

# *holons & cosmogenesis*

a sermon preached on the  
*fifth sunday of easter & family eucharist*

18 May 2014

at

*st john's*

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

*by fr david moore, vicar*

the lections: John 14:1-14

John's Jesus tells us that he goes to 'prepare a place for us'.<sup>1</sup> A certain English translation of lingering feudal mindset called this place a 'mansion'.<sup>2</sup> Many people envisage this pie-in-the-sky delayed gratification 'mansion' in thoroughly concrete terms. This piece of John's gospel is frequently read at funerals. In that setting, it is implied that the 'mansion' is some literal place where the now-dead loved one is going – the suggestion that, at some later date, I can join the person I love, just like a family reunion!

What do you think? Do you think that's true? Do you think that makes sense?

We should be wary of misguided pastoral concern desiring, of course, to give some reassurance to the grieving person. Certainly, there's a widespread denial of death. In one of the more well-known versions of application of this thinking, Anglican priest Henry Scott Holland comforted the Empire grieving the death of Edward VII with the 'pastoral' assurance that he wasn't really dead, just in the waiting room next door!<sup>3</sup> (Though in his defence, it has been argued that this interpretation of the poem in his sermon is quite wrong.)

What do you think? Does this make sense?

One biblical fact is unambiguous: the gospels themselves testify to the complete wrongheadedness of this sort of 'pastoral' comfort.<sup>4</sup>

We can excuse our forebears, who had to deal with the mystery of death in the context of a fixed three-decker cosmos. But we know that the cosmos is not a three-decker structure – with fixed places for all and sundry, such as Dante envisaged in his 'Inferno'. We know that the cosmos is expanding – not static, but itself an act of *cosmogenesis*, of ongoing creativity – indeed, at an accelerating rate. We know that the cosmos is unfathomably immense – billions upon billions of galaxies. We know, from Einstein's famous equation that matter and energy are interchangeable.<sup>5</sup> We know that only five per cent of the universe is ordinary, visible matter. It makes no sense to pretend that we do not know. It also makes of the gospel a complete nonsense when we still try and talk about it as though we live in the first century Ancient Near East.

So what do you think: given what we know about evolution and the cosmos and the new physics, as those who have seen images from the Hubble telescope, what do you think this 'place' is that Jesus has prepared for us where we see 'the Father'<sup>6</sup>? What can such a saying mean: "I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also".<sup>7</sup>

When I was a child, I needed a very concrete 'place' to belong. We do need concrete 'places' by which we can feel safe, comforted, assured, confident. This is all very good and perfectly normal. And this is also the very reason why the way we treat children and all who are vulnerable is so crucial. We cannot forget that people who are dependent – including those who are adults but are still deeply dependent, for all manner of reasons frequently not of their own making – when such people have concrete safety stripped from them according to the self-righteous dictates of free-market ideology this violates the economy Jesus calls 'the kingdom of God'.

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<sup>1</sup> John 14:2

<sup>2</sup> King James Version

<sup>3</sup> 'Death is nothing at all', in a May 1910 sermon entitled "Death the King of Terrors", which includes the lines: "I have only slipped away to the next room... I am waiting for you."

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 22:23-33, Mark 12:18-27, Luke 20:27-40

<sup>5</sup>  $E=mc^2$

<sup>6</sup> John 14:7-11

<sup>7</sup> John 14:3

There *is* a 'place' – Jesus assures us – in which all fear, insecurity, homelessness, despair, poverty, hunger, and oppression are transformed into their opposites – this is resurrection, from dying to living. Not later – but now! There is a 'place' where I am assured of my worth as a human person – even when I am insufficiently mature or strong to know it for myself. Such a concrete sense of 'place' is fundamentally good.

But now that I am an adult I am called out of the security of the concrete and the literal – by the unfolding, expanding creativity of cosmogenesis, called to transcend the concrete, literal and comforting 'place' of my childhood.

If I am *very* fortunate (as I am) – on this planet in which 1.4 of the world's 7 billion live on less than \$1.25 per day<sup>8</sup>; where the richest 1% of adults in the world own 40% of the planet's wealth,<sup>9</sup> in this nation where the wealthiest 20% of households has 68 times the net worth of the least wealthy 20%<sup>10</sup> – then I am in the process of discovering that the mind-blowing immensity of cosmogenesis is actually being accomplished *in me*, as, of course, in every person. If I have been fortunate enough to have been given a comprehensive education – in addition to the love and security of family and community – then I am in the process of discovering that relationship is fundamental to being itself; that nothing is separate or distinct, that according to 'holon' theory everything is a whole/part.

To say this another way: I am a part of the vast reality we call the cosmos, *and* the entire cosmos is in me! This bears repeating: I am a part of the vast reality we call the cosmos, *and* the entire cosmos is in me! Can you hear the mystical insight of John the Evangelist: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"<sup>11</sup>

John saw reality in ways more like modern physicists. Yet now we see what John saw with the added benefit of modern science: we are holons in an expanding cosmos of complexity and inter-dependence; each and every holon a manifestation of both the whole and, simultaneously, a unique and unreproducible part. And it must be this mystical insight behind Jesus' teaching: "I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and in fact, will do greater works than these".<sup>12</sup>

So, if we are blessed – as indeed we here are – the concrete and literal 'place' of comfort and assurance of our childhood will be incrementally superseded by our true calling, as unique and unreproducible parts in whom the whole of cosmogenesis is unfolding, doing even greater works than the one into whom we are baptised.

Gathered as one people around the Altar of transformation, we are invited to take up our unique place in Christ's ongoing work of cosmogenesis.

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<sup>8</sup> see <http://www.globalissues.org/article/26/poverty-facts-and-stats>

<sup>9</sup> see <http://www.theguardian.com/money/2006/dec/06/business.internationalnews>

<sup>10</sup> see <http://theconversation.com/income-and-wealth-inequality-how-is-australia-faring-23483>

<sup>11</sup> John 14:10 Echoes can be heard, here, of Jesus' teaching about who constitutes a 'neighbour': see for example Luke 10:25-37, Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>12</sup> John 14:12