

incarnating

a sermon preached on the feast of the

Birth of Christ

25 December 2015

at

st john's

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

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the lections: Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-4 (5-12); John 1:1-14

“In the beginning was the quantum, and the quantum was with God, and the quantum was God. All things were in the quantum, and apart from the quantum nothing could exist or come to be.”¹

Of course, no one has ever *seen* the quantum.² But as physicists have now established, what they call the ‘quantum vacuum’ “is the basic, fundamental, and underlying reality of everything in this universe, including ourselves”.³ Not only that, though we think of a vacuum as *empty*, in fact the opposite is the case. The quantum vacuum is the 13.8 billion year old unfathomably vast ‘sea’ of energy – the “substrate of all that exists”!⁴ Indeed, apart from the quantum vacuum, nothing could exist or come to be!

It is astonishing, and immensely exciting, that in our time physics is describing reality in terms that so resonate with our tradition.

We come to celebrate this ancient feast, with knowledge about the universe undreamed of by our forebears. We come as those who now know that the universe is *not* static and eternally-fixed as our forebears assumed, but is in fact *evolving*. Moreover, we humans ourselves are *active participants* in this immense evolutionary process – every atom and element of which we are made having been fashioned in the hundreds of billions of degrees furnace of that primordial singularity we call Big Bang.

And we cannot un-know what we now know.

So it’s no use celebrating Christmas as though we are ignorant of the universe’s 13.8 billion years of evolution, and our place in the vast cosmic drama. We can no longer regard ‘salvation’ as defined by the terms of an eternal static-state cosmos, in which all beings had fixed places. For all his brilliance, Albert Einstein insisted on this static-cosmos metaphysical assumption: and later came to deeply regret it as his greatest mistake.⁵

Crucially, in celebrating the birth of the “Saviour who is Christ the Lord”,⁶ it is no longer possible for us to interpret the birth of Christ as God’s eternally-fixed pre-conceived ‘solution’ to restore humankind to a supposed state of original ‘perfection’. For this simply makes no sense in a dynamic evolutionary universe.

The church’s doctrine of Incarnation is very clear about insisting on the *full humanity* of Jesus: “The Word became flesh and lived among us”.⁷ That being so, then there’s no getting around the fact that – in his *human* aspect – “Jesus emerged by way of evolution, as you and I did”. (To be fully human *requires* this.) “The carbon in his body came from the stars, and the elements in his blood were first in the explosion of the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago. His distant ancestors, like ours, were the ancient primitive cyanobacteria that blanketed earthly life about 3.8 billion years ago.”⁸ This is what being ‘fully human’ requires.

What about Christ’s *Divine* aspect? This great feast also proclaims that: “No one has ever seen God, it is God the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, who has revealed

¹ Ilia Delio, *Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015, p57. cf. John 1:1-3

² cf. John 18a

³ Ilia Delio, *ibid*

⁴ Ilia Delio, *ibid*

⁵ Dave Prueett, *Reason and Wonder: A Copernican Revolution in Science and Spirit*, Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012, p143.

⁶ Luke 2:11

⁷ John 1:14

⁸ Ilia Delio, *Making All Things New*, p71.

God”.⁹ The word translated into English as ‘bosom’ in Greek literally means ‘hollow’, ‘emptiness’.¹⁰ ‘The only Son is in the *emptiness* of the Father’ – how remarkably similar to the modern concept of the quantum vacuum! It is the Son – matter, flesh, embodiment, the living Word, Spirit-infused energy embodying creative authority¹¹ – who reveals the Divine Emptiness. The Son – who is the “reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being”¹² – *reveals* the fullness¹³ of the Divine energy from which all things came to be. To all who received the Divine energy has been given power to become ‘children of God’.¹⁴

To be comprehensible and credible in our time, then, Christmas must cohere with what we now know. To light candles in the middle of a late December night, to pray at a Crib, to ‘adore the child in the manger’ to sing of ‘redeeming grace’, to hope for ‘God and humans reconciled’, ‘veiled in flesh the Godhead to see’, to envisage that ‘we may no more die’, to enter meaningfully into this mystical vision of the ‘incarnate Deity’,¹⁵ we must do so as those who are *fully conscious of our mutual origins in the quantum vacuum*.

Well, one immediate consequence of embracing an evolutionary cosmology is bound to be a vision of Christianity as *inter-connected with all the other religions* – not to mention with all life on the planet. We are many – but we are indeed one. The doctrine of Incarnation affirms the Spirit-breathed creativity, the infinite goodness, the manifest Love, *and the ultimate oneness and inter-connectedness of all things*,¹⁶ of the whole cosmos.¹⁷ In spite of St Paul’s residual dualistic thinking on certain subjects, he did repeatedly declared this all-encompassing vision of one-ness.¹⁸

A second immediate consequence is apparent, perhaps best expressed as a question. What, exactly, is ‘salvation’ in the light of what we now know? One thing it *cannot* be is the dividedness and the feudal-tribal rivalry which static-state cosmology spawned. For we know that all things are evolving together, that we ourselves are part of the one vast inter-connected web of life,¹⁹ that not one thing can exist apart from everything else, because all exists only as gift of the Divine energy field.

This knowledge is bound to impact upon every decision we make.

Incarnation, then, is a high calling! We are not only *products* of evolution – children of God, made in God’s image and likeness – we are ourselves *evolution in process*, God-bearers, each uniquely called to incarnate the Divine-energy in an ongoing creation, to ‘abide in’ the self-giving love of the Lover,²⁰ even to do ‘greater works’ than the works of the One whose birth we celebrate.²¹

In this and every Eucharist we give thanks for the astonishing gift of the life we did not ourselves create – having been birthed in the teeming energy field of Love – offering ourselves in joyful response, as living embodiments of self-emptying love, abandoning ourselves into the Divine Love, giving ourselves with all the love of our heart.

‘Glory to God to the farthest reaches of the cosmos, and on earth peace to those who gives themselves freely and joyfully to this great calling’.²²

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⁹ John 1:18, **ἐξηγησάτο** *exēgēsato*. Gerhard Kittel (ed), Geoffrey W Bromily (trans.), **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol 2**, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, p908.

¹⁰ **κόλπον** *kolpon*

¹¹ Luke 4:32, 20:2,8

¹² Hebrews 1:1

¹³ Colossians 1:19, 2:9

¹⁴ John 1:12

¹⁵ Metaphors from well-known Christmas carols: O Come all ye faithful; Silent night; Hark! The herald angels sing

¹⁶ John 1:3, Isaiah 52:10

¹⁷ John 1:9,10

¹⁸ e.g. Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:15-16,20,23,28, Romans 8:22, 1 Corinthians 15:28, 2 Corinthians 5:19

¹⁹ Fritjof Capra, **The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems**, New York: Anchor Books, 1996, pp5-7.

²⁰ John 14:20

²¹ John 14:12

²² Luke 2:14