

Differentiating from Dowd

Michael Dowd and I are both associated with evolutionary Christianity. I'm not sure I even like the tag, but it probably will stick for awhile. Michael asked me to give him some feedback on his excellent recent youtube videos and Tedx talk, and I decided to respond to him with a blog post. My hope is that Michael will respond with his own post on this site. I've had an itch for some time related to Michael's work, and this gives me an opportunity to scratch it.



Over the past few years I have noticed some significant differences between Michael and myself. That is to be expected. I'm finding it important to publicly declare that I don't see us doing the same thing. Michael and his wife, Connie Barlow, have become friends over the years. I first met them when I was giving a presentation at Chautauqua Institute in Up State New York. They rolled into town in their van, the same week that I was the presenter. And it was a fabulous connection between brothers whose lives had been changed by the insights of Father. Thomas Berry, Teilhard de Chardin, Brian Swimme, and others, who helped us all to see the intrinsic luminosity of an unfolding cosmos. As well they were a great support to me when I was going through a big life transition recently.



Michael and Connie famously travel throughout North America, and have done so for the past 12 years or so, in a van they affectionately call Angel, spreading the gospel of evolution. They see themselves as bridge builders between the scientific community and the church, sometimes taking heat from both communities in the process. Folded into these presentations is a passionate concern for climate change. Suffice it to say that these two souls are “all in” in their passionate commitment to helping the church not be afraid of science (particularly evolution). I celebrate and applaud their commitment.

Michael sees himself as leading an “evidential reformation” as significant as Luther’s Protestant revolution hundreds of years ago. He summarizes his work in a tidy little manifesto: (1) Reality is my God, (2) Evidence is my scripture, (3) Big History is my creation story, (4) Ecology is my theology, (5) Integrity is my salvation ... Beautiful. These pithy summaries represents decades of synthesis. Right off the top let me say that the Youtube videos and the TEDx talks are characteristically lucid and Michael is his passionate and articulate self. Kudos.

But when I look at the manifesto, it could have been written by an atheistic materialist. It reflects a scientific, modernist worldview and doesn’t require anybody holding that worldview to contend with your Christianity, Michael. My question to you is whether this is this truly a bridging mission? I can see how you are challenging and inviting Christians to take science seriously. But it’s less clear how the scientific community is being challenged to take Christianity seriously on its own terms. The bridge is actually a one-way street.

I know that you have a reaction to the word “materialism” to describe a worldview in which everything is a reconfiguration of matter, including mind– the belief of mainstream science today that the great story of the cosmos is not unfolding

within a pervasive and primordial heart and mind. For the record I believe that it is. To repeat, I can see the challenge that you are putting to Christianity, which I support, but I don't see how you are actually challenging science with a robust articulation of Christianity.

I hear you saying, *G_d is Reality*. But that just begs the question: what is Reality? And as far as I can tell from what you are putting out, Reality is what science is able to confirm about physical reality. Physical reality is truly awesome, and here I'm in agreement with you that the church needs to become scientifically literate. The story of the evolving cosmos is truly another scripture, as Thomas Berry affirmed. ("The heavens declare your handiwork and Earth your glory, day to day pours forth speech, etc."- Psalm 119) But it's a lot less clear how you are wrestling with that other scripture (the Bible) as a valid expression of truth. (You know of course that I'm no biblical literalist and realize that there are truly nasty bits that need to be contextualized).

I hear and appreciate your referencing these ancient texts as "night language" or "private revelation", versus the "public revelation" or "day language" that science offers. But you privilege and validate, as far as I can tell, the public revelation over the private. This is the so-called "evidential revolution" you are leading. It would be helpful for me if you would occasionally critique, a la Thomas Kuhn, the limits of the scientific epistemology as a way of knowing, with its inherent problem that we don't see the world as it is, but as we are. You can't extract mind from the equation. The quintessential postmodernist wisdom, supported by quantum physics, shows us that we participate in the construction of reality.

