

• **Is the Holy Trinity Matter, Energy, and Information?**

(Sermon at Beaverkill Methodist Episcopal Church,
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"Oh, Great Spirit, what is my name, what is my beginning, what is my end?" These are words from An American Indian prayer. To me, they seem a profound expression of a natural yearning of the human being to claim an identity, a soul, a relationship to a Divine Source, God, which created and recognizes that soul by a name, by a word, by a piece of information.

Today I am going to begin an inquiry concerning ways in which Scripture and science seem to me to be coalescing, and I just used a key word in that inquiry, and that word is "information."

Of course, this is a commonly used word which bears a well-accepted meaning. But it also is a critical word and concept used in a special sense by physicists when they talk about Einstein's Theory of Relativity and the nature of the universe, and when they do that, this is what they mean [from an article in Wikipedia][This is heavy stuff, but bear with me]:

"In the Theory of Relativity, c [the speed of light], interrelates space and time, and also appears in the famous equation of mass-energy equivalence, $E = mc^2$." "According to special relativity, c is the maximum speed at which all energy, matter, and information in the universe can travel." "Information, in its most restricted technical sense, is a sequence of symbols that can be interpreted as a message. . . . Information is any kind of event that affects the state of a

dynamic system. Conceptually, information is the message (utterance or expression) being conveyed. The meaning of this concept varies in different contexts. Moreover, the concept of information is closely related to notions of constraint, communication, control, data, form, instruction, knowledge, meaning, understanding, mental stimuli, pattern, perception, representation and entropy."

Straddling the border today between France and Switzerland is an enormous, powerful, underground machine called the Large Hadron Collider. Its purpose is to accelerate atomic particles in opposite directions around a circular track 20 miles in diameter until they reach speeds approaching the speed of light in each direction and then smash into each other, producing an explosion of subatomic particles that then can be measured and identified.

It has been reported in the popular press in the last weeks that the scientists who run this machine have proven the existence of a predicted, elusive particle or force that they call the Higgs Boson, and that this discovery proves that certain theories of the existence and the nature of the Universe are sound. Eventually, they hope they will be able to divide and subdivide matter to a point where it cannot be divided further. And what will be left when this happens? They think that the residue of this process will be information. It may be that matter and energy come out of information.

Stephen Hawking, the famous, hopelessly crippled physicist, was interviewed concerning recent discoveries in cosmology and particularly concerning so-called black holes in the center of galaxies into which matter and energy are sucked by enormous

gravitational forces. He used to think, he said, that matter, energy and information drawn into black holes are destroyed, but he has changed his mind. He now thinks that matter and energy are destroyed, but that information is not and cannot be destroyed.

Let's now return to that American Indian prayer, the natural yearning of the human being to claim an identity, a soul, a relationship to a Divine Source, a God, which created and recognizes that soul by a name, by a word, by a piece of information.

I imagine it this yearning for identification that leads some skeptics to posit that, if God did not exist, He would have to have been invented in order to satisfy this yearning. The same skeptics also claim that the God of Moses, who said that his name was Yahweh, meaning "I am," was an invention of man, not an historical figure at all, but perhaps a cynical and elaborate conceit designed to unify a wandering tribe of nomads into a secular world force.

In today's readings from the Old Testament, we hear much about names, words, prayers, and their relationship to clouds, heaven, earth, glory and God. Consider again what we read from 1 Kings, Chapter 8, verses 10 through 12:

"When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. Then Solomon said, 'the Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud' " [We will return to that dark cloud in a moment].

Of course, this is not the first time we have been told about names, clouds and glory. Consider the Book of Exodus at Chapter 33, in which Moses is told that no human being can see the glory of Yahweh and survive:

"Yahweh then said to Moses, 'Again I shall do what you have asked, because you enjoy my favor and because I know you by name.'

He [Moses] then said, 'Please show me your glory.'

Yahweh said, 'I shall make all my goodness pass before you, and before you I shall pronounce the name Yahweh; and I am gracious to those to whom I am gracious and I take pity on those on whom I take pity. But my face', he said, 'you cannot see, for no human being can see me and survive.' Then Yahweh said, 'Here is a place near me. You will stand on the rock, and when my glory passes by, I shall put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with my hand until I have gone past. Then I shall take my hand away and you will see my back; but my face will not be seen.'" [What is this stuff all about?].

