Earth is the planet of Love.

**But it is experiencing,
along with knowing,
that deepens our
capacity to feel
ourselves an
expression of the
earth and of the
cosmos. Real Presence
includes both.**

Everything here is Love...our cosmology is that everything happens as an explosion. There's no map..."⁸

"No map... " but another famous and familiar cosmologist, Brian Swimme, tells us that "in order to enter into the new story of the expanding universe, we need to experiment with altering basic patterns of consciousness that have been set down in the primate line for seventy million years at least."⁹ We also know from the cosmological work of Swimme that "the birthplace of the universe, where existence first sprang forth, is fifteen billion light-years from Earth"¹⁰ and that "Humans--as we know from the cave-paintings of 20,000 years ago, created artifacts of cosmological wonderment going back at least 40,000 years... conceivably, for as long as three-hundred-thousand years, humans have huddled in the night to ponder and celebrate the mysteries of the universe in order to find their way through the Great World they inhabit."¹¹ And just now, even as I write, it was announced that a Lunar Gateway would be opened in 2026! And people who can pay will be able to experience a trip to the moon within this present year.

How to even comprehend such realities? How to actually absorb these possibilities and their invitation that stretch our minds, so narrowly wrapped in the primacy of earth with all its fights and feuds. Are we blind to the expansive and expanding nature of the universe? This question is primary if we wish to seriously engage our own deepening as a way to expand comprehension and contribute to a more realistic, humble and loving Real Presence of Earth.

Openness to this unifying vision of the earth and cosmos takes a loving heart. Robert Sardello says, "The Way of Love is the Way of the Whole. You can be in Love or attachment, which is not Love. To be free of attachment, stop thinking.

Love is Space--pure nothing, without Form. Love is absolute intelligence-- it knows what to do. Earth is the planet of Love. Everything here is Love."

Teilhard de Chardin invites us to "establish ourselves within the divine milieu. There we shall find ourselves where the soul is most deep and where matter is most dense. There we shall discover, where all its beauties flow together, the ultra-vital, the ultra-sensitive, the ultra-active point of the universe. And at the same time, we shall feel the plenitude of our powers of action and adoration effortlessly ordered within our deepest selves."¹²

Robert Sardello counsels a way. "How do we enliven the resonance between ourselves and the soul of the world, which includes the cosmos? The primary practice is silence, the first aspect of magic."¹³ Silence. This is a new learning from our earlier practices of external silence, This teaching is the contemplative, receptive Silence of the inner universe linking us with the outer universe.

If we only followed the news all day, every day, we would believe that there is nothing to our earth but war, greed, poverty, starvation and waste of resources by others. This is not the only reality. It takes both personal and communal engagement in Silence to restore our place in both the Ecology and Cosmology of our Universe. Daniel O'Leary's reflection on Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* offers a reflection concretely applicable to ordinary life. One chapter is entitled, "This is My Body: It Echoes Across the Cosmos of our Hearts and the Heart of Our Cosmos."¹⁴

This title opens us to reflect on the meaning and practice of "Real Presence."

I believe that every person has some moment of encounter with the natural world. My earliest memory of this in my life happened when I was

Love is absolute intelligence-- it knows what to do. Earth is the planet of Love. Everything here is Love.

nine. Some years ago, I wrote a poem, "Listen," about that encounter, which has shaped my life. It's abbreviated here, to focus on the essential:¹⁵

When I was nine I saw the trees -
no- listen- I saw the trees. It happened
this way -

...First I *felt* the quiet...
I looked up (from where I had fallen)
and saw -
saw the ring of trees.

Each of them radiated light
towards one another,
towards me. I felt protected,
hidden
in their luminous shield,
washed and seen and safe.

From the age of nine until now, I have been steeped in the daily awareness of belonging to the earth and more lately, and always astoundingly, the universe itself. I have been living in a forest bordering a river for nearly twenty years. A dark night sky opens the expanse of our cosmological reality in every season. As I track the sky's movements and changes, I feel an ever-deepening invitation to open my own heart, body and soul to the Sacred. That way, even all the books I read about the natural world--and they are many and enlightening --are really only small windows and narrow doorways to the Real Presence of the Earth-- its ecology--and to the Real Presence of the entire Cosmos. This Cosmos is holding and containing us, and always extending an invitation to a more conscious belonging. Ecology and Cosmology embrace us all, *not the other way around*. That is the invitation. That is what we are called to receive, and then to act out of that acceptance in everyday, so-called "ordinary" life.

We feel great reverence for the earth. One of my poems is called "Walking On the Body of

God." Here is an excerpt:¹⁶

Every day I walk on the Body of God...

The God I know pretends to sleep under a white
blanket,
then delicately rises in green shoots, aching
vulnerable,

no less surprising for coming up every year.

The God I know is so abundant
that color bursts out everywhere - everywhere Her
Body isn't

bulldozed, paved, sprayed, dug, or filled with
chemical trash
that goes on killing and killing...

The God I walk on, breathe in,
step over and swim through
is the source of all I know or will ever know:
This dirt, this composting soil
this hidden stream and raging ocean, This:
The Body of God who births me, breathes me
and claims me back before I walk on her again.

What would happen, what would the world be like
if we all knew that we are walking on
the Body of God?

In 1959, Walter Miller wrote a post-apocalyptic novel called *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. It is a sobering, almost shocking foretelling of the possible ending to the path we are on today, when humans are forced to leave the earth to its destruction. The last two paragraphs read:

They sang as they lifted the children into the spaceship. They sang old space chanteys and helped the children up the ladder one at a time and into the hands of the sisters...when the horizon erupted the singing stopped. They passed the last child into the ship...

The last monk, upon entering, paused, stood in the open hatchway and took off his sandals. "Sic transit mundus" he murmured, looking back at the glow. He slapped the soles of his sandals together, beating the dirt out of them. The glow

*was engulfing a third of the heavens...he scratched his beard, took one last look at the ocean, then stepped back and closed the latch.*¹⁷

I close this essay on the fiftieth anniversary of the first moonwalk. ♦

Endnotes

¹ As quoted by Sally McFague in *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993): 211.

² Teilhard de Chardin, in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: Writings*, ed. by Ursula King (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999): 27.

³ Mary Oliver, *Thirst* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 2006): 55-57.

⁴ See James Endredy, *Earthwalks for Body and Spirit* (Vermont: Bear and Company, 2002).

⁵ John Haught, *The New Cosmic Story: Inside Our Awakening Universe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

⁶ Nadine Artemis, *Renegade Beauty: Reveal and Revive Your Natural Radiance* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2017): 31-32:

⁷ Robert Sardello, "Living Life: Through Stillness into Heartfelt Life," Workshop presented October 20-24, 2016 at the Christine Center, Willard, Wisconsin.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Brian Swimme, *The Hidden Heart of the Cosmos: Humanity and the New Story* (New York: Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1996): 51.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹² Teilhard de Chardin's *The Divine Milieu*, quoted by Ilia Delio (ed.) in Chapter 10, From Teilhard to Omega

(New York: Maryknoll Orbis Books 2014).

