

April Talk at the Forum – April 24, 2022

Cornelia - introduction

I had hoped to be with you who are in the Friend's room but I didn't want to talk the entire time through a mask, so I am here on Zoom. And welcome to the zoom people. Thanks to all the tech people.

I will begin by explaining what the New Story is about

Thomas Berry, a cultural historian, and author of the books of *The Great Work* and *Dream of the Earth*, writes that history is governed by *those overarching movements* that give shape and meaning to life....(p.1) The words New Story are a name suggested by Thomas Berry for the overarching movement we are part of now. It involves a major change in human consciousness. Consciousness carries our fundamental self-understanding and sense of identity.

Joanna Macy calls it the Great Turning.

Since the new story is about a change in consciousness, we are invited to enter into it, to participate in it, as it is more than learning about the changes in worldview in an academic sense.

There have been many changes in consciousness throughout history.

One remarkable example of a change in consciousness is described by the German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) in his book *The Origin and Goal of History*. He identified major developments in human consciousness occurring independently in several centers of civilization between 800 B.C.E. and 200 B.C.E. The social, psychological, and spiritual changes were of such a fundamental nature that it was a defining era in world history for much of humankind. Jaspers calls it the first axial revolution. In the axial change the Individual no longer identified as strongly with the fixed tradition of the tribe. (p. 256, *Awakening Universe ... Coelho*)

Major figures in the axial period, include Lao-tzu and Confucius in China, Buddha and Mahavira in India; Zoroaster in Persia; Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremian in Israel, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle in Greece. (Cousins, 1992, p.4)

In the more than two millennia since that axial change, there has been further changes in consciousness. The change in consciousness from the Dark Ages to the Renaissance comes to mind as an example. We can think of other changes although it takes a cultural historian like Thomas Berry to identify them carefully.

There are several reasons why is it thought that we are now in the midst of a major change in consciousness.

One is the recognition and embrace of the 13.8-billion-year evolutionary story of our origins within which we and all the earth emerged. Another is the fundamental change in our understanding of matter coming from quantum physics. I'll say more about that in a moment. Also, our now widely available knowledge of spiritual traditions from around the world effects our consciousness. The environmental crisis is telling us we desperately need a change in consciousness. Breakthrough insights into the natural world, including the interest in the communication among trees is part of the change in consciousness. People from all around the world are in instant communication by means of zoom and other electronic communications. The immediacy of graphic pictures shown daily of the war in Ukraine on our TV screens shakes us and awakens us more deeply to the ongoing tragic wars.

I will focus in this brief talk on the change in consciousness with regard to the spirituality of the person and spiritual communities as well as brief reflections on the crucial importance of the New Story regarding the ecological crisis

The New Story has been especially important to me as I was caught in parts of the old story. The new story opened windows for me into a profound spirituality, a transformed consciousness that was not available in the old story I had learned as a science student in college.

So how did the new story become so important to me?

In early 1990s I was part of a small group that watched a video series called *Canticle to the Cosmos*, taught by Brian Swimme a physicist. In one of the talks, he spoke of the discovery of the quantum field that is the nonvisible energetic reality that is 99.99% of the atom. Oh my goodness! What is he talking about? Can it be? I was deeply moved. If atoms are 99.99% this nonvisible energetic realm, that

means I am of that nature. We are comprised of this non-visible realm since atoms join to become molecules and become part of complex forms and beings, all coming into being in the gradual process of complexification described Eric Jantsch as the self-organizing process.

Matter is an organized energy configuration. The energy of the nonvisible energetic realm.

(Baseball stadium analogy.)

The quantum field was not detected and measured by the direct modes of scientific measurement. It is only identified indirectly by the particles emerging from it. So it is not of the same nature as the objectively measured world of traditional western science, yet it is integral to our daily world.

This nonvisible energetic reality underlies both the microscopic world of subatomic particle and the macroworld of stars and galaxies.

Swimme calls the non-visible realm the “all nourishing abyss.” He describes as a nonvisible ocean of potentiality. In my book I use the words “seamless plenum” to name this reality. It has many names.

(Copernicus)

Pondering this remarkable discovery and catching a glimpse of its great importance I realized we are in a position like people listening to Copernicus. They thought his idea that the earth circles the sun was clearly mistaken. We see the sun go around the earth everyday. Copernicus’ idea was unacceptable. So may this discovery of the nature of matter seem unacceptable.

