

Epic Of Fire And Sparks

Carmel Higgins

(A longer version of this paper was given to the participants of the September 2003 gathering at Cahokia.)

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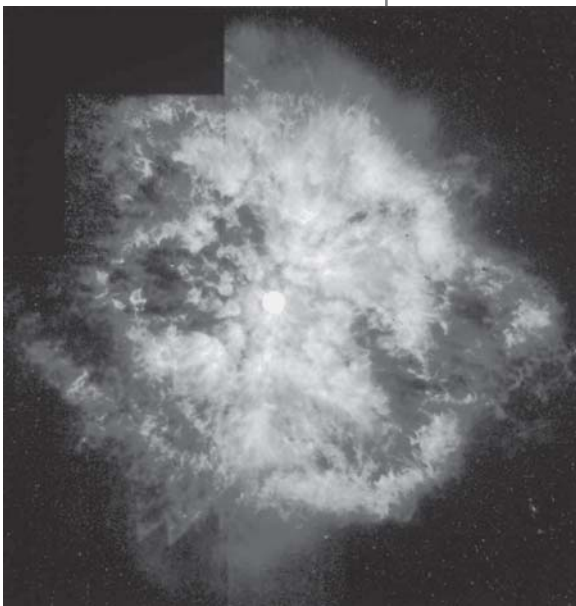
“The New Cosmic Story emerging into human awareness overwhelms all previous conceptions of the universe for the simple reason that it draws them all into a comprehensive fullness. Who can learn what this means and remain calm?”(Brian Swimme)

The New Story now emerging in scientific and theological circles begins with the Universe Story. Scientists tell us that thirteen billion years ago, from the quantum vacuum and a source of energy the size of a pinprick, the universe flared forth from the heart of ultimate mystery. It then burst into a fireball that embodied all the basic elements that would go to make up, color and differentiate every body, human, animal or material, that would ever exist. Quantum theology tells us that the fireball also contained the seeds of spirit, psyche, soul, dreams, desire, creativity and imagination. Nothing that exists has come from outside of this all-inclusive, interrelated, interdependent and primary event. There are no outsiders to the event and no outside destination. The fireball did not explode into space, but created time, space and place as it unfurled.

From the primordial flaring forth, the universe, now “on fire with the word Go” and in all of its creativity, continued to unfold and differentiate itself... billowing out in all directions and spewing forth spiraling galaxies, exploding stars and whirling planets. On our privileged planet, after molten rock and seething vapors cooled, after rain fell and oceans formed, live cells miraculously appeared in the sea and life began. Long before humans saw the light of day, these cells at some point joined together for survival and invented sexual reproduction. With sex, death and diminishment appeared on the scene as a natural consequence and prerequisite for life’s journey forward.

Four hundred and twenty five million years ago the microscopic life that began in the sea somehow moved on land. Grass, trees and flowers appeared, followed by reptiles, birds, mammals and family—a baby’s smile! In humans evolution smiles, sees, feels, reflects, acts, invents and celebrates. We are the product of a thirteen billion year history of unbroken evolution now looking back at itself and saying, WOW! We are also that aspect of the universe and a dimension of the present state of the fireball capable of looking ahead and asking: Why not? In and through the universe’s creative energy flowing through us the story of the universe and our personal story continues to evolve and unfold.

With the re-creation of fire by humans, humanity, too, has been on the roll: from fire to tool making and cave drawings; to planting and agriculture; to the tribal period; to the rise and fall of the great civilizations; to the teaching of great philosophies and on through to the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago. Still the story continued; to spiritual triumphs, to the establishment of wisdom traditions, to the arts, to religious and civil wars, chaos, the dark ages, the enlightenment, the industrial revolution, medical breakthroughs, on through to the conquest of space. Thirty-five years ago, the “Eagle” landed on the moon and Neil Armstrong took his “one small step for man and giant leap for mankind.”



The leap into space and Armstrong's dance changed for many of us the perceptions we held of ourselves and of the world in which we live. Via television, we saw the bunny hops that left footprints in moon dust and knew the moon was solid and not made of green cheese. Returning to Earth, the astronauts brought back actual rocks and pictures. We heard them speak of a breathtaking view of our home planet, "strung like a fragile jewel in the darkness of space". The pictures of Earth seen from space expanded our consciousness from local maps to a more cosmic sense of awe and grandeur. In the journey from Earth to the moon, human aspiration and mystical wonder soared.