¹³ Robert Sardello, *Facing the World With Soul: The Reimagination of Modern Life* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1991, 2004): p.35.

¹⁴ Daniel O'Leary, *An Astonishing Secret: The Love Story of Creation and the Wonder of You* (Dublin: Columba Press, 2017): 195.

¹⁵ Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M., *When the Bones Find Their Singing Place* (Peterborough, ON: Palabras Press, 2003):2.

¹⁶ Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M., *SoulWinds* (Calgary, AB: Palabras Press, 2008):62.

¹⁷ Walter Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (Philadelphia: Lippincott & Co., 1959): 337.

New _____

Renewal _____

I want to subscribe to The MAST Journal for:

1 year _____

2 years _____

(\$20.00 US; \$30.00 outside US) (\$40.00 US; \$60.00 outside US)

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Please make payment by check payable to Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (US funds drawn on a US financial institution), money order/international money order or US currency. Mail to Julia Upton, RSM, St. Mary of the Angels Convent, 600 Convent Road, Syosset, NY 11791.

To pay by credit card go to our website: www.mastrsm.org and click on The MAST Journal tab for instructions.

Seeing Cosmology Through the Eyes of a Child

Mary Tee, R.S.M.

*"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly;
what is essential is invisible to the eye."*

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

A cosmology that is human centered and separate from all creation, in which humans see themselves at the pinnacle of creation, superior to all other life forms and where Earth's resources are viewed as being for the sole use and benefit of humans is now being widely acknowledged as one of the main contributors to the present environmental crisis.

Albert Einstein said we cannot solve problems using the same mindset that created them.¹ In searching for a cosmology that is more relevant for our times and to our evolving consciousness, we are beginning to recognize a deep need for a more relational understanding of who we are in the cosmic story.

This requires us to break out of our anthropocentric mold into a new living creation-centered cosmology in which we are members of a living Earth community, a living universe, interrelated and interconnected in one human and other than human family. Michael Dowd says, "We are not separate beings on Earth so much as we are a mode of being or an expression of Earth."² The question we ask ourselves is: How can we enter into such a shift in consciousness and to change our sense of self so as to feel in the depths of our being who we are in a connection of oneness with everything in existence? Here is my proposal: If we as adults take the time to see cosmology through the eyes of a child, we can awaken to a new consciousness of the majesty and exquisite beauty of our planet home. This *world of wonder* and enchantment will

give us a truer sense of who we are as conscious expressions of Earth, with a much larger sense of why we are here.

The Child's Sense of Wonder and Mystery

Children can enable us to expand our minds and hearts to think and feel about how we can see all creation in a far different way and to fall in love with all life again. Renowned Austrian teacher and psychoanalyst, Otto Rank, observed that children live mentally and emotionally on an entirely different plane than adults.³ A child feels and experiences deeply the natural world even before he or she can speak a word. Anthony de Mello calls this "the formless wonder of the child."⁴ Children do have a natural sense of wonder, and, according to Brian Swimme, it is wonder that will lead us.⁵ Through their imagination and creativity, children can give us a sense of their magical world.

Children with their open minds and their free spirits are ready to engage with loving adults in an atmosphere of joy, peace and harmony. Through their intimate engagement lies the possibility of opening new doors for adults to a world of fresh and different ideas, a world in which adults become more consciously aware of the stupendous beauty of the universe. As adults we are governed and driven largely by intellectual information, but a young child is very perceptive and shows us the importance of an irrational way of knowing. Small children are not concerned about having more successful people in the world, but rather

**Children with
their open minds
and their free
spirits are ready
to engage with
loving adults in an
atmosphere of
joy, peace and
harmony.**

people who are more compassionate with a more intuitive way of thinking.

Albert Einstein held that the intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. He said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we know and understand while imagination embraces the entire world and all there will ever be to know and understand."⁶ This propels us toward a greater recognition of the need for the intellect and the heart to be more closely connected in order to create the harmony and balance needed for a sense of personal well-being and fulfilment.

The Contemplative Nature of a Child

Contemplating cosmology from a child's perspective can activate our memory and reawaken us to a more enlightened way of living in an interconnected and interrelated inclusive community or in a unified field. According to modern quantum physics everything in creation is connected. We have likely had unexpected glimpses of being held in this oneness. Perhaps there was that breath-taking experience while watching a beautiful sunset, or parents' first sight of their newborn child. In these moments there is a feeling of being in love with the whole of creation. "In this experience of oneness," says Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, "is life. Life is no longer experienced solely through the fragmented vision of the ego. It is known in the heart and felt in the soul...we feel at one with all things."⁷

A young child has what writer, scientist, and ecologist Rachel Carson describes as "a clear-eyed vision."⁸ They can spend hours observing whatever catches the eye, absorbed and completely attentive to what is at hand. Nature actively engages a child's curiosity and thus the child's world is ever fresh and new, filled with

excitement and beauty. No doubt we have all had the experience of taking a small child for a walk. We soon realize that instead, the child was leading us, not on a walk but on an adventure. There was so much calling to be discovered and examined along the way. There was time to jump in a rain puddle, pet a dog, hug a tree, run after a butterfly with unrestrained delight, pick up a dead leaf or a tiny faded flower and intently study it, smell it and then gift it to you as if it were the most beautiful flower in the whole world. It seems a child's whole being comes alive to nature and nature comes alive to them as they find enchantment in everything they discover.

Children are a constant reminder to us to slow down from our fast pace in life. They call us to be aware of all that we miss in nature when we do not silently pay attention. By being inattentive to nature, we deprive ourselves of awe-inspiring moments that could profoundly touch our lives. It would be a poor life indeed if, because of worldly cares and concerns, we had no time "to stand and stare" at the beauties of nature, says William Henry Davis in the poem "Leisure."⁹

Observing how nature catches the eye of children alerts us to the need to reverse our dominant way of thinking. Do we believe that we are noticing nature? Rather, we need to consider that it is the collective energy of the plants, animals and pebbles which is attracting us and calling us to take notice and admire them. Perhaps, if we did take time as a small child does, we would hear the flowers and animals speak to us, or we would notice a five-pointed star in an apple blossom or in a forget-me-not showing us in a contemplative way that stars are present on Earth as in the heavens.

