

Monastic Scribe XXVI: April 29, 2022

Jesus Meets Mister Spock

I am still surprised when I hear people express their belief that the Catholic Church is opposed to science. The story of Galileo Galilei (1564- 1642) is a shocking one to many people who deduct that the church has always been and continues to be against science. There are, indeed, some Christians who oppose science but not the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II apologized for the church's treatment of Galileo in 2000. Earlier than that he spoke often of the importance of science. Did you know that it was a Catholic priest who uncovered the theory of the hot Big Bang story? The Church sponsors conferences on science and religion. The Vatican has its own observatory in the hills outside Rome.

In our country there has been a growing anti-intellectualism and an increasing suspicion or even rejection of science. We live in an age when people think they can make up their own facts. Truth is not important. Some people, including politicians, reject truths they do not like and make up their own facts. Subjective belief in making my own truth is openly expressed. This is sad for the fabric of our society. Maybe the Church has, in the past, demanded we accept too many doubtful truths but today it upholds the truth and upholds science. Of course you wouldn't always know this if you listen to some local homilies and talks. The teaching of the Vatican is not gotten down to all our parishes.

Science and Religion should assist each other in pursuing the truth. Science can be too closed to the life of the spirit, the mind, imagination, thought, and creativity. Religion can be closed to anything new that threatens its perception of reality. Science can document the what and the how of our universe but Religion struggles to define the why of it all. Both may be tentative in some areas at times as new discoveries and insights develop. So we need to keep studying, listening, learning.

Saint Thomas Aquinas said that if we wish to know God we should study the world. The Psalms already preached this, "The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament shows forth the work of God's hands." (Ps. 19:2) And Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, "What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made." (Romans, 1:19-20)

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Thanks to science we now know so much more about this world than we have ever known before. The vastness and intricacies of the cosmos just blows our mind. And all adds to the majesty and beauty of God. Our God is a great Mystery and calls us into a life beyond what we can imagine. But we have to adjust some of our old images. The universe was not created in six days but has been evolving for almost fourteen billion years. The three tier universe which is the base of the world view in the Bible now cedes to vast, uncountable galaxies.

All of this challenges us to reimagine, much more meaningfully, the beginning of humankind, Adam and Eve, original sin, the Creator God, the incarnational God of Jesus Christ, the life giving Holy Spirit, as well as pain, suffering and the problem of evil. There is nothing to fear here. Our faith, seeking understanding, is deeper and more ennobled than we could have imagined. A deeper faith leads to a deeper hope and a deeper love as we are overcome with awe and beauty at God's creation.

Evolution is not a theory but the way that God, since the beginning, has been creating and continues to create. We are called to take part in that evolutionary creation. Evolution means God is a God of the future, a God of promises. We believe in this God and therein is our hope no matter how bad things seem in our world. Not just the earth but the entire cosmos is God's creation and our concern.

The "new cosmology" or simply "the new story" is the tale of an expanding universe, always in motion, growing, incalculably vast. A century ago we thought our milky way was the only galaxy but now we know there are billions of galaxies. Black holes and black energy are the latest mysteries of this story. And we are part of this story. Our bodies are made of the very stardust that is found in all creation. Quantum mechanics shows us how everything and everyone is connected. It shows us how we can touch each other from a distance.

I am not a scientist and certainly not a mathematician. I don't comprehend all the details nor can I differentiate all the categories of sub-atomic matter. But I don't have to understand the details. I rely on scientists to explain things. But my view (my philosophy) of the cosmos, which comes from religion, adds meaning to all of this. I have enjoyed reading Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Berry, John Haught, Ilia Delio, Elizabeth Johnson, Laurie Brink and others to get a better picture of what

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this beautiful cosmos is all about. I recommend these authors to you. I urge all my readers not to be afraid of science but to embrace it and open your mind to a fuller comprehension of what God does for us. It will also give deeper incentive to work on climate change and care of the environment. We are creating with God but often have been destroying creation. Is this new for you? Is it exciting for you? You can let me know at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.