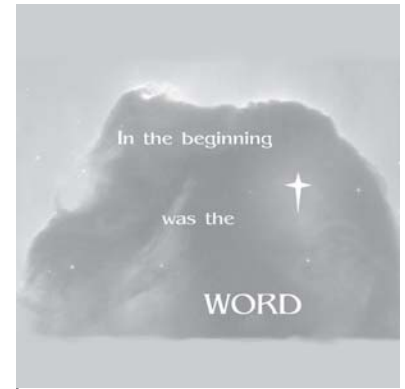
Propelled by the same dynamics that expand the Universe, our spirit, within mind and body, continues to expand and soar; pushing, pulling, thinking, groping, feeling, shaking, quaking...we moan and groan with all of creation for greater realities still. In the process we gain new knowledge, outgrow concepts, transcend structures, cross every threshold and re-create life as the story continues to unfold. There are no written texts, no single tradition or no single philosophy that can fully contain or capture the mystery of this ongoing story. On the contrary, the story with its mystery and wonder captures us.

The Universe as story is our primary text, primary teacher, primary lawmaker, primary source of religious feeling and primary revelation of the divine. By reading the divine message written in the stars, by hearing the divine voice in the whisper of the wind and by contemplating the seasons and the work of human hands... we can come to know who we are in relation to the story and know our role in the unfolding drama: Our role in the cosmic process is to engage our talents and gifts for the good of the whole.

Central to the New Story, is the understanding that humans are a product of evolution and Earth's conscious mode of being. Humans are not separate beings who were placed ON the Earth by an outside source but a species that grew and evolved from it! Just as an apple tree at some point begins to "apple" Earth at a point in time began to "people" (Dowd, 1991). By evolving human eyes Earth now sees herself, sees her beauty and feels her pain; she dreams of a better future and a more sustainable life style; she sings and dances... and mountains echo the refrain. In the depths of the human, Earth and the Universe awaken... to enchantment, pathos, wisdom, interiority and to the joy of emerging community and personhood.

The Universe Story is the wineskin for every story ever told. As the container of all stories, it takes nothing away from any culture or tradition, all belong in the story. To ask how the Universe story fits into the bible or Christianity is to diminish the grandeur of the story and the very mystery that stuns us in the first place. The Christian story, however, can be seen within the context of the larger story. It can be re-imaged, re-interpreted, re-mythologized and our understanding of its truths expanded. In the light of Wisdom and in relation to a common creation story, the meaning and core truths of religion and all traditions can be cracked open and brought to greater fulfillment.

The New Story has the potential to heal what is broken and to reconcile what is separated, it is all-inclusive and egalitarian. It speaks to our feelings of alienation and our need to know and belong. It resonates in the soul of every mystic who has ever been entranced by the beauty of the natural world: a perfectly shaped rose; a falling leaf; a snow-capped mountain shrouded in mist; and the colors and hues of a setting sun. It speaks to every child who has ever chanted, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are." Every child who has ever asked, "Tell me a story" can be told: "You come out of the mystery and energy that gave birth to the Universe; it is your beginning. You come out of the fire that fashioned the galaxies; it remains alive within you". (Swimme)



Questions for Discussion

- 1. Have implications of "The New Cosmic Story" been an agent of disquiet in your life?*
- 2. How has man's exploration of space affected your view of the earth's history?*
- 3. Do you agree that, "The New Story has the potential to heal what is broken and to reconcile what is separated...?"*

Our younger generations need to know the truth about their origins. They need a story that will arouse their interest, awaken their imagination, spark their creativity and challenge the meaning of their lives. They need to see the “big picture” and to connect with sacred energies operating within it, energies that are in a sense at the tip of one’s pen, paint brush, a new idea, an insight, caring, friendship, work, passion, music making, playing, justice making, storytelling and lovemaking. Young people need to know they have unique gifts to bring to the table of life and be invited to join in the fireworks! Given a vision and fueled by science and mysticism, they, too, will be propelled into the work of birthing a new culture, in building a just society and in saving the planet. They, too, will be motivated to join in the “Great Work” of renewing the face of the Earth.

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Author’s footnote: I am grateful to my literary mentors Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, Diarmuid O’Murchu, Jim Conlon, Michael Dowd; Miriam MacGillis, Mary Coelho... and others, for the ideas expressed and for helping me understand and grow in the meaning and implications of the New Story.