Experience of Oneness with the Created World

Environmental psychologist, Louise Chawla, has written widely on children and she reported

**Children are a
constant
reminder to us
to slow down
from our fast
pace in life.**

that in a study one participant, Howard Thurman, a minister and an amateur painter, shared his memory of a particular experience as a child in which he came to know his rightful place in creation. He recounted how he used to go walking along the mid-Atlantic seacoast during both daylight and darkness, in both peaceful stillness and in turbulent weather. At one point, he had a vivid experience in which he felt he was rooted in all creation and all creation was part of him, a memory which remained with him all his life. He described it in this way. "I had the sense that all things, the sand, the sea, the stars, the night and I were one lung through which all of life breathed. Not only was I aware of a vast rhythm enveloping all, but I was a part of it, and it was a part of me."¹⁰

In his heightened state of awareness, Thurman was experiencing in his child's mind his own capacity to know the world in a contemplative way. This extended far beyond his intellectual ability or bodily senses to a heightened, intuitive way of knowing. Within every child, there is already the essential capacity needed for entering into the oneness or the "singularity" from which we have been born. Being drawn into pure love as a conscious, spiritual participant, we recognize in Thurman's intuition that we can also be "one lung through which all of life breathes." This is an example of a relationship that is not dualistic—mind separate from body—but dwelling in a universe of unity and harmony with a profound awareness of being deeply connected with all that is. Thurman's experience brings us face to face with the oneness for which Jesus prayed in John 17:21, "...that all may be one...." The oneness of all creation is now scientifically traced back through the evolution of life to the Big Bang. Author Damian Mark Smyth

says, "We're One, we've always been One, we'll always be One, until we think we are not."¹¹

Brian Swimme reminds us that, out of an evolutionary process of billions of years, we have come with a destiny which is to be love, a love which is already present, permeating the whole universe. Swimme likens this love to the gravitational pull which he calls allurements, the attraction which holds the planets in their orbit in a unity and a harmony.¹² Astonishingly, this is the love of attraction which is active in us, not only in the way we are attracted to people and to the things of nature, but in the way we become attracted to the mystery which life holds for us.

According to Swimme, we need to remember what science recognizes that we have been woven into being by the cosmological powers of the universe and are a dimension of the emergent universe.¹³ These creative powers may seem to be

**I remember the
stillness of those
evenings and the
ways my father
would guide me to
listen, to hear the
sound of the nearby
brook and to catch
the pungent smell
of decaying leaves.**

beyond us or just something far, far away out there in space. Instead, he proposes, the forces of the cosmos are present in the heartbeat and in the pulse of each of us. They are in the small child created with a destiny to be love. They are active in a love which permeates the whole universe. These forces can awaken the potential this loving relationship holds for us if we allow ourselves to be aligned with them.

The Power of Childhood Memories

If we remember our childhood experiences, this may bring into our present consciousness a loving and felt connection to the wonder and enchantment of nature. We are being ministered to by a Power much greater than ourselves. Swimme often relates how the energy of the stars allured him into gazing at the starry night sky from his bedroom window. He feels it is such moments which led him to his life's work.

There are particular moments in my own childhood to which I often return. One such memory is enjoying a cup of “woods’ tea” with my father as he took an evening break from harvesting his potatoes. “Woods’ tea” was the name which our Newfoundland ancestors gave to a cup of tea served in the woods and steeped with a birch stick in it. This was the best tea I ever enjoyed. I remember the stillness of those evenings and the ways my father would guide me to listen, to hear the sound of the nearby brook and to catch the pungent smell of decaying leaves. This early enchantment with nature instilled in me an appreciation for what is real and worthwhile in life. To this experience, I attribute my awakening to a sense of belonging which nurtured in me a heart-felt desire to further a relationship of love, respect and reverence toward the natural world. At the same time, my mind and heart were being prepared for the work which now involves me.

During our Summer Environmental Camp, we endeavor to provide moments for the children to nourish and sharpen their connection with love present and alive in nature. Each morning the children eagerly find their favorite place in the garden where they sit in the grass and listen for daily messages from the sounds of creation. Sometimes, as they listen to the singing of the birds, they receive a message to be happy within themselves and to do something to bring happiness to others. Or, it may be the gentle breeze stroking their faces reminding them that they, too, can be gentle in their dealings with others. Perhaps it was the out-stretched branches of a tree that caught their eye, bidding them to be welcoming toward all persons they encounter that day. Children are also amazed to learn that, when they put their hands on their beating hearts, they are feeling the same energy of the twinkling stars.

As I reflect on the children’s experiences, I am reminded of the words of Michael Dodd, “The child entranced by the immensity of the ocean is Earth enraptured by itself.”¹⁴

This sense of oneness lived out in our childhood experiences often becomes obscured in adulthood by the glamour, glitz and greed of a consumeristic society. This causes us to overlook the contemplative spirit with which we were gifted and the intimate connection of our childhood sensitivity and connectedness with the natural world. Materialistic conditioning makes our ego develop so strongly that we become dominant and competitive, eager to become richer and more influential than others. Even in Jesus’ day, as we note in Luke 9:46-48, the human desire to be the most important was a tension. Some of the disciples questioned him about who among them would be the greatest. Jesus tried to impress upon them the perspective needed to be his followers. They needed to set aside their ingrained egotistical attitudes of self-importance. Jesus called a little child and set the child in front of them. Perhaps he chose a child as an example for the disciples

**This sense of oneness
lived out in our
childhood experiences
often becomes
obscured in adulthood
by the glamour, glitz
and greed of a
consumeristic society.**

because a child in the newness of its life has not yet developed a notion of self-importance and would have no fear of losing its autonomy.

A small child does not have a developed sense of superiority, but rather a desire to be loved and to love with a more inclusive love and trust. A child can show us what it means to be in communion with the natural world and its inhabitants, to feel and connect with the wonder, grandeur and sacredness that surrounds us. It is this readiness that needs to be appreciated and desired by adults. Black Elk reminds us, “Grown men can learn from little children, for the hearts of little children are pure. Therefore, the Great Spirit may show them many things that older people

miss.”¹⁵ Adults who share this wisdom can come to a sense of inner unity and harmony that is similar to the outlook of a child--and come to sense the aliveness and sacredness in all creation.

The Child's Sense of Compassion

Many authorities now agree that, because of human evolution, humanity is genetically coded with a human capacity to care. However, this is not confined solely to the human species. This is particularly evident in the attraction to animals which children display very early in their lives, whether it be to a stuffed toy or a real animal. Upon seeing a duck swimming in a pond or a dog being walked by its owner, children immediately run towards it, wanting to pick it up or in some way to physically connect with it. Some animals become their friends—and comfort them, sleep with them, talk with and befriend them in an intimate way. I once saw a painting of a child who was punished and standing in a corner. Her dog was standing next to her, looking sad and forlorn as if pleading for the child to be released from its punishment. Some writers refer to this as affinity or attunement, a sense that the animal not only recognizes the child's pain but also that the animal is sympathetic to the child's feelings.

Recently, a librarian related to me how she observed little children who never passed the fish tank in the library without sitting and watching the fish before engaging in any library activity. They would just gaze intently, captivated in a graced moment. One stormy night, the power went off. When the children returned the next morning, they shed tears when they learned that the fish had died. Such intimate connection with the friends of other-than-humans gives us an inkling of the human capacity for communion with all of nature

which can be reawakened in us.

Activism of Children

Children seem to have not only an inborn feeling of kinship with animals and an emotional connection, but also empathy with them. A child attending our Summer Environmental Camp refused to eat meat and became a vegetarian at the early age of four. In the receptivity of children, we find an example of how the cosmic energy of the universe surrounding us with fullness of life prepares us by nudging us in a more intentional direction for a relationship of care and compassion, not just for human life, but for all of life.

