

Science As Divine Revelation

WHY MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF EVOLUTION?

Is it not just the scientifically validated way that things came about?

Only in the last couple of decades has a larger picture emerged.

We were aware that the old myth had long since been discredited and as Joe Campbell in the Power of Myth PBS series said, we had no new myth.

This is a pretty big deficiency!

Brian Swimme, "All professions, all work, all activity in the human world finds its essential meaning in the context of a people's cosmic story." We are literally betting our life on our cosmic story.

If we haven't crafted a new one, we are likely to be shaped by the remains of the old Flat Earth creation story. While we have laid aside many aspects of it, many remain to control our thinking. An example of this is that most folks still divide themselves into their virtues vs. their faults, and are afraid of accepting themselves for fear that they will just behave worse - vestiges of original sin.

Joel Primack has said, "People today are still picturing a Newtonian universe, or in some cases even a medieval earth-centered universe, while exploiting technologies based on relativity, quantum mechanics, and other new science. The major threats to human survival today — world environmental degradation, extinction of species, climate destabilization, nuclear war, terrorists with weapons of mass destruction — these threats result from unrestrained use of such new technologies without a cosmology that makes sense of the nature and scale of their power."

For too long the main picture of evolution that has been offered us is that of a dismal, random, cruel, depressing, barren, vicious, meaningless process. No wonder our vision has been so small.

"Without a meaningful, believable story that explains the world we actually live in, people have no idea how to think about the big picture. And without a big picture, we are very small people. A human without a cosmology is like a pebble lying near the top of a great mountain, in contact with its little indentation in the dirt and pebbles immediately surrounding it, but oblivious to its stupendous view."

But we DO have a new myth! It is at our doorstep and we have been stepping over it.

Edward O. Wilson, "The evolutionary epic is probably the best myth we will ever have."

Brian Swimme, "I am convinced that the story that has come out of three centuries of modern scientific work will be recognized as a supreme human achievement, the scientific enterprise's central gift to humanity. For the first time in human history we now have a creation story that is not tied to one cultural tradition, nor to a political ideology, but instead gathers every human group into its meanings. We are in the midst of a revelatory experience of the universe that must be compared in its magnitude with those of the great religious revelations.

That is quite a statement, but the power of this new myth is only experienced when we take our Cosmic Story seriously.

Who has been doing that? Michael Dowd and his wife, Connie Barlow and a host of their predecessors: Julian Huxley, Teilhard de Chardin, Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, many others.

What have we traditionally looked to our Creation Stories to tell us?

- How can we know the truth?
- Who are we?
- Where did we come from?
- Where are we going?
- Why are we here?
- What ultimately matters?
- How are we to live?
- What happens when we die?

These authors write about how our new Evolutionary Creation Story speaks to all of these.

How can we know the truth? Useful distinctions: Beliefs/facts, Private / Public Revelation, night and day language. Explain these

How we know has evolved from beliefs to facts, from private revelation to public science. Has this eliminated our need for story and mythic expression. NO. But now we begin with science as the foundation and imbue that science with meaning that is life-giving to us. Nowadays we will not accept any myth that contradicts public revelation.

But the scientific story of cosmological evolution is more than just a foundation - it is the primary revelation of that ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being.

For those of us who have rejected the notion of a supernatural God outside the universe, any notion of divinity must mean that the whole universe is divine and science is how we learn about its nature. As such, science is a holy enterprise and scientists, empirical theologians.

And who are we? Each of us must then be just as divine as any other part of the universe. Since we all came from the same original stuff, everything that is true of the universe is true of us. This has some very important lessons for us.

If a lost child who knew nothing of her background and had been raised by an indifferent family suddenly discovered that she was the direct descendant of an illustrious house traceable back many centuries, her sense of identity would expand momentarily even before anything else changed. How much more expansive will our identity be, when we really get it that our lineage goes back 14 billion years and that our family is the WHOLE UNIVERSE.

We ARE the universe, we (and everything that is) we are cells in this giant body, we came out of the earth - we were not dropped onto it. We Are the universe pondering itself.

What has the Great Story of the Universe, as revealed by science, taught us about the universe and as a result, about ourselves?

An extremely long time ago We began as a spot of extremely hot energy. But it was not well-behaved and uniform, so parts got together and created elementary particles and they got together with other particles and created electrons, protons, neutrons and collaborated to create atoms of hydrogen.

