

The Universe is in us. I love those Symphony of Science songs using words of scientists. Karen laughs at me but I find them oddly inspiring. You can just imagine me driving around listening and singing along with songs about black holes and  $E=Mc^2$  squared...

Today we're talking about the intersection of science and religion – and it's the continuation of a sermon I gave back in January that was investigating the different stories we tell about the meaning of life and what we are called to do. We looked at teaching by cosmologist Brian Swimme & evolutionary theologian Thomas Berry and at the ways our understandings of the world had evolved over the last century or so.

For those who weren't here – or are like me and can't remember what I said yesterday – here's the synopsis. Swimme & Berry claimed that as humans, our relationship with the universe had existed for eons as a personal experience of the world, but that in the last few hundred years, science had opened up ways for us to know about reality in a whole new way.

Our first stories, those told by our tribal and shamanic ancestors, were of wonder at the mystery of the universe. They understood themselves as intimately connected to the ongoing story of the natural world and we still see this perspective in the indigenous peoples today. There is a deep connection and relationship, respect and reverence. These were the source of our early stories for much of the world; stories of the divine incarnate in the living world.

The next stage of human stories is what we think of as classical religion. Places where the divine became proscribed and contained within human directed rituals and mythology even as it was made transcendent. This separated out the power and creativity of the universe from the natural world – and even with some accommodation for humility – placed humans at the center of the creation story. In these stories human beings were at the top of a pyramid of value and this shaped our psychic separation from the natural world. Berry says "This completed the alienation and isolation of the natural world from the divine and made possible the conception of the world as a mere external object." End quote

The final separation of human beings from the natural world came with the scientific-technological-industrial period - the one we are still operating within today. Berry continued "a further step in degradation came later, when not only were the divine and the human taken away from intimate presence... but all inner dynamism was removed... Thus there emerged the concept of crass matter as mere extension, capable only of external manipulation and mechanistic activity."<sup>i</sup>

This is the place we are right now – and where many of us are trying to break free - from a place where the universe in which we live is entirely separate from human beings and our actions within it. As Unitarian Universalists, we know this is not the truth. Our seventh principle proclaims our interconnection to the web of life and affirms our responsibility to and accountability to life.

But the world around us doesn't live from that perspective. And it's especially hard to watch the hard work done by generations of environmentalists being overturned by our current administration – seemingly set on totally denying the sacred in anyplace outside of a bank vault.

Swimme and Berry – and others – posit that the next evolutionary stage of human development will be one where we transcend our current blindness and come to a realization of our inherent interconnection. To an understanding of our role as the consciousness of the planet. They name this coming epoch the Ecozoic age. A time when we truly understand ourselves as not in the universe, but a mode of the universe that has become aware of itself and acts thoughtfully from that place of consciousness.

But how can we, in our small lives, with our multiple and competing commitments participate in this transformation of the human consciousness? One way is to find the ways we separate ourselves from the earth – the ways we separate science and religion and create a dualistic relationship.

Our readings earlier were from Michael Dowd – a self-described evolutionary theologian & big history evangelist. He says that part of our work is to understand the deep connection between religion and science – and to understand that they are both telling the same story. He begins by talking about the meaning of God. Now buckle your seatbelts, because I know I have a lot of folks that do not believe in God – and get nervous when we start using the G-word in church.

But Dowd's definition of God is simply evidential reality. God is the universe revealing itself to us. Which is what has been happening since the very beginning. Humans observed reality and recorded it – and explained what it meant to be human by what they observed. This is why god looks different in different places. God in the desert is much different than God in a rain forest. God on the ocean looks nothing like god in a canyon. Different places and times illuminated different aspects of observable reality – and they all helped – and help - us to understand the world in which we live.

He quotes Philip K. Dick, who said "Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away." I don't think most of us in this room would argue with that definition of God. God as reality revealed through evidence – through provable, observable, repeatable interaction. The problem isn't that God isn't real, it's that religious people have frozen God in different times and places and not allowed an evolving God that keeps up with our understanding of the universe and reality.

There is so much made of the conflict between science and religion – especially in the media – but the interesting thing is that for most people there isn't much conflict. A Pew Research Survey in 2015 found that 68% of Americans found no conflict between their personal beliefs and science.<sup>ii</sup> Ironically, the folks who thought there was conflict were either the non-churched or evangelical protestants – people at either end of the religious spectrum.

I know I never felt conflicted growing up as a Catholic. My faith taught that God created the world – but didn't say that the bible was exactly the way it happened. I think the Vatican learned its lesson from Galileo and Copernicus and decided to ride out those kinds of debates. When I attended Loyola during seminary for a spiritual direction program I was a little worried going in that I would find myself in

conflict with the worldview there, but I shouldn't have worried. Loyola is a Jesuit institution – and the Jesuits are all about exploring and seeking. In fact, I found myself entirely comfortable with the material presented and watched as the devout Catholics in the room struggled as they had to let go of deeply held beliefs and assumptions.