Reflection on the consequence of the separation of science and religion

Before turning to speak about the spiritual significance of the discovery of the quantum field, I want to remind you that we all are living in a culture in which science is a distinct mode of inquiry. We are familiar with the history in Europe when the separation between science and religion was necessary so science could have freedom of inquiry.

So, because of this continued separation, it is common to think that a discovery made by scientists is assumed to be strictly scientific information, it only informs us about the physical world. It is in this context many people are not able to hear that the discovery of the quantum field by scientist might be relevant to our understanding of spirit and of the sacred. It is easily declared it has nothing to do with spirituality.

I was taught within the old, objectified story that has been called the machine paradigm. The atom was a small physical particle. The understanding of matter, the matter that comprises my very being, and its predictable interactions did not have a place for leadings and the inner light. There was even a claim at one time that science had become fully explanatory of our world.

I abandoned Quakerism for several years because I was convinced by these claims.

But there is a profound breakthrough coming into consciousness from this discovery by science of the quantum field, the all-nourishing abyss.

(Mysticism)

Before hearing Brian Swimme's talk, I had studied the mystical tradition of the West. Learning that we are 99.99% a non-visible energetic realm, I thought "Oh my Goodness" I had read similar words when I studied some major voices in the mystical tradition.

The Quaker, John Yungblut wrote that God is "the very self of myself and we are all members of one Godbody". Catherine of Genoa wrote: "My me is God, nor do I know my selfhood save in Him"

Don't these words "My me is God" and "God is the very self of myself" require us to ask in what way their words are related to the discovery by physicists that we are 99.99% the non-visible reality. I was profoundly moved by my recognition of this apparent common witness.

I struggled with it for many years. I dared not talk about it because it so deeply contradicts the assumptions of the western dualistic tradition in which matter is not sacred and scientific discoveries cannot have anything to do with spirituality. In light of the western separation of science from religion we cannot accept that the discovery of the nature of matter informs Catherine of Genoa's experience and Yungblut's words. But I have learned from the new story to question the dualism of the West that has separated science and religion. Some of our interest in indigenous traditions arise from the fact that this split did not occur in those traditions. They have not pulled the sacred out of their story. The current interest in the Celtic tradition among several of us in the New Story group is that it challenged the decisions by the church in the 4th century which denied the sacred presence in matter. You may be familiar with the Pelagian controversy.

Here are the words of two people who have abandoned the western split.

Teilhard de Chardin, a paleontologist, writes that the world in his experience is like a burning bush. (p.5, Newell)

Hafiz wrote of God's magnificent masquerade as us. ... Because of what he calls the masquerade, the daily physical world, we are easily not aware of who we are in our fulness.

So are we coming to know the same hidden reality by different modes of knowing? There is reason to conclude that the answer is yes. We are coming to understand Jungblut's words "God is the very self of myself " can be affirmed by different modes of knowing by both physics and spiritual experience. So the discovery by physicists can be held together with many accounts over centuries of experiences of the sacred within and around us. This is a major healing change for the West, it heals the deep Western split. It certainly changes our common contemporary consciousness.

(We have to carefully ponder our understanding of the word God as inadequate meanings may lead us to reject this integration.)

Here is the same integration described by a physicist.

In his book the *Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra, a theoretical physicist, wrote that “modern physics leads us to a view of the world which is very similar to the views held by mystics of all ages and traditions.” There it is. I’ll read it again. It is ironic Capra notes that physics, the extreme specialization of the rational mind, should be the science that now led us to mysticism. (p. 45 my book)

(Add other scientist’s witness??? Erwin Laszlo and the Akashic Field , Werner Heisenberg)

We now realize that although the disciplines of science had to separate in the western world from the church it is always only one world. Isn’t it likely that it should be known indirectly by different modes of inquiry?

Although the seamless plenum is not knowable by our daily consciousness it is fully and deeply present.

This integration encourages us to learn to be more receptive of this presence within and around us. It becomes knowable, in a non-rational mode of knowing, by meditation or in a silent meeting for worship, in the natural world and unexpected spontaneous insights and felt inner experience.

