

Lent 2023: St. Anselm's and Sister Barbara Green, OP: Fresh Challenge

General information: What's Available?

- =an orienting talk, in-person, with this handout available (2/23), now posted
- =a brief reflection, integrating the “orienting material” with the liturgical readings for each of the Sundays of Lent and also Easter; so seven of those will become available;
- =a zoom session on the Thursday of the next week, an hour in length, for q & a by those who are participating in the process; seven zoom sessions 4:30-5:30 pm

The Orienting Presentation: What, Where, When?

- =the event will be **in the parish center, February 23, 4:30-5:30 pm**; a handout will be provided for subsequent use; the main point will be the introduction of seven concepts from New Cosmology, named distinctively and described adequately;¹

=content outlines:

- ===challenges of Vatican 2, climate change, New Cosmology: all at once!
- ===what New Cosmology is: a primer, a thumbnail sketch—from a particular angle;
- ===its challenge to serious, committed, practicing Catholic Christians (likely for others but I am not speaking for them)
- ===seven key insights/points distinctively named for later reference
- ===these, worked among the Lenten and Easter Sunday readings, are up for participant discussion; discussion on these points, not on other things, wonderful though those may be!

=*New Cosmology: the thumbnail sketch:*

- ===timing: post-Hubble telescope, but related to Copernicus, Galileo, Darwin, Hawking, Webb; we can think of it as about 50 years old and a product of science but other fields of inquiry as well;
- ===challenge to religion: some of our long-running assumptions need up-grading and can sustain it without serious problems; e.g., our somewhat literalist assumptions about what we know of God from the Bible; but the whole point here is to show how rich our biblical tradition continues to be! Religion cannot responsibly ignore new science, should not want to do so;
- ===what remains central for us, if not for all who are enthusiastic about NC: the reality of God, active throughout the Universe and the centrality of the Jesus tradition and the presence

¹ If you went to a talk on the New Cosmology, it would be introduced in a wholly different way; but since my aim is to show how it relates with the project of using our Scripture, I introduce it with that end in mind. Analogy:

of the Christ, risen in our midst and active in the cosmos; but these remain to be better understood than we do at present;

===my sense of the most urgent thing to aim to retire or downgrade: our philosophical categories inherited from Aristotle, through Thomas, into modern science (Descartes, Newton): tight edges and clean borders; those have been helpful but are not the only way to navigate—maybe not even the best way;

=the seven **points**, distinctively named, to be worked with:

One: **time moving ahead** (rather than circling back)

Two: **integral ecology** (intensive relatedness rather than clear distinctions)

Three: **suffering and sin** (new possibilities)

Four: **beyond videos** (wonderfully spacious narratives)

Five: **powers of the universe** (to explore) *to be sent as an attachment

Six: **God's main job** (calling us all forward)

Seven: **the cosmic Christ** (present and active in our midst and throughout)

===for each point, now, I will offer a fuller description, indicating –what is the plainest meaning; --why it is new; --why or how challenging; --what potential gain for us.

One: **time moving ahead** (rather than circling back):

-what is the plainest meaning: the universe continues to expand, as it has for 13.8 billion years, so we are rushing forward with it, in it, as it--being drawn forward;

-why it is new: virtually all ancient cultures valorize what is old and make it special and longed for, envision it as lost or taken away and now to be sought and regained;

-why or how challenging: we are not called upon to return to the past, escape the present; there is more of that in our old stories than we may hear; longing to escape is not the only option;

-what potential gain: lots of good stuff lies *ahead*, where God is leading us.

Two: **integral ecology** (intensive relatedness rather than clear distinctions):

-what is the plainest meaning: we are way more connected to the rest of creation than we have been accustomed to thinking; we are neither better nor separate but share many more aspects than isolate us; this is a category issue!