Religion and Science have gotten a bad reputation – ever since the heretic verdict of Galileo and the Scopes Monkey trial. But in reality, they both serve a very similar purpose. They are ways for humans to learn about reality and find ways to live the best we can. Both science and religion observe the world, and then tell stories which fit those observations. We have multiple creation stories, because people at different points and times observed different things. But now, science can tell us a new story based on repeatable observations – on evidence.

Michael Dowd says that we need to begin spreading a new gospel or good news story about the big history of our planet. A history that we all share, no matter where we live or how we understand our place in the cosmos. Like Berry and Swimme, Dowd sees three stages in religious development, but he describes them a little differently. His first stage Religion 1.0 - is the original which lasted for 99.9% of human history. Wisdom was passed down by the elders through stories. It was collective wisdom, gathered through many generations, about how reality worked and how humans fit within it. They told stories which explained observable experiences with language that spoke to both heart and mind.

Religion 2.0 occurred a few thousand years ago when those oral stories got written down. Suddenly a history which had been flexible and could be responsive to ongoing changes got locked into one version. Still gathered over time and brought together from many sources, but it became disconnected from the reality in which it had been written. It was collected wisdom which pointed to observable experiences and put meaning around them – just like the Easter story we told a short while ago. These stories endure because they touch common experiences.

There are places in almost every human life where you have to let go of what you thought was real and important, and step into a new reality. It can feel like death and resurrection. The Easter story passes on this understanding and can be shared with generations to understand that dying to what you think is true doesn't mean actual death. Something amazing and wonderful can be right around the corner – if you can hold on through the dark time in the tomb.

As long as people understood these stories as larger wisdom tales, to be shared and learn from, they were fine. But when we started to think scientifically – to assign factuality to the written word – trouble crept in. People began treating wisdom stories the same as the facts reported on the evening news. They took understandings written in what Dowd called night language in our first reading, and applied day language understandings to them.

We are now experiencing Religion 3.0 – and Dowd says we are still working to get it right. In the next iteration of religion, science is the sacred scripture by which we understand reality. Science is, again, collective wisdom. Gathered from scientists around the globe. They can be Jewish scientists, or Hindu scientists, or Buddhist scientists, or atheist scientists, but they are observing the same reality and sharing their understandings with one another.

Now some people reject this premise – and again – they are people who mistakenly take the written revelation of religion 2.0 as fact rather than metaphor. They take things that were observations of reality in a certain place or time, written with the best understanding of that time in language that spoke to the heart, and try to make them mean the same thing they would mean if written today. While rejecting the evidential reality right in front of us. This is both dangerous and harmful to all of us and we can observe that in our world today. By holding onto past understandings instead of living into the evidential, observable reality, we ignore the deeper implication of our actions to our peril. By refusing to acknowledge our interconnection and effect on the planet, we continue its destruction – which is our own destruction.

Dowd proposes a new evolutionary theology has three points:

1. Living in right relationship with Ultimate reality matters – we have to open our eyes to what actually is – now what we want to believe is true.
2. Ignoring God’s evidential world can have tragic consequences – global climate change.
3. Being faithful to God (reality) means honoring both the past and the future. <sup>iii</sup> We can learn from the wisdom of the past while still remaining in right relationship with the present – which will ensure a future for our children’s children.

The intersection of religion and science is that point of being aware of the world in which live and living respectfully in relationship with it. It brings us back to Berry and Swimme – to the recognition that we are modes of the universe – not separate, but deeply connected to both history and the future of the planet. Now, if you are interested there are TED talks by Michael Dowd – saying this much better than I. And I will show a film called “Journey to the Universe” by Brian Swimme on Thursday May 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:00pm. Maybe we can create an ongoing discussion group to explore this idea of evidential, repeatable and reproducible reality as God – and figure out what that means to each of us on our individual search for meaning and purpose.

Religion and science are both modes of knowing – knowing about ourselves and about the world in which we live. Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to be present to the world in which we live – at whatever level and commitment is possible. For some of us, watching the birds at the feeder is a deeply spiritual experience. For others it might be peering through a telescope or pondering beautiful poetry. For others it is traveling on a bus to Springfield this Tuesday to lobby legislators. To yet others it is taking a pot of soup to a neighbor in need.

Whatever reality you live within – the goal is to be present, to live in right relationship, and to understand that each one of us is made of the dust of stars and woven into the fabric of reality. We are connected to one another on our explorations, sharing insights, pausing in wonder, helping and caring for one another in ways both small and large. Our faith helps us see with an inner eye, mysteries beyond comprehension which call us to be together and to serve the world in which we live. The universe is in us – and we are the universe. Blessed be.

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<sup>i</sup> (Berry, Thomas edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker, 2006)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/10/22/5-facts-about-the-interplay-between-religion-and-science/>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QeTWVw9Fm4>