Their sense of care and concern is leading

**Children can
become our
teachers in the
way they lift us up
with a zest for life
to see more
clearly the beauty,
wonder and
enchantment of
all God's creation.**

millions of youth to rise up and challenge the governments of the world to take immediate action on climate change. In March 2019, 1.2 million young people were inspired by one teen-age Swedish girl, Greta Thunberg, to participate in a global protest to fight climate change. This mobilization was initiated from her heart-felt relationship propelled by a deep urgency to promote concerted action to protect our planet home and all its inhabitants from the devastation caused by global

warming. This simple act of a child, sitting on the steps of the Swedish Parliament and protesting the inactivity of adult leaders to protect the endangerment of all from global warming-- has since spread throughout the whole world.

Acting out of the inner truth of her intuitive way of feeling what it is to be in right relationship with all of life, Greta became a vegan. She is conscious of not bringing harm to even the tiniest creature. Greta is looked upon by some people as a modern prophet, not only in the way she has inspired millions of young people for political action, but also for the gentle way in which she is

calling adults from her own inner love for all creation to raise their voices for our common home.

Conclusion

The wonder, awe and loving interconnectedness and interrelatedness that characterizes a child should be honoured and appreciated by adults. Children can become our teachers in the way they

lift us up with a zest for life to see more clearly the beauty, wonder and enchantment of all God's creation. In this connection, we are drawn to recognize the deep love of the divine in all creation. We feel a transformation within ourselves that makes us more human. Thus, we can live out our destiny as loving co-creators of a new world. ♦

Endnotes

¹Albert Einstein quotation. Accessed at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/320600-we-can-not-solve-our-problems-with-the-same-level>

²Michael Dowd, *Earthspirit: A Handbook for Nurturing an Ecological Christianity* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991): 17.

³Matthew Fox, "Otto Rank as Mystic and Prophet in the Creation Spirituality Tradition," Meditations of Matthew Fox online. January 3, 2011, quoting from Otto Rank, *A Psychology of Difference: The American Lectures*, Robert Kramer, trans. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996): 272. Accessed at https://www.matthewfox.org/blog/otto-rank-as-mystic-and-prophet-in-the-creation-spirituality-tradition#_edn31.

⁴Anthony de Mello, Words and Wonder – The Eyes of a Child. Accessed online at <http://www.katinkahesselink.net/other/mello.html>.

⁵Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014): 113.

⁶Albert Einstein quotation. Accessed at

<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/556030-imagination-is-more-important-than-knowledge-for-knowledge-is-limited>.

⁷*Contemplative Alliance. A Call to Inner Reflection for Societal Transformation, 3 Questions with Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee.* Accessed at <https://contemplativealliance.org/2019/06/17/3-questions-with-llewellyn-vaughan-lee-2/>.

⁸Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962): 54.

⁹William Davies, "Leisure," in Collection of Poems (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), lines 1,2 and 9.

¹⁰Louise Chawla, "The Natural World as Prepared Environment," *The NAMTA Journal* (Vol. 39, No. 1, Winter, 2014) 47.

¹¹Lilith, Spiritual Coach, *Oneness: What Makes Us be All One?* Posted on website August 23, 2018. Accessed at <https://www.li-lith.com/what-makes-us-be-all-one/>.

¹²Brian Swimme, *The Universe is a Green Dragon* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, Inc., 1984): 43.

¹³*Ibid.*, p.51.

¹⁴Dowd, *Earthspirit*, p. 17.

Visit the MAST website!

Read *MAST Journal* issues from 1990-2018 for free.

Go to our website at www.mastrsm.org

Click on "Archive."

Current issues are available to subscribers.

Cosmos Mercified into Being

Elizabeth Davis, R.S.M.

“God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). With these words, God carried out the first act of mercy. From the chaos of the “formless void and darkness” came the order and beauty of Cosmos. In the words of the Muslim spiritual master Ibn al-‘Arabī, God has “mercified” the universe into being.¹

To speak about cosmology, the cosmos and mercy is to use terms that have many meanings. In the context of this article, cosmology is the study of the origin, evolution and future of the universe. It is a study involving disciplines as diverse as physics, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy and theology and a study which once again invites a mutual interaction and dialogue between science and religion. Cosmos refers to all creation, the entire universe, every dimension of time and space (spiritual and material). It includes galaxies, stars, planets, black holes, ecosystems, animals, plants, humans, molecules and time. The macrocosm is the universe, the mesocosm is the planet, and the microcosm beings on the planet.

Mercy has multiple expressions to encompass the depth of its meaning. Scripture gives good nuances of the meaning. *Hesed* is the most used Hebrew word for mercy in the Old Testament and refers almost exclusively to the covenant love of God for the chosen people. In newer editions of the Bible, it is usually translated as “steadfast love.” Its equivalent in the New Testament is *eleos* (e.g., *Kyrie eleison* or Lord, have mercy). The Hebrew *rahamim*, with its root word *rahum* meaning womb, is womb-love in the Old Testament and is usually translated as compassion or mercy. In the New Testament, the Greek word *splagchna* would have a similar sense. In the Old

Testament, *hanan* translates as grace or favor; in the New Testament, *charis* would carry the same nuance.

Cosmos Mercified into Being

Almost all ancient traditions tell a founding story of the creation of cosmos out of chaos imaged as violent waters, dire emptiness or deep darkness. There are rich examples from Aboriginal, Aztec, Babylonian, Celtic, Ceram, Chinese, Christian, Dogon, Egyptian, Greek, Hawaiian, Hindu, Inca, Inuit, Iroquois, Japanese, Jewish, Maori, Mapuche, Mayan, Navajo, Norse, Sumerian, Vodoun, Yoruba, and Zulu traditions. While these ancient creation stories such as the one found in Genesis 1 would not have had today’s scientific understanding of the universe, of Earth or of earth creatures, they certainly reflect an understanding of all creation seen and unseen, “the heavens and the earth.” They differentiate the creation of the heavens, the land and water of Earth, and humans.

The Jewish Rabbis, in interpreting Psalm 89:2 (“I declare that your steadfast love is established for ever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens”), concluded that “the world is built on *hesed*.”¹ A spiritual writer in this century, Cynthia Bourgeault, echoes this same understanding of the first act of mercy when she says, “Mercy is the very heartbeat of God resonant in creation; the warmth that pulses through all things as the divine Mystery flows out into created form.”²

If the cosmos has been mercified into being, it follows that all creation is a spiritual universe filled with God’s presence and sustaining mercy. Psalm 24:1 tells us, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.”

Mercy is the very
heartbeat of God
resonant in
creation; the
warmth that pulses
through all things
as the divine
Mystery flows out
into created form.