The biblical writers themselves enjoyed a different way of knowing and interpreting the world, and there is much wisdom that's not available to current scientific method. Pre-modern

philosophers and theologians, including Thomas Aquinas and the Greek philosophers, wrote about seven or eight senses, not just the five that we're familiar with and through which science limits its inquiry. These other senses were related to the soul's way of knowing a reality deeper than the physical. They approximated what today we call intuition. These intuitive senses "saw" and "felt" a Wholeness animating every part, every atom of the universe. An early scientist, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) inspired many non-materialist scientists including biologist, Rupert Sheldrake and physicist, Henri Bortoft. As a religious man, he studied plants, and began with the premise of an underlying, animating Wholeness. He intuitively got the wholeness, and his method of doing science, was, in part, a conscious alternative to the reductionistic scientific method of Sir Isaac Newton.

This Wholeness or Coherence (or Mind, G_d or Buddha Mind or the Christ Mystery) *lived* the universe and is living the universe. Intuition reveals a synthesizing, whole-making presence and activity, weaving patterns from the chaos. This perception of wholeness or deep patterning is what Plato meant by "beauty", which transcended but included physical or aesthetic beauty. Paul (or a scholar in his lineage) used this intuitive capacity when he declared that Christ was the one "in whom all things are held together" (Colossians 1:15-20).

Yes, it's night language, but only night language can capture what science in its current iteration of metaphysical materialism will never be able to reveal. To put the question bluntly to you, is there a dimension of Reality that includes and permeates, but transcends the physical, and does this Mind and Heart interact with the physical realm, in-forming it, influencing, and supporting it?

It seems to me that if the scientific world is truly going to be challenged in the way you are challenging the church, you might want to present a *nuanced* theology of providence—that this Whole-Making activity is actually non-coercively at work

within the evolutionary process, leading it all/us all into greater degrees of freedom, beauty, truth, goodness. And that this is all an expression of the Mystery that religions called G_d. There is no true religious sensibility without some kind of felt sense that the universe is purposively unfolding toward, yes, an indeterminate (or emergent) future, but biased toward a completion of love. I'm not talking about traditional notions of predestination, but rather the subtle interplay of Spirit with a world that enjoys freedom, particularly in human. To repeat, I don't see you challenging the scientific world to contend with a robust, credible theology.

So while that part of your manifesto "ecology is my theology" has a nice ring to it, ecology isn't actually theology. I could support your argument that there is nothing more important than ecological repair. However, your choice not to have a theology (implicit in the statement "ecology is my theology") feels, again, like you are catering to the scientific (and materialistic) community. Rupert Sheldrake comes to mind here as a pan-psychic, non-materialist and religious biologist, who has truly and courageously taken heat from the scientific community for his theory of morphogenetic fields.

Let's be clear, theology that's worth the ink is not the same as mere beliefs, understood as arbitrary intellectual assertions that may or may not be true. Theology, at best, is an articulation of a transcendent experience that is real and life-changing. Even philosophically, I hear no metaphysics (that which transcends, but includes physicality) in your work. Especially in recent years, I sense a shift away from theology and metaphysics. This is a real problem, because until we understand first principles, we cannot understand the basis of our actions as a species. More about this below.

This leads me to your presentation of the evolutionary role of religion in human civilization. Along with Robert Wright and

others, you conclude that religion served and serves an “adaptive” function, in a kind of neo-Darwinian way, helping humanity to survive, to stop killing each other, to establish moral frameworks for community, etc. I find this position overly simplistic and reductionistic. It reduces pre-modern people’s experience of the Numinous, of G_d or the gods, to an instrumental role, a mere means to an end, unconsciously driven by blind instinct to give us a better shot at surviving.

But I would reverse it. The experience of the Numinous is not a means to an end, but an end in itself and the beginning of an authentic life. It is contact with the true Nature of “Reality”. It is a genuine “I-Thou” experience, and not merely, as you claim, a personification of what a pre-modern mind couldn’t yet understand because the scientific method hadn’t yet emerged. I know that you validate the “I-Thou” experience in your presentations, but again, Michael, it seems as though the “Thou” is a projection of the human psyche, in line with Feuerbach’s philosophy. This takes me back to the question of theology. What for you is the “Thou” in this experience?

A last point about this experience of an over-arching, implicate order, or Wholeness/Mind that weaves beauty from chaos, truth from falsehood, and goodness from evil. It rarely serves an adaptive function. If it is authentic it doesn’t adapt to culture, but explodes it. Jesus, for example, interrupted consensus reality, re-ordering it in the direction of a deeper expression of what it means to be human. And that true humanity is only revealed in relation to the One he called Abba. The direction of evolution he effected was not in accordance with the dominant culture’s trajectory, but rather subverted its moral order.

