

## Pacific Yearly Meeting Book Talk

*The Depth of Our Belonging (show book)* is about the change in worldview we are now offered and why it has been of great spiritual importance to me and others seeking the fullness of our being. Although I do not write explicitly in the book about its potential importance for Quakerism I hope that will become clear and we can discuss that

Being Californians I wonder if some of you have worked with the teachings of Brian Swimme. I fear I may be bringing coals to Newcastle.

The book has an autobiographical element.

As an undergraduate and as a graduate student in biology I learned a very reductive, largely mechanistic story of the natural world and the human person. As I write in the book:

READ p. 1 – (3rd paragraph)

“One chilly evening in college as I was walking slowly across the campus, I realized that I must accept that there was no possibility of indwelling sacred Presence or “Light within” my being or within Earth, given the assumptions that I was being taught in my biology classes. In a class on evolutionary biology all changes were accounted for by mechanized forces and biochemical events. What I heard in my classes, there is no larger order, no patterns, no intrinsic creativity, no unity.

In my late twenties I had a strong spiritual awakening experience as I describe in the book. I learned eventually to call it a mystical experience. It involved being knelt, a motion which I did not consciously intend. I was 29 years old.

READ –p.1 “I had no name for the experience and no ability to talk about it and no understanding of what happened. Although it was of great importance to me, as it was profoundly attractive and unforgettable, I said nothing about it for many years. I told no one as I feared its importance to me would not be heard or that I would be found foolish and troubled. I could not speak as I had no adequate

words and furthermore, I feared that if I spoke, the experience might be discredited. The search in these chapters is for a worldview that offers an understanding of such experiences and to encourage wide embrace by individuals and the culture of the profoundly attractive, healing, numinous reality that I knew is available to us.

In the reductive worldview that I had been taught, I had no way to understand or embrace that experience. I had no way to grasp its significance although I did know experientially it was of great importance both personally and regarding discerning the nature of the world in which we so deeply belong.

(Western History)

The origins of this objectification of the natural world in the West such that the natural world, ourselves included, has no intrinsic spirituality can be traced and explained. I've gradually come to recognize how deep this dualism is in the Western culture. It is important that we be aware of the depth of this cultural assumption.

One person who writes about an historical episode in the development of this dualistic worldview is John Philip Newell in the book *Sacred Earth, Scared Soul*. He explains that in the 4<sup>th</sup> century Pelagius brought to Rome a spirituality from his Celtic tradition that recognized that every life form is in essence divine. (p. 23) In a famous controversy with Augustine, the Pelagian controversy, the Celtic insight into the sacred depth of the person was rejected. Celtic spirituality challenged the teaching of original sin so the intrinsic sacred depth of the person could not be accepted as that would be contradictory. And the sacred depth of nature was also not recognized as Rome did not want to undertake overseeing land use and human relationship to the natural world.

And there is the history of reductionist thought by people like Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The reductive thought was intended to apply only to the developing scientific method but it has had influence beyond science within our culture. I was not able to keep that reductive thought separate from the whole of life.

The work of science has had great value in the medical discoveries and technology, but at the same time it has involved the disregard of sacred presence in the physical world that has been very costly for several reasons. One is regarding a person's fundamental identity and self-understanding. Another cost of this reductionism in our culture's unbridled exploitation of the natural world now visible in so many ways as deforestation and pollution of our waterways.

It is important to say many people were not caught in the reductive worldview and could embrace their religious tradition, but the reductive worldview is the dominant costly pattern in our culture especially regarding our relationship with the natural world. The dualism in our worldview may explain in part the documented decrease in church attendance. I don't know how Quakerism is doing.

### **My introduction to our changing worldview**

In the early 1990s a small group of us gathered to watch the 12-part video series, *Canticle to the Cosmos*. Brian Swimme, the lecturer, is a mathematical cosmologist although now for years he primarily teaches about the change in worldview coming from discovery of the quantum field and evolution. He studied with Thomas Berry. He is the author of **Hidden Heart of the Cosmos** and other books.

(Book, p. 15)– Brian Swimme said “A full reaching of physics and geology requires teaching the interior, nonvisible, energetic depth that pervades all of matter.” My heart stirred with these words. The idea that teaching physics, no less, requires teaching interior depth certainly caught my attention.

I could hardly believe Brian Swimme's words.

Brian Swimme also teaches, as do other physicists, that the “interior, nonvisible depth is 99.99% of the atom, as impossible to comprehend as that initially seems.” (2004, *Seamlessness, Powers of the Universe*. Center for the Story of the Universe, DVD )

It was a memorable day for me because I had studied the words and experiences of mystics. I wondered if physicists and mystics are both touching into the same non-visible energetic reality present within and around the manifest physical world?

It is important to understand the nature of the energetic field. It was not detected by the direct mode of scientific measurement. No high-powered microscope, no microwave detector nor any scientific measurement devices could detect this Interiority.

It is only identified by the particles emerging from it. So this nonvisible energetic reality is not of the same nature as the objectively measured world of traditional western science, yet it is integral to our daily world. Note the use of the word non-visible rather than invisible. If it were invisible it might become visible but nonvisible means it never can be seen.