The Muslim tradition interprets the wording in the Quran beautifully:

In the first Sura of the Quran, Allah begins by saying: “In the name of Allah, the all-Merciful, the ever-Merciful, Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, the all-Merciful, the ever-Merciful.” Commenting on this verse Ibn al-‘Arabī affirms that, since Allah mentioned His two names the all-Merciful and the ever-Merciful (ar-Rahmān, ar-Rahīm) before and after mentioning the worlds, this certainly implies that the worlds, or the creation, emanated from His Mercy and will also conclude with His Mercy.³

Note the similarity between the name of Allah and the Hebrew word for mercy, *rahamim*, reflecting the common root language for Hebrew and Arabic.

Cosmos Sustained by God’s Mercy

Not only is God’s mercy present at the initial act of creation, but that mercy-filled presence continues over time. In her Magnificat, Mary proclaims, “God’s mercy is from generation to generation” (Lk. 1:50).

Karunā, a key belief in Buddhism, is translated as mercy or compassion and is an essential component of the spiritual path linked with loving kindness, wisdom, sympathetic joy and inner balance. In Buddhism, one who is on the spiritual path to complete enlightenment and to Buddhahood is called a bodhisattva. In almost all Buddhist traditions, there is a Bodhisattva of Mercy and Compassion, in more recent times, a woman known as Kwan Yin or Guanyin. Her name means “One who hears the cries of the world.” She is seen as the champion of the unfortunate, the sick, the disabled, the poor, and those in trouble. Some coastal and river areas of China regard her as the protector of fishermen, sailors, and generally people who are out at sea. It is said that she had reached the final stages of her spiritual journey, but she refused to complete it

because she had not yet responded to all the cries. She remains on Earth continuing this work.

In the Old Testament, one of the most gracious expressions of this ongoing presence is the frequent connection between morning and the steadfast love, compassion and mercy of God. The Book of Lamentations says with such eloquence, “The steadfast love of our God never ceases. God’s mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22-23). The psalms echo the same theme: “I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning” (Ps. 59:16); “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Ps. 90:14); “Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust” (Ps. 143:8); and “It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night” (Ps. 92:1-2).

This Old Testament metaphor is taken up in the New Testament by Zachariah in his *Benedictus*: “By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Lk. 1:78-79). Pope Francis chooses the same metaphor in his *Misericordiae Vultus*, announcing the Year of Mercy in 2016, “We will entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking him to pour out his mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future” (MV §5).

Elizabeth Johnson speaks to the theology of accompaniment as one more way of showing how the cosmos is sustained by God’s mercy:

Scripture testifies that the cross did not begin the outpouring of divine mercy in the world. It has been present from the beginning and endures forever. . .gracious and compassionate, God has

always been acting mercifully. Saving mercy accompanies all creatures in the world's beautiful, terrible journey through time to fulfillment. . .A theology of accompaniment holds the faith conviction that God forever companions the world with liberating, saving mercy. The living God, who in the Spirit is already in, with and for all creation, has in Jesus Christ joined the history of the world and participates in its journey as a member of the planetary community. Within this overall framework, we can interpret the cross as a particular event of divine solidarity with the suffering and death of all creatures.⁴

In the Quran, Allah says succinctly, "My mercy embraces all things" (Quran 7:156).

Cosmos Marked by Communion

Among the visionary leaders in today's thinking about the cosmos are Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry. Both have spoken about communion as being at the heart of understanding of the cosmos. Richard Rohr notes:

For Teilhard, gravity, atomic bonding, orbits, cycles, photosynthesis, ecosystems, force fields, electromagnetic fields, sexuality, human friendship, animal instinct, and evolution all reveal an energy that is attracting all things and beings to one another, in a *movement toward ever greater complexity and diversity—and yet ironically also toward unification at ever deeper levels*. This energy is quite simply *love* under many different forms.⁵

Thomas Berry identified three basic principles of the universe process: differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. Of the third, he wrote:

The third ethical imperative of communion reminds us that the entire universe is bonded together in such a way that the presence of each individual is felt throughout the entire spatial and temporal range of the universe. This capacity for bonding of the components with each other

enables the vast variety of beings to come into existence in that gorgeous profusion that we observe about us.⁶

On another occasion, Berry says, "The sacred community must now be considered the integral community of the entire universe and, more immediately, the integral community of the planet Earth."⁷

In the context of cosmos then, communion means communion with God, with the entire human family, with Earth and with the universe itself. Pope Francis begins his second encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, with these words, "Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of God's creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth" (LS §92).

Echoing the covenant between God and all living beings in Genesis 9, Leonardo Boff describes the qualities of this communion:

Human beings must feel that they are sons and daughters of the rainbow, those who translate this divine covenant with all the beings existing and living, with new relationships of kindness, compassion, cosmic solidarity, and deep reverence for the mystery that each one bears and reveals. Only then will there be integral liberation, of the human being and of Earth, and rather than the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth there will be common celebration of the redeemed and the freed, human beings in our own house, on our good, great, and bountiful Mother Earth.⁸

As Boff's quotation implies, one of the dynamics of communion is shared suffering and active response to suffering. For Hindus, the Sanskrit word for mercy is *daaya* which has as its root meaning "suffering in the suffering of all beings." Jesus' parable in Matthew 25 begins with the words, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you

from the foundation of the world,” and confirms what this means in everyday life:

Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me (Matt. 25:34-36).

The Church’s restatement of the Corporal Works of Mercy – feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, etc. – loses some of the immediacy of the parable which says “I was hungry. . . I was thirsty. . . I was naked. . .” In 2016, following his *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis created a new work of mercy: care for our common home. In his message on September 1, 2016 for the World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation entitled “Show Mercy to Our Common Home,” he wrote:

As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a “grateful contemplation of God’s world” (*Laudato Si’*, §214) which “allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us” (§85). As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires “simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” and “makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world” (§230-31).⁹

In the past decade, scientists have begun to understand that the universe is structured by galaxies connected by giant voids. They have named this vast network of galaxies and web-like strands holding them together as the cosmic web. Cosmic web – what an amazing metaphor for communion!

Cosmos as Dynamic and Unfolding

Scientists in the later decades of the twentieth

century brought about an awareness that the universe is not static but dynamic and unfolding – Teilhard de Chardin named that awareness cosmogenesis, a universe in *continual* creation. This new insight, strengthened by the work of scientists and theologians for the past seventy years, has called all humanity to a new way of understanding the evolving universe, the evolving planet and evolving humanity. It has challenged humans to re-imagine their roles as being co-creators with the Creator God and having responsibility for caring for Earth and all created beings for whom Earth is home.

Such thinking invites new readings of passages like Psalm 104, the most mercy-filled account of creation. This psalm illustrates poignantly the fruitfulness and beauty of creation, and the ongoing act of creation: “When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground” (104:30). A contemplative reading of this psalm brings light and energy and hope in these times of disruption and fear.

The Gospel of John introduces us to the cosmic Christ, the one who comes in history in the person of Jesus. How differently the first verses of that Gospel are read when there is a recognition that the cosmos is the Body of God, the first incarnation. The coming of Jesus is the second incarnation. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. . . From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn. 1:1-4, 16). The *charis* word for mercy is used here translated as grace.