So there was this great cloud of hydrogen, but they got out of line and joined cliques and created little stars and big stars, which ganged together to create galaxies. The hydrogen atoms in these stars were strongly attracted to each other so much that they were willing to give up their identity to become helium and a lot of bright energy.

This is what happened in all the stars and so they were able to give out light. In some of the stars the helium atoms sacrifice themselves to become carbon, nitrogen and oxygen and a lot of energy - making their star very bright. In the really big stars the gravitation is so great that they sacrifice themselves to die and become enormously creative - this supernova explosion creates all the other elements and spreads them far and wide in their galaxy.

And again there is collaboration among these elements as they gather together to create molecules of numerous variety and all of these combine to create planets, which are only possible if stars die.

Meanwhile on these planets, carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, oxygen, etc. gather energy and combine with each other to create amino acids, nucleotides, fatty acids and carbohydrates. And together they create protein, RNA, DNA and enzymes which then create life in the form of prokaryotes and bacteria. There is even more collaboration and sacrifice as they come together to create cells with nuclei. Then there is an explosion of creativity as they find innumerable ways to join together to become multicellular organisms.

These plants, fungi and animals face innumerable challenges and create ever-stronger ways to live in their environments and then to take over new & often extreme environments. This is made possible by the great diversity that as a whole supports the lives of the individuals.

Individuals and systems that benefit the whole are benefitted by the whole, and those that harm the whole are harmed by the whole and disappear.

What are some of the lessons here?

- There is a direction in evolution toward greater complexity, diversity, intensity, awareness, intimacy and cooperation on an ever-larger scale.
- Freedom pervades the universe and makes creativity possible.
- The Whole and everything in it is massively creative.
- Collaboration leads to emergent properties that cannot be predicted from the elements.
- Individuals and organizations that collaborate out-compete individuals and organizations that don't.
- Nothing is itself without everything else. We are not ourselves w/o everything else.
- Everything is a system of parts that depend on it and is itself a part of a larger system upon which it depends.
- Death, destruction, and bad news typically yield great creativity and advances.
- Nothing is static - everything is in constant change - everything is a process. Everything is evolving. The Cosmos is the story of the changing story.
- I love Geology because it presents such a grand picture of how everything is moving, flowing, changing in response to everything else, everything is affected by and affects everything else. Everything is a cycle related to other cycles.

How do we make use of this understanding of our cosmic story?

With this magnificent view of who we are, we can trust the process, we can trust ourselves and the diverse family we have gathered around us; we can know that disasters, losses and distress are all possibilities for great creativity and strengthening.

When we have this trust, we can let go of our fears, be spontaneous and creative, enjoy ourselves.

We can rely on the creativity of diversity and welcome it because that is what leads to unanticipated new wonderful solutions.

When our self-interest is aligned with the interest of the whole, then the whole and we are benefitted.

When we identify with the Whole, we identify with a process not a static thing, so we are comfortable with change as the normal state of being and then we can be honest, and we are not so stuck on our individual fortunes. Our knowledge evolves like everything else. Everything evolves and so environments evolve and require fresh creative responses.

So instead of being afraid of science, scholarship and investigation, we embrace them because we are not stuck with a static truth and celebrate the evolution of Truth.

And we are not afraid of facing the other, because we look upon that openness to the other is what leads to learning and creativity.

A great example of the application of these principles was our Workshop on training for shared leadership. Shared Leadership is not just a good idea - it is how the universe has always worked.

Imagine a world where we see ourselves not as individuals, tribes or nations, but as divine parts of this magnificent Whole. When we would look at another, any other, a Muslim or a tree in a rainforest, or a river, we would be seeing ourselves as if we were looking at our own finger or our leg. Tell me - how much war would there be, or injustice or environmental degradation?

Having empirical knowledge as our foundation gives us great freedom to create myth, poetry, art, music, parable and story - to create the night language of dreams that inspire and move us to action and that brings us into a state of harmony with the mysterious Whole. There is no place that is more energizing and peaceful and loving.

With this splendid view of the whole of reality we can have faith in ourselves and our future. We really can.

Thomas Berry, "The basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the Earth. If the dynamics of the Universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the Earth. If this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere - if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings, and finally brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries. There is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the Universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture."

Amen.