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Expressions of God's astonishing universe

by Michael Morwood

Soul Seeing

On Christmas Eve, I attended with Maria, my wife, the American Ballet Theatre's presentation of 'The Nutcracker' in New York. Ballet is not high on my list of entertainments, but on this occasion I was profoundly moved. What inspired me was not just the work of art, but the way I found myself present to it, taking it in, living in it. I wondered at whatever is at work in the universe, hurtling atoms billions of years ago into the life and death of countless stars, through transformation after transformation into Tchaikovsky, such astonishing music, into the beauty and grace of the dancers, and in me reflecting on how this all happens.

On New Year's Day I went for a long walk on the Appalachian Trail (honest) and listened for a time to 'The World's Greatest Operatic Arias.' The music led me to reflect on Verdi, Mozart and others and the question: Where does this music come from? And how can Joan Sutherland, Luciano Pavarotti and other singers give such wonderful expression to the music? What is going on here? I concluded that Tchaikovsky and Mozart did not add anything to the universe through their music. Rather, the universe found a way through them to give expression to itself.

I was moved again by a sense of wonder, and was grateful to be human, to be a conscious aspect of God's astonishing universe.



Jesus so appreciated the kingdom of heaven right before him

and manifested gratitude in the very way he looked at the lilies of the field, the birds of the air, people. I see him inviting me to manifest wonder and appreciation in my own life. Here and now in the 21st century I can marvel at the way atoms and stardust are transformed into the life form we are. I imagine Jesus saying to me, "Michael, the human enterprise and the universe in which it has come to be is God-charged. You not only give the universe a way of manifesting itself, you give God, the Ground of all Being, a way of coming to expression. That is what it means to be human. To express the qualities of God: love, beauty, harmony, goodness, peace. Take in this good news about yourself and everyone else, and see. See everything around you with the eye of your soul. See the music of life!?"

I have sought for years to learn more and more about the contemporary scientific data about our universe and our human origins -- and it motivates me to see the world around me as Jesus wants me to see it. I see what I have always been led to see and believe -- that Jesus embodied the Divine Presence in human form. When I bring his story to the scientific story about our human origins and how life evolved on Earth, I'm led to a new awareness and appreciation of the Divine Presence all around me, a love that bonds all that exists. I think it was this awareness and appreciation that drove Jesus when he preached about "the kingdom of God." He wanted people to see what he saw: people giving human expression to the Divine in their living and loving.

I see Jesus differently now. I see him as revealer of God-always-here-with-us, rather than as a gateway to a God in the heavens. I see myself differently. I am not living in exile from God. Far from it. I have this wonderful opportunity -- my lifetime -- to give human expression to the universe and to the Divine Presence charging it. I see the world around me differently. I see the task of the church differently. I see prayer and sacraments differently. Instead of looking for an Elsewhere God, I am learning to see an Everywhere God.

This is the God Jesus revealed. Jesus was concerned about God with us in this world, and about our giving the best possible expression to this Presence. His call to conversion is not about winning a place in heaven but about manifesting God on Earth. It is not about winning forgiveness from a God who is withholding it. Rather, it is a passionate plea that we really see the creative Divine Presence all around us, in all of us, here and now. It is a passionate plea that we use this seeing to transform our personal, social, religious, political, legal, educational and economic interactions. As we see, so shall we -- and the world -- become.

[Michael Morwood is resident theologian at the Kirkridge Retreat Center in Bangor, Pa., and author of many books, such as *Praying a New Story*.]

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