In Richard Rohr’s words, “As John Duns Scotus taught, ‘Christ was the first idea in the mind of God,’ and then Teilhard de Chardin filled out the cosmic schema by calling Christ the final

‘Omega Point’ for all of history! We were supposed to live safely between this cosmic Alpha and Omega, with history moving forward with clear meaning and direction.”¹⁰

Just as the first chapter of the first book of the Bible tells the story of creation mercified into being, so, too, the last chapters of the last book of the Bible tell the story of ongoing creation mercified:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them; they will be God’s peoples, and God will be with them; God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.” And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new” (Rev. 21:1-5).

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis echoes this sense of ongoing creation, “God’s divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, ‘continues the work of creation.’ The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge: ‘Nature is nothing other than a certain kind of art, namely God’s art, impressed upon things, whereby those things are moved to a determinate end’” (LS §80).

Cosmos in Mystery and Wonder

Since its origin almost fourteen billion years ago, the cosmos has unfurled in a story of majesty and wonder and mystery. The mysteries continue: how the cosmos began, how it will end, the cause of the cosmic expansion, how galaxies are formed, formation of mega-stars, existence of massive black holes, dark matter and energy, life outside

Earth. Among these great mysteries are how and when humans will allow a sense of the divine and the sacred back into contemporary understanding of the cosmos, how and when humans will understand and accept that the universe has been mercified into being.

In describing the work of Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker writes:

We dwell in a sacred universe, we are part of a vast evolving process, we are returning to a sense of kinship with all beings. . . . He [Berry] calls for an awakening of wonder, so that along with such new strategies as sustainable agriculture, ecological economics, green politics, and eco-design there will also be an emerging sensibility in human consciousness that will have the enduring energy for the great transition ahead. This is Berry’s fondest hope – that the dynamizing sources of human energy will be found in a broadened religious and spiritual sensibility. This comprehensive sensibility includes a revitalization of the world’s religions and a robust dialogue among and between civilizations.¹¹

The weaving of many faith traditions within this article shows how the dialogue among world religions about a theme as simple as cosmos and mercy is not only possible but enriching and energizing in humanity’s move towards “a broadened religious and spiritual sensibility.” The search for the spiritual impulse or presence that permeates the universe is as important as the search for the answers to the physical questions posed above. Science and religion, each with its own questions and its own wisdom, will strengthen each other’s quest if they share the journey and, in that sharing, model a way for all humans to enter the dialogue.

The following interpretation of the creation Psalm 104 illustrates well the wonder and the wisdom of interweaving ancient scriptures and distinct indigenous cultures. It comes from

Aotearoa (New Zealand), and the words are a weaving of Maori and English languages.

Psalm 104: A Psalm for Aotearoa

Bless the Lord, my soul.
Kororia ki te Atua!
 You are wrapped in light,
 in a *korowai* of glory.
 You made *Rangi*, Father Sky,
 infinite space stretched out above us.
 You made *Papatuanuku*,
 Mother Earth,
 resting strong beneath us.
 At your command *Tangaroa* rose and fell;
 the seas once covered the mountains of this land
 but now tides swirl around us,
 drawn by *Marama*, the moon, in her monthly dance.
 Each day the sun, *Ra*, walks his path through the sky.
 Rain falls, springs gush up out of the earth,
nga awa, rivers flow through our islands,
 water for bush and bird and cattle.
I nga ra o mua, before Maori and Pakeha,
 great forests ruled this land, *Tane Mahuta*: totara, rimu,
 filled with birds from the smallest fantail to the
 giant eagle,
 from the shy kiwi to the long-legged moa.
 The sea was filled with life: whale, kahawai.



Aotearoa, cloaked with cloud, shaped by water
 and wind.
Nga hau e wha, winds from four directions,
 brought people to these islands
 and you made them a home here,
 fed them from your abundance;
 though sometimes you hid your face and the people
 were sad.
 When you take away the breath of life your
 creatures die
 and return to the dust. *Aue, aue!*
Haere, haere, haere ...
 we mourn the loss of so many creatures, so
 much beauty.

Send forth your Spirit again on Aotearoa,
Haere mai, Wairua Tapu, renew the face of this
whenua,
 care for this land,
 re-make us who call this our home, *nga iwi o te motu*.
 May the glory of the Lord shine forever!
Kororia ki te Atua! ¹²◆

Endnotes

- ¹ Jordan Denari, "The Year of Mercy is a time to learn about Islam," *National Catholic Reporter* (December 8, 2015).
- ² Cynthia Bourgeault, *Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2001): 31.
- ³ Mohamed Haj Yousef, "Ibn al-‘Arabī: The Treasury of Absolute Mercy," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, 48 (2010), accessed online at <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/treasury-of-absolute-mercy.html#note-1>.
- ⁴ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), xiii.
- ⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (Convergent Books: 2019): 69-70.
- ⁶ Thomas Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009): 121.
- ⁷ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009): 133.
- ⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1997): 114.
- ⁹ Pope Francis, "Show Mercy to our Common Home," *Message for the World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation*, 01 September 2016, accessed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160901_messaggio-giornata-cura-creato.html.
- ¹⁰ Richard Rohr, "One Sacred World," *Daily Meditations*, Center for Contemplation, Thursday, March 26, 2015, accessed at <https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/2015/03/>.
- ¹¹ Mary Evelyn Tucker. "Forward," in Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth*, xv.
- ¹² Silvia Purdie, "Psalm 104: A Psalm for Aotearoa," *Resources for Life and Faith*, 2015, accessed at www.conversations.net.nz.

Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril

Review by Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M.

Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril

by Elizabeth A. Johnson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018).

HD and PB \$25.00, 238 pp. ISBN 978-1-62698-309-0

God demands justice for sin. Remember Adam and Eve, the fabled ancient couple in the Book of Genesis whom Augustine chained with “original sin” in the early 5th century? Their woe has been laid upon succeeding generations, compounding the understanding of sin and nature of sinners ever since. Whether our nature is depraved or redeemed, what will heal our souls and put us in right relationship with our Creator God?

In response to sin and the need for human salvation, according to Elizabeth A. Johnson, Anselm of Canterbury in the late 11th century employs a metaphor from his time and place to speak of a God who redeems and saves humanity. Anselm uses a legalistic and juridical metaphor that makes God the holder of a debt. In his text, *Cur Deus Homo*, he shows why humans need to pay off this debt to God, a debt that humans incurred through their sinfulness against God. Yet, humans can never clear a debt with Creator God with anything or action of their own.¹ As Anselm saw it, only a God-figure could amass the proper payment, equal to what is owed and valuable enough. Thus, there was a need for an incarnate God in the world, and for this God-human to die as payment-sacrifice in order to clear the debt.

Anselm presents his case, using the literary device and assistance of an interlocutor, the monk Boso. As Johnson analyzes it, Anselm’s unfortunate explanation for why God became human grew dominant in Western Christian salvation theology. Atonement theology became the rationale for how Christians account for Jesus dying on the cross. Without much nuance, this

version of the salvation story still dominates Western Christian theology: Christ died for my/our sins. This leaves salvation focused on sin, the sinfulness of humans and the need for the redemption of humans. She does not underplay human sin but argues that “salvation” is much broader than being free from a debt. Christian theology desperately needs a broader understanding of salvation, not human-centric, at a time, when the Earth is groaning in labor pains without comfort, awaiting its redemption, as St. Paul says (Ro. 8:22).