It need not be a strong mystical experience but learning to live in the flow of our life in ourselves and in communities with leadings and careful listening.

Jesus of Nazareth

In our new context many traditional attempts to say who Jesus was are congruent with this new consciousness carried by the New Story.

The Christian tradition has said that Jesus, a man from Nazareth, was God. This is not unlike Yungblut saying God is the very self of myself. And Catherine of Siena saying my me is God. Newell writes: Jesus disclosed the deeper truth of our being. (p 89, check)

Fortunately, the split between science and religion that led me astray as a science student can no longer be maintained in the context of our 13.7-million-year evolutionary story. While the split between science and spirituality was historically necessary and we still will continue to value the discipline of science, the common recognition of the seamless plenum strengthens our confidence in the possibility of deeper experience of the sacred.

Turning Briefly to Address the Environmental Crisis

The affirmation that the seamless plenum is integral to all the natural world is one area in which the New Story has particular persuasive power. It is greatly needed as it speaks directly to our alienation from the natural world. As this integration is embraced and experienced it will become a powerful motivation to change our relationship to the natural world. There is a new consciousness of life's interrelatedness within the seamless whole.

We find the basis for strong opposition to the West's often unbridled exploitation of the natural world. We have not had this strong spiritual basis to challenge this exploitation because of western history, as just described, has denied the sacred depths of matter. The fate of the natural world has largely belonged to decisions based on objectified science alone.

[TALK re Muir if time]

An example of the power of knowing and experiencing the sacred depth of nature, is exemplified by John Muir's long battle to save the beautiful Hetch Hetchy valley from becoming a reservoir for San Francisco. His opposition was no doubt a consequence of his many experiences of the sacred as he hiked in the Sierra Nevadas. He could not accept the destruction of the valley he loved and which he knew, in his experience, to be sacred. The damn was built after a five-year battle in Congress. It is moving to me had many congresspeople had his experience in wild places and understood the New Story, they would have sided with Muir. In the context of the new story we may be led to very strong

opposition of unnecessary projects. The new story can help us value more strongly the truth of Muir's experience and deep caring.

My book is titled The Depth of Our Belonging

In the book I describe how becoming convinced that the seamless plenum is indeed intrinsic to my being was healing. It was with great joy and excitement my spiritual experiences so very important to me, found a home within the New Story when the objectified world I had studied did not offer a home for them. The integration just described enabled me to embrace and seek healing of emotional wounding as there is a comprehensive ordering sacred reality inner to my very person within which my wounding could be held. This is profoundly healing although a journey to embrace and find a deeper, fuller life is often a long journey. We now can have more confidence that we live in a world in which there can be a journey to healing.

The New Story is a Great Gift to Quakerism.

There is a strong tradition that Quakerism is a mystical tradition given that it values experiences of the Light within and experiences of leadings. Unfortunately, mysticism has for many people the ring of being esoteric or only describing the experience of a limited number of people. Isn't this breakthrough embracing the seamless plenum a great gift to Quakerism as mysticism finds a welcoming home in the New Story. Quakerism is no longer on the margins as it is given a firm foundation now in the new story. Quakerism can identify itself within this new story with great fruitfulness. It is hard for many people to embrace Friends experiences of the Light in the old story, but they can be attracted to Quakerism given the New Story's strong affirmation of its mystical tradition, now freshly heard and affirmed.

Friends certainly have reasons to celebrate the New Story.

Also, the new story affirms Quakerism's tradition of leadings and help with discernment and support of leadings.

In the light of the embrace of evolution we are well aware of the history of the ongoing creative unfolding of the earth. It took the universe 13.7 billion years to bring people and the incredible diversity of the natural world into being not to mention exploding stars and galaxies. This creativity continues. Considering the depth of our belonging within this story of ongoing creativity, we can be hopeful that many people find greater confidence and trust in listening for leadings great and small. Leadings are a form of creativity and insight.

Many Friends have not needed the new story as they already live within many of its central revelations regarding their spirituality. But many people will find it enlightening and healing as they are caught in the old story. Individuals and communities can be strengthened if they work within this great evolution of consciousness, the New Story.

Conclusion

As a culture we are now able to hear with great confidence and clarity the witness of many mystics and poets and musicians and Friends experiences of the Light within.