These and many other Biblical passages recall to me things pondered for many years as I studied the parade of astonishing discoveries of modern science. These discoveries concern everything from the infinitely large to the infinitely small, from cosmology to atom splitting. Is our body composed of matter and energy, and is our soul composed of information? Is this the essence of what we call the Holy Trinity: matter, energy, information? Is God information?

Is the inspiration of John's gospel in its opening sentence actually true when it says: "In the beginning

was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Is the Word information? Where did John get that from? Was it from Divine inspiration, from some arcane fragment of knowledge from an earlier, unknown earthly civilization, from some extraterrestrial civilization?

In his book *Modern Times* Paul Johnson posits that the wars, crimes and human-generated catastrophes of the Twentieth Century were caused by the fallacy that man could understand the mysteries of the universe through his unaided intellect, presumably including scientific inquiry. There is certain logic in the notion that a creation, in this case humankind, could not understand its Creator unless the Creator wished it so by a grant of revelation, but can science at least help? Is there a helping relationship between science and divine revelation?

Some years ago I read an essay by Keith Mano in *National Review* magazine which compared Jesus' miracle at Bethsaida reported in Mark, Chapter 8, verses 22 to 25 with then recent discoveries concerning the working of the human brain. This is the passage from Mark:

²² "Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him.²³ So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything.

²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking."

²⁵ Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly."

Mano pointed out that the report of this miracle could now be seen as conforming to the modern discovery that the human brain not only needs functioning neurons (call them the hardware) to transmit the visual information to the brain, but also that the brain needs to learn how to interpret the data transmitted (call that the software). To Mano, this showed that Christ's two-step miracle, laying on the hands twice, conformed to what science had just learned about the functioning of the brain. In a sense, science had helped to verify Christ's miracle.

This was an exciting insight to me, but as I thought further I wondered why Christ had done the miracle in two steps. If He was what He claimed to be, He could have done the miracle in one step with just as great an effect on the observers. It occurred to me then that Christ, if He was what He claimed to be, would also know that in future ages there would be many skeptics about his miracles, and so He had done the miracle in a way which would leave a clue, which would be understood in the unfolding of scientific discovery in the fullness of time, that his miracles were genuine.

I then wrote to the *National Review* editors suggesting that they might employ their influence to cause the commissioning of an expert study to ascertain if there were other clues quietly residing in Scripture, discoverable by the application of advancing scientific knowledge. Nothing came of it, but I still think it is a good idea.

For example, in today's Gospel reading, John 6:56-69, Jesus alienates some of his disciples with an admonition to eat His body and blood. Here are selections that most interest me in this context:

"Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever. . . It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

If Jesus had attempted to reveal these thoughts to a modern audience, perhaps instead of using flesh and blood as his metaphor, he might have said that the DNA, the genes, the instructions organizing the matter of life, the information contained in the spiral helix code within every living cell, a small part of which gives the formula for mankind and an even smaller part of which gives each man his peculiar traits and individual identity. This identity, a name known to God, is what gives man his soul and his unity with the Holy Spirit, if only he unites with it of his free will. Perhaps that also is what Jesus meant when referred to the necessity of being "born again" (John: 3) to achieve salvation, the great promise of Christianity.

As another example, when in today's reading Solomon says "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud," could this be a reference to the so-called dark matter which we cannot see but which physicists think may comprise perhaps 70 percent of the stuff of which the cosmos is built, if the Theory of Relativity is sound?

Is the phrase "The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory" used at the end of the Lord's Prayer, in fact a reference to matter, energy, and information?

Can scientific inquiry now prove that we have a soul identified by a name which is incorporated in the Divine Inspiration, the Divine Information, that John calls the Word, which is God?

Can scientific inquiry now prove that there is but one God, and that his name is Allah, but that he exists in a Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is Energy, Matter, and Information? That might discourage a lot of wars.

As a boy instructed in the Roman Catholic Church, I was taught that the universe was created as an act of God's free will for His own glory, but that God does not seek to be glorified for His own sake, but for the sake of mankind that they may know Him. Thus our duty is to know, love, and serve God.

At some point in life I came to see that the evidence that God exists, and that the evidence that we have a soul which is eternal, is all around us, if only we look, if only we inquire.

Or, as expressed in Psalm 119, "The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."

Amen.