According to Johnson, Anselm sees sin as an affront to God’s honor and holiness. God is thus justified in demanding some form of recompense as appeasement and as the condition for restoration of God’s right relationship with humanity. A debt is owed, God must be paid, God holds the paperwork, and the mortgage is due.

Anselm hypothesizes that who, but a divine being could ever measure up as the proper offering and sacrifice, enough to satisfy God, and pay off a creditor-Creator? How can we even begin to calculate a proper payment, much less pay it? We can’t. We already owe God for our very being, our very existence. So, who could? Enter Jesus, Son of God, who gives himself as payment. He is the perfect one, sharing the divine nature, the one and only installment who is worthy of clearing the debt, so things can be made right, again. Thus, for Anselm, Jesus becomes the payment, the sacrificial lamb for the ages.

We are saved. This idea of salvation may have had legs during Anselm’s time, but it really should never have been given wings, according to Johnson. What kind of God requires a human

sacrifice in order to forgive human beings, people that this God created and loves? What kind of God is this?

Johnson rebels against this theological travesty and she can only estimate the cost that Western Christianity has suffered and continues, paradoxically, to pay because of its attachment to Anselm's "satisfaction theory."²

However, Johnson in her measured approach, does not dismiss Anselm entirely. Instead, she places him within the context of his own time and culture. She methodically shaves his theory down and surrounds it with a plethora of other citations from Jewish and Christian tradition on the meaning of salvation and redemption. Assembling this collage, Johnson invites us to re-think what is meant by "salvation" at a time when we are in desperate need of embracing a broader "we," one that is more than human-centered, one which embraces all creation, humanity, and the world as a whole.

Instead of a God who demands payment, she reclaims a God who "accompanies" humankind and all of creation. This God knows the suffering and pain, the joy and beauty of all of creation. She prefers the concept of humans dwelling with creation, as opposed to lording over it. Stories of the Exodus, the return of the exiles, and of Jesus on the cross are understood as an outpouring of the mercy of God. She asserts:

The cross dramatizes the terrible destruction humans can foster, as well as holds up indelibly what Christians see as the epitome of divine participation in the ensuing suffering and death. This is the dangerous memory par excellence that shakes lovers of God out of complacency and calls them to attend with vigor to their suffering neighbors, human and more-than-human, especially those relegated to the margins.³

Johnson asserts that the "cross did not begin the outpouring of divine mercy to the world. It has been present from the beginning and endures

forever."⁴ Additionally, she reminds us that before theology became dependent on Anselm's version of salvation, the fuller horizon in biblical tradition acknowledged incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection integrated as a theological dynamic of hope for creation as a whole.

Her critique of Anselm is cast in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and an imagined interlocutor, Clara--a bright, student composite who helps to flesh out Johnson's lessons on Anselm and her alternative offerings on salvation. Her text is divided into six books, with subsections:

Book I: Wrestling with Anselm

Book II: The Creating God Who Saves

Book III: Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews

Book IV: Interpretations Blossom

Book V: God of All Flesh: Deep Incarnation

Book VI: Conversion of Heart and Mind: Us
(with exercise questions)

Johnson's text confronts a cliché that narrows the heart of Christianity. As remedy, she challenges us to explore multiple metaphors about what "salvation" could mean for all of creation. This text is recommended for professionals, as well as students of the Christian tradition. It is particularly recommended for those who get a twitch every time they hear, "Jesus died for my sins." ♦

Endnotes

¹Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), xiii. (Referring to Cur Deus Homo: Literal Latin = Why God Human, traditional translation = Why the God-Man, or colloquially = Why God Became Human).

²*Ibid.*, Chapter II treats this concept.

³*Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

Discussion Questions

(Doyle) *“Does my worldview allow room for other living creatures, for the inanimate world?”* How would I share with others how I express those relationships I have?

(Peddle) *“A true missional church will minister for the sake of the whole world, and not just for its own ends.”* How is your faith community expressing this commitment to “the whole world?”

(Singleton) *“The worldview of the oneness of the entire universe and connection with eternity can cast new directions, purpose and meaning to one’s life, vocation and tasks.”* Have you any new thoughts, as a result of this widened vision, about your purpose, vocation and tasks?

(Walsh) *“I understand my role as a catechist as a call to transformative conversation, to echo the wonderful works of God, and to open spaces in which others may make their own response to these wonders.”* Has the new cosmology, space exploration, astrophysics and theories of the “big bang,” expanding universe and continuous creation affected the way you teach?

(Whitty) *“For a long time, I thought that creation was ‘out there.’ It took some time to see that creation is within me, that my body is part of creation.”* How does feeling your body is part of creation affect your self-image and sense of self? Do you disappear, emerge, converge?

(Peddigrew) *“Thus it is that now, at the age of seventy-two, I again live in a forest, nourished by its silence, its rhythms, and claiming kinship with other inhabitants, including bears, birds, foxes, fish, deer, rabbits, squirrels, and moose.”* Do you have any experiences that approximate this sense of kinship?

(Tee) *“If we remember our childhood experiences, this may bring into our present consciousness a loving and felt connection to the wonder and enchantment of nature.”* Recall a childhood experience of feeling one with the natural world. Write out that memory, naming all the sensate associations.

(Davis) *“In the context of the cosmos, then, communion means communion with God, with the entire human family, with earth, and with the universe itself.”* What are your favorite psalms on a cosmic theme? If you recited your own prayer, how would you express your communion with God, other people, earth and universe?

Contributors

Mary-Paula Cancienne, R.S.M.

Mary Paula is a Sister of Mercy from the Mid-Atlantic region. She presently serves the Conference of Mercy Higher Education as its Associate Director for Mission Support and Integration. She received her Ph.D. from Duquesne University in Systematic Theology. Previously she was chair of Religious Studies, Theology and Philosophy department at Georgian Court University in Lakewood, New Jersey. She now serves GCU online as an adjunct professor. Her areas of research and study include Mercy spirituality in today's world of pluralism, contemporary environmental challenges and theological aesthetics. Prior to studying theology she earned advanced degrees in art, psychology; and spirituality.

Elizabeth Davis, R.S.M.