Politically, the abolition of slavery, women’s rights, the rights of workers all came out of the Jesus’ lineage, (and thereby through Judaism) inspired and initiated by those who

had an authentic experience of the Numinous "Other", calling them to interject and correct the trajectory of evolution away from the privileged and toward rights of the invisible and marginalized. I contend that they *actually* encountered the Christ Mystery and were transformed. Not that they just didn't understand or that it was an inner voice that got projected on to G_d, but that a reality, a transcendent Heart and Mind (implicate in the cosmos), more subtle than the physical apprehended them. Would you agree? Or how would you put it? I'm not too concerned about the words we use for it, but that whatever they experienced is ultimate Reality, even though you can't do an experiment to prove it.

Owen Barfield wrote his book, *Saving Appearances*, precisely to correct the modernist flatlander[1] tendency to see only "appearances", but miss the dimension of Wholeness living in and through the appearances. Historically, this lack of intuitive capacity led to what ancient Judaism called idolatry, which led to devotion to objects, rather than the indwelling Subjectivity that was the source of physical beauty and reverence. The objects themselves could not carry the freight of the numinous. And this tendency is what leads precisely to the mess that the modern worldview has made of the world. This is why theology and metaphysics are, in fact, so critical. When we ascribe a numinous dimension solely to the material, we worship (unconsciously) the material world of objects. We gather to ourselves tokens of the numinous (bigger houses, a second or third car, more sound systems, better vintage wines, designer clothes). And we do so as individuals, leading lives of disconnected excess, because we do not feel the Mind and Heart that connects (or the "pattern that connects" to use Gregory Bateson's third person metaphor). This is precisely what we would expect from a modernist worldview that voided the universe of both a pervading and primordial consciousness, soon to be followed by voiding it of any intrinsic cosmic meaning or purpose. Stripped of the sacred, numinous dimension, matter and its various

artifacts, attains god-like status, and our devotion manifests unconsciously in lives of material excess, which is at the heart of our ecological crisis, including climate change.

Deepak Chopra is directly challenging the scientific community to come to terms with consciousness or mind as a fundamental reality, and not only an emergent or epi-phenomenon. This is perhaps “the” issue for science in the 21st century. You have chosen not to sign his challenge, claiming that ecology is more critical to Christians than such issues. I disagree, and given your mission of bringing science to Christians, how can this be excluded as unimportant? In fact, for reasons outlined above, it is critically important.

Deepak calls it this originating mind “consciousness”. Christians call it G_d, and ascribe deep, ontological personhood (G_d as personal, but not “a” person). But whatever name it goes by, there is a lot at stake, and it is precisely an ideological battle between materialist metaphysics, and the theology and metaphysics that honour a Transcendent Mystery.

I could say more, brother. But I leave it there for now. Both of us experience ourselves as embodiments of the creative unfolding of the cosmos, with the capacity to consciously participate in the emergence of a new and better future. I honour your commitment and your rare passion for this evolving project. Both of us affirm that there’s an emergent quality to this process, that nothing is predetermined, and that the future needs us to show up in our co-creatorhood. What I experience is that this great cosmic emergence itself emerges out of and is grounded, not solely in the physical, but in the ultimately mysterious interplay and polarity of Spirit and matter. Both poles are actual. For me, this is where the numinous, awesome nature of reality lies. I look forward to your response.

[1] “Flatlander” is a term that integral philosopher, Ken

Wilber, uses for the modernist worldview which denies interiority or a subjective dimension to reality. This subjectivity (or mind) pervades the universe, including matter. Matter is not "lower" than mind, rather it is mind's outside dimension.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has become increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get information that is reliable. You can find useful information fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile dysfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about "[levitra cost](#)". Did learned something about "[buy levitra online usa](#)"? Other matter we are going to is "[buy generic levitra online](#)". In effect, a medicinal reviews found that up to three quarters of people on such remedy experiment side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your member and physician. Today, there are many options for men who suffer from erectile dysfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this treatment. Talk to your health care purveyor to see if it's sure to make the switch.