

An Introduction to Cosmology: What is Your Story?

Maurice Lange, OMI

“Tell me a story!” As children, how often did we so plead with our parents at bedtime?! Let us now ponder: from where does this deep and continual yearning for story arise? Humans, both young and old, seek to live in a world of meaning. Children, especially, appropriate a worldview like a sponge absorbs water.

What is the story, the *big story*, that we are telling our children? Culturally, we tell the big story in so many ways (and not just at bedtime). This big story is told both by ordinary folks like us and by masterful tellers as well. This big story is actually a cosmology.

A cosmology imparts a view of the world, it answers the profound questions like: “Where do we come from?” “How did we get here?” “What is our place in the world?” “Where are we going?” Cosmology (through providing answers to such questions) happens whether we realize it or not!

By examining tribal existence in our human history, we find that each clan would have its designated storyteller. Gathered around the nightly fire, the teller, by the use of story, would entertain, enchant and evoke the depths of the listeners. These stories consisted of interactions with the gods, with each other and with the rest of the natural world. Meaning would be made as the actions and moral of the story would be heard and reflected upon.

Even though we as a Western people do not live in tribes, a cultural story is nevertheless told to us and to our children. This story surely shapes and molds our worldview. It guides a relationship (or lack thereof) with the Divine, with each other, and with the rest of the natural world.

As illustrated by physicist Brian Swimme, even though we no longer gather nightly around a fire in caves like our ancestors of old, we still yearn for and are told a story. Only today, the cave has been replaced by what? The TV room! And the fire? Well, the television burns brightly and fixes our gaze! Who is our current day storyteller? Advertisements. With our children watching 30,000 ads before they enter first grade, they can't help being formed by these stories touting the religion of consumerism and materialism.

Is it any wonder, then, that we live in a nation which represents 5% of the world's human population, but consumes 25% of the world's resources?!?! How did this come to be? What perpetuates it? What could bring about its healing?

The dominant story or myth of our time is that the Earth exists solely for the use of the human. We are immersed in a worldview that says the Earth has no meaning in and of itself. The message we receive is that the planet is basically raw material waiting to be refined into consumer items. The point of our lives, we are told, is to get jobs so that we can be happy by buying stuff. And yet, as priest and cultural historian, Thomas Berry reminds us “The Earth is not a collection of objects, it's a communion of subjects”. This too, leads to a cosmology. And this worldview greatly challenges the dominant story of our culture.

If we live in a worldview absent of deep meaning, then our lives, our actions and our faith will reflect that absence. However, if like so many of the ancient ancestors,



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He followed this with a two-year internship there in 1998-99. Maurice is currently the director of the Oblate Ecological Initiative in Godfrey, IL. This is both an ecological learning center and a community supported agriculture project.

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our culture has a functional, deeply meaningful story, then our lives can be rich, vibrant, and well lived.

The new story that is now breaking into our consciousness is that *the Universe fundamentally is a story*. Humans discovered only in the last century that we live in a Universe that is both expanding and developing. It is a 13 billion year story that continues to emerge even in your reading of these words. The Universe from its beginning is a spiritual as well as a physical reality. We come from and participate in that immense, Sacred Story.

Questions for Discussion — Introduction to Cosmology

1. *Does your personal worldview respect Earth as more than a supplier of wants?*
2. *Can you really envision/pass on the concept of both Universe and self as entities of both expansion and development?*
3. *Have you attempted to introduce the Great Work within your own family and community?*

As humans, we now wield technological power of the magnitude that this is altering the ongoing story of the Earth. If we are to live sustainably now and ensure life for future generations, we need a worldview that sustains and ensures life. The story that needs to be told to our children and to this culture is that we come from the same numinous energy that gave birth to galaxies, mountains and microbes. The Great Work for us and our children is to consciously enter into the Sacred story of the Universe and help create a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. Now that's a cosmology that is functional, a story where all can live together in justice and peace.



Maurice Lange, OMI., leads the group in the Cosmic Walk at the Cahokia gathering. Photo by Sr. Joan Shalapin, ASC