Elizabeth Davis is Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland. She has a B.A. and B.Ed. from Memorial University of Newfoundland, an M.A. in Scripture from the University of Notre Dame, an MHSc (Admin) and Th.D. (Bible) from the University of Toronto. Her past teaching ministries include teaching high school and university, administration as Executive Director of St. Clare's Mercy Hospital and President/CEO of the Health Care Corporation of St. John's, both health facilities in St. John's NL Canada) and leadership (Catholic Health Association of Canada, the Medical Council of Canada, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and the National Board of Medical Examiners in the United States). She has served on institutional boards of Regis College in Toronto, the Canadian Biblical Association, and Mercy International Association. She holds honorary doctorates from Memorial University of Newfoundland and the University of Manitoba. She is a member of the Order of Canada. Her published works include "Catherine McAuley's Interpretation of Scripture" for *Recovering Nineteenth-Century Women Interpreters of the Bible* (2007), entries on three Roman Catholic women interpreters in *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters* (2012), and an article entitled "'The Lord God has given me a disciple's tongue': Catherine McAuley's Interpretation" in *Fromme Lektüre und kritische Exegese im langen 19. Jahrhundert* (2014, in German, Spanish and English).

Carmel Doyle, D.Min.

Carmel Doyle was born and raised in St. John's Newfoundland, and spent seven happy years with the Sisters of Mercy. She holds a B.A. She has a B.A. from Memorial University of Newfoundland, M.R.E from Toronto School of Theology, and D.Min. from St. Stephen's College. She worked in the education system of Newfoundland as teacher, department head, vice-principal, principal and co-ordinator for Religious Education. She has developed religious education curriculum for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and for Newfoundland's provincial elementary non-denominational religious education and family life programs. In 1986 she became an adjunct professor of Religious Education at Queen's College, an Anglican institution which provides theological education to all denominations. Since her retirement, she has taught courses in spirituality, pastoral studies, and evangelization. She was a chaplain and is currently Director of Student Programs. Carmel has been active in parish ministry – as choir director, lector, and R.C.I.A. As a spiritual director she leads retreats for parishes and diocesan clergy. She was active in Development and Peace, an organization sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic

Bishops. Carmel has been involved with Habitat for Humanity, the St. Francis Foundation (for youth requiring housing and support services), with the Council for the Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland Labrador, and as a board member for the Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice where she continues as Chair of the Programme Committee.

Brenda Peddigrew, R.S.M. (Newfoundland and Labrador)

Brenda Peddigrew received her B.A. and M.Ed. from Memorial University of Newfoundland, her M.Th. from Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, Mo., and Ph.D. from California Institute of Integral Studies. Past ministries include high school teaching, vocation director for her Mercy congregation, and director of adult education for the Archdiocese of St. John's, NL. For the past 25 years she has been a chapter facilitator for religious congregations of men and women in Canada, the U.S., Ireland, Nicaragua, Zambia and Zimbabwe. She has also trained facilitators in Ireland for over a decade. She has published five books of poetry. Her dissertation appeared as *Original Fire: The Hidden Heart of Religious Women*, and a collection of essays, *Finding the Line: Ordinary Encounters in Nature's Mirror*, all available on Amazon.com. She writes and paints in a forest setting, where she has lived for nearly twenty years.

Bishop Geoffrey Peddle, Ph.D.

The Anglican Bishop for the Diocese of Eastern Newfoundland and Labrador, Geoffrey Peddle is a Newfoundlander and was born in Bonavista, NL, growing up in Trinity, Lethbridge and Whitbourne, NL. He holds a B.A. and M.A. from Memorial University, an M.Div., from Queen's College, and a Ph.D. from Cardiff University. He and his wife, Kathy, make their home in Mount Pearl near St. John's, and have two grown sons, Adam and Benjamin. Peddle was ordained in 1987 and has served in the Parish of Lake Melville (Labrador), the Parish of Arnold's Cove, the Parish of the Ascension and the Parish of the Good Shepherd, the latter located in Mount Pearl. He has also served as Diocesan Executive Officer and as Provost, Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's College, the Newfoundland and Labrador theological college. He is the author of various academic articles and three books: *From Mount Pearl to Mount Sinai*, *The Atonement of Jack Fowler*, and *The Church Lads' Brigade in Newfoundland: A People's Story*.

Rick Singleton, Ph.D.

Dr. Rick Singleton is Provost and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's College faculty of Theology in St. John's, NL. He was educated at Memorial University, University of Western Ontario, Graduate Theological Foundation, Indiana and Foundation House, Oxford. He holds a Ph.D. in Health Ethics and a D.Min. with a specialty in grief and bereavement counselling. He has certification in Grief Counselling and Health Services Management. He is adjunct professor of philosophy on the Faculty of Arts and adjunct professor in the Community Health and Humanities Division, Faculty of Medicine at Memorial University. He is author of the Multi-media Bereavement Resource Program used at sites across Newfoundland and in other provinces. He has well over 40 years' experience in pastoral care and theological education, ten of which were as a Roman Catholic priest in parish ministry. Rick is married to Donna, and they have two young adult children. Rick admits, when all else is done, he loves to sail the waters of his native St. Mary's Bay, Newfoundland.

Mary Tee, R.S.M.

Mary Tee was born in Burnt Cove, a small fishing village on the East Coast of Newfoundland. She holds a Masters in Theology from St. Michael's College, Vermont, and a Masters of Spirituality and Culture from

Sophia Center, Holy Names University, California. Her primary ministry has been teaching. She served as missionary of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland in Puerto Eten, Peru, where she worked mainly in catechetics. Presently, she is Director of the Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice which she founded in 2003 after completing her studies in California. She is an active member of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace and of the Sisters of Mercy International Association Subcommittee for Cosmology/Eco-justice. She is the representatives of the Sisters of Mercy of Newfoundland on the Canadian Religious Conference-Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation and is a member of the CRC-JPIC Core Committee for Atlantic Canada.

Anne Walsh, D.Min.

Anne Walsh is a native of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. She is currently the Coordinator for Partnership in Mission for the Redemptorists of North America, a member of the Redemptorist Adult Faith Formation Team, Chair of their General Commission for Partnership in Mission and member of their General Secretariat for Evangelization. She holds a B.A. in Education from Memorial University, an M.A. in Religious Education from St. Michael's College, Toronto, a Diploma in Fine Arts from the University of Calgary, and a D.Min. from St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, Alberta. Anne has been a classroom teacher and a coordinator of Religious Education and Adult Faith Formation at parish and diocesan levels. She has worked in campus ministry and youth ministry. Anne has given courses, talks and presentations in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy and Thailand.

Gerard Whitty, D.Min.

Gerard Whitty studied for the ordained ministry at All Hallows College, Dublin, Ireland and was ordained in 1969. He served in the Archdiocese of St. John's for thirty-nine years and retired in 2008. He received an M.A. (Liturgy) from the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, an M.A. in Religious Education from Boston College and a D.Min from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He formed the Archdiocesan Liturgical Commission and worked on implementing Vatican Council II's "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy." He organized workshops with the Commission on the formation of liturgical ministers in the Archdiocese. He was a presenter at the North American Forum on the Catechumenate and a leading learner at the Liturgy Institute in Ottawa, Canada. He is presently an Assistant Professor of liturgy at Queens College in St. John's NL. He and his wife Marie just celebrated their twelfth wedding anniversary.





Institute of the Sisters of Mercy
of the Americas
West Midwest Community
535 Sacramento Street
Auburn, CA 95603

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

OMAHA, NE
PERMIT NO. 1485