

The Universe Story

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh, NC Chris Abbate, July 23, 2018

Chalice Lighting & Opening Thought:

The New Story of the universe is a biospiritual story as well as a galactic story and an Earth story. Each particular being in the universe is needed by the entire universe. With this understanding of our profound kinship with all life, we can establish the basis for a flourishing Earth community.

Thomas Berry (1914-2009) [1]

Check In: Talk about one thing you have learned or a significant feeling or thought you have had since our last meeting.

Topic for reflection (from blog by Fr. Richard Rohr, February 21, 2018):

Judy Cannato (1949-2011)—an author, spiritual director, and visionary of a “new cosmology”—writes:

Thomas Berry has said that our generation is one that is in-between stories. We are caught between the story that religion tells and the story that science tells. . . . During the last several decades, a new story has indeed emerged, a new cosmology that brings matters of science and matters of faith into a space where they no longer need collide, but can complement each other and render a fuller picture of what is true. [If it’s true, it’s true *everywhere and all the time.*] Ironically, in modern times it is science that has told us the story of how all life is connected in a fundamental way—a story that the world’s mystics have been telling for centuries. . . . [2]

In their book, *Journey of the Universe*, philosopher Brian Swimme and historian Mary Evelyn Tucker write:

With our empirical observations expanded by modern science, we are now realizing that our universe is a single immense energy event that began as a tiny speck that has unfolded over time to become galaxies and stars, palms and pelicans, the music of Bach, and each of us alive today. The . . . universe is not simply a place but a story—a story in which we are immersed, to which we belong, and out of which we arose.

This story has the power to awaken us more deeply to who we are. For just as the Milky Way is the universe in the form of a galaxy, and an orchid is the universe in the form of a flower, we are the universe in the form of a human. And every time we are drawn to look up into the night sky and reflect on the awesome beauty of the universe, we are actually the universe reflecting on itself. . . .

With the emergence of humans, we have arrived at an evolutionary breakthrough for being able to develop compassion, not just for our offspring, but for all beings of every order of existence. . . .

Our human destiny is to become the heart of the universe that embraces the whole of the Earth community. We are just a speck in the universe, but we are beings with the capacity to feel comprehensive compassion in the midst of an ocean of intimacy. That is the direction of our becoming more fully human. [3]

References:

[1] Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (Sierra Club Books: 2006), 57-58, 62.

[2] Judy Cannato, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life* (Sorin Books: 2010), 16.

[3] Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (Yale University Press: 2011), 1-2, 115.

Questions for Discussion:

In what ways is the universe a place or a story, or a combination of both?

Is our story today of the universe new, or is it the same story of interconnectedness that people have been telling all throughout human history? Has technology (not necessarily scientific understanding) divorced us from the universe story?

How can the universe story awaken us to who we are, individually and collectively?

How do science and religion come together/co-exist in the modern age? How do they shape and influence each other?

Is there a tension between science and religion? Can religious belief co-exist in a scientific age? This may require defining faith and religious belief.

Can science enhance faith or religious belief, or does it diminish or undermine it? How can they complement each other?

As we evolve in scientific knowledge, what is the place of religion? How will religious thought/belief need to evolve as our scientific knowledge increases?

What does a religion of the universe story look, sound, and feel like? How would you describe the religion of today and what do you think it will look like in the future?

Closing Thought:

The universe is represented in every one of its particles. Everything is made of one hidden stuff. The world globes itself in a drop of dew.

Ralph Waldo Emerson