So our understanding of the nature of our daily world has profoundly changed. Swimme calls this nonvisible reality the "All Nourishing Abyss." In my book I call it the sacred plenum.

I quote in the book the words of several well-known spiritual authors who help us hear the proposed commonality of their spiritual experience and the discovery of the quantum field. p. 40. (endnotes are available for each citation)

Louis Dupre wrote: "A mystic had found a way of seeing the finite, namely as it exists within the infinite."

Teilhard de Chardin was a scientist, a paleontologist, and a Jesuit.

Chardin write of "The Diaphany of the Divine at that heart of a glorious universe – as I have experienced it through contact with the earth – the Divine radiating from the depths of a blazing matter."

Here are the words of people who use the word God to refer to the interior Presence they have experienced (p.41 book)

Jungblut was a Quaker. He wrote that “the consensus of the mystics of all living religions, namely that God is nearest me in me, that God is the very Self of my self, and that we are all members of one Godbody, who is the very ground of our being.”

Catherine of Genoa: “My me is God, not do I know my selfhood save in Him.”

Meister Eckhart: “As I have often said, there is something in the soul so closely akin to God that it is already one with him and need never be united to Him.”

Returning to Jungblut's words “God is the very self of myself” and Catherine of Genoa’s words “my me is God nor do I know my selfhood save in Him.” Aren’t these words congruent with the discovery by physicists that we are 99.99% the non-visible energetic reality?

It isn’t just people concerned with spirituality who write about the integration but also some scientists.

Here are the words of Erwin Laszlo. He identifies the Akasha as the quantum field. p. 47 The Akasha is the fundamental medium of the cosmos. It underlies all the particles and all the forces and fields that govern particles and the systems built of particles, throughout space and time. Science has a name for it; it is the quantum vacuum also known as the “unified vacuum” or “neither.” (Word vacuum is no longer used.) Laszlo identifies the quantum field as the Akasha.

So he is one of the writers who explicitly integrates in his writing the commonality of the quantum field and that which is known in spiritual experience. He writes from an integrated perspective.

Another most important spokesperson for this common testimony written as a scientist, a paleontologist, is Teilhard de Chardin. His writings are one of the foundational sources of the change in worldview that I am describing. He actually writes from the perspective of science and spirituality. He was a Jesuit.

READ - Teilhard de Chardin p. 47

Teilhard offers an image that speaks to the integration just offered: “Like the meridians as they approach the poles, science, philosophy and religions are bound to converge as they draw near to the whole.”

Valuing people’s felt experience of this sacred interiority no longer requires a leap of faith. However, these experiences are not easily known as they are hidden to daily consciousness.

I struggled with this integration for many years. I dared not talk about it because it so deeply contradicts the assumptions of western dualism that I had absorbed from the culture. I feared seeming to be naïve and foolish. From the perspective of our dominant rational consciousness, this integration cannot be proven. In our dualistic culture we have assumed scientific research and discoveries are to be kept separate from spirituality. Historically there was appropriate fear in the West that spiritual traditions would curtail the work of scientists but now, to our very great surprise and joy, this discovery in physics about the nature of matter is a great gift to spiritual traditions.

Based on some of the voices and current rethinking some of my previously unchallenged assumptions lost their power. I realize now this integration is profound good news.

Recognition of the sacred depth of the manifest world compels profound change in our lives as we recognize the depth of our integration within the natural world. For both the human future and the future of the natural world our behavior must change. We may learn from the long traditions in many “native” cultures of a life lived in the context of knowledge and experience of the sacred nature of the natural world. We may learn from them as we seek to create a sustainable culture.

## Impersonal?

There can be a fear that this integration, given the central place of a discovery made by science, will mean the sacred plenum is impersonal. As I understand it, we do not know the powerful energetic field directly but within the ordering of the person. According to Jung, the Self (capital S Self) is where the sacred is known. It is traditionally called the soul although with some differences. So it is supremely personal when known within the individual. Our experiences of the sacred in the natural world find a welcoming home.

## Another Theme in the Book.

One of the reasons for my advocacy for the great importance of this integration is that it invites the person into a healing belonging within the very matter of our bodies and the natural world. This is one of the reasons for the title The Depth of Our Belonging as we learn in this transformed worldview there is deep spiritual belonging and healing.

In a culture with so much despair, confidence in our grounding in the nonvisible creative reality can be healing. We all belong within a profound communion.

## Quakerism

There is a long stream of thought that Quakerism is a mystical tradition given its valuing of experiences of the light within and experiences of leadings.

Unfortunately, mysticism has had for many people the ring of being esoteric or describing the experiences of a limited number of people. Given the integration just described the label of esotericism is found to be an error. Life changing mystical experiences or variety of experiences of the sacred can no longer be culturally marginalized but recognized as revelatory of the nature of our daily world and the identity of the person.

We are in a period of profound transition. Isn't this breakthrough embracing the sacred plenum a great gift to Quakerism as its search for the light finds a remarkable welcoming home in our new world view? Thomas Berry called it the new story. Integrations with the Christian tradition, articulated in our new context is being offered. Quakerism can embrace this integration, teach it and promote it with great potential fruitfulness. Within the old story it is hard for people to be confident there can be awakening to the Light. Within our new story Friends now can be freshly heard.