-why it is new: we may have thought of our human selves as the very most special, and that preening has blinded us to many good insights and relationships;

- why or how challenging: we *like* feeling special and favored, superior! But...
- what potential gain: many new relationships open up; a bit of humility can be salutary!

Three: suffering and sin (new possibilities):

-what is the plainest meaning: catastrophes and other events that pain us are not punishments sent or approved by God; violent things happen in the universe, on earth, and these affect our lives, sometimes very painfully; blame is not inevitably implied or to be inferred;

-why it is new: our Bible-composing ancients related to God as, among other things, a powerful monarch; Christian theology made that category even tighter, so that God is alleged to be in complete control: either God's ways or take the consequences; not best!

-why or how challenging: we both like and resist the idea of God's massive power, often feeling that God must approve of harmful-to-us things, else they would not happen;

-what potential gain: this is one of the areas where we can reconceive God as wooing rather than forcing us, of loving us forward rather than shoving us back! We have likely made a similar shift in our way of seeing other key relationships, e.g., our parents; makes many facets of relationship possible.

Four: beyond videos: (our Scripture offers wonderfully spacious narratives and prayers)

-what is the plainest meaning: much of our ancient biblical tradition works best once we understand it more contextually, as in fact we do with other classic and beloved narratives;

-why it is new: since modernity (17th century, roughly) with the rise of science we have become more literal about biblical narratives; the ancients were not as fundamentalistic as we moderns can be;

-why or how challenging: we have to learn to take our narratives seriously but not literally, to recall that their composers did not have our world views; if they thought the world come into being in six 24-hour days (which they may not have thought at all—not possessing or imagining clocks or calendars), we know different; we can love the story without taking it as factual;

-what potential gain: whole new vistas of insight become possible; stories have great depths that remain frozen if we struggle to reconcile them with facticity, or else scrap them as dumb and useless; closer to poetry than to arithmetic!

Five: powers of the universe (to explore):

-what is the plainest meaning: We need new language to talk about how the universe functions; one effort is by Brian Swimme, who suggests eleven ways in which the universe, including ourselves, “flow”: (see accompanying download)

-why it is new: This is not our usual set of attributes and invites us to, again, think beyond the categories, which, like gates and walls, impede seeing relatedness;

-why or how challenging: they are unfamiliar, different, can seem trivial...or exciting!

-what potential gain: Our vast interrelatedness (among all creatures, binding creation/creator) is enhanced; it's not that there are no struggles or edges, but maybe many fewer than we assumed; lots of new friends! Lots of new energies co-relating us all.

Six: God's main job (calling us all forward)

-what is the plainest meaning: Not all NC-ers are interested in these last two categories, but some are; challenging is to allow our sense of God to re-mystify a bit, as we “retire” God from some tasks that we once assumed were God's. God invites us, always and freshly, into life as it is continuing to expand, to unfold; John Haught calls our attention to God with Abraham...always fresh adventures; not easy but not boring!

-why it is new: We thought we pretty much knew God's scope and plans, maybe even that the divine job was mostly done (except for the last judgment!); but no;

-why or how challenging: It is not easy, at “our age,” to explore, entertain, and unpack new mysteries; easier to stick to what is familiar;

-what potential gain: We can go beyond the sense of God as taking us back somewhere, or *out* somewhere, and feel much more engaged with where we actually *are now* and what the possibilities are.

Seven: the cosmic Christ (present and active in our midst and throughout)

-what is the plainest meaning: the role of the risen and cosmic Christ is connected to the expansion of the universe and all the implied processes;

-why it is new: scripture knows no detail here, though ask St. Paul, who seems to have had a clue here!

-why or how challenging: the resurrection of Jesus is a challenge for us, who can name no one else who has had this experience; danger of special pleading; to add cosmic philosophy/theology is even more challenging, and the theorists are not easy to follow; but ...

-what potential gain: a vast enrichment of our understanding of who God/Jesus/HS are.

Questions/comments? Recall: these will be explored with Sunday readings