

# *The Unity of the Cosmos*

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*Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things.  
Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God.  
Every creature is a word of God.—Meister Eckhart*

Ancient Witness: Luke 6:32-36

The human body is such an amazing, intricate thing. We have all these different cells: red blood cells, white blood cells, skin cells, neurons, cells for each of the organs—pancreas, spleen, heart, lungs, brains, stomach, and so on. Each of these cells has a specific task and function, helping each organ and system to do its job. And each organ is doing its job for the entire body. This incredible array of cells, each specialized with a function, coming together in a delicate balance to form this amazing human body that can eat, think, perceive, walk, speak, love, work, cooperate, reproduce. And if any of these cells begins to malfunction, the whole system and the entire body can cease to function or even cease to survive. Intricate. Delicate. Amazing. Miraculous. As the Psalmist wrote, we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.”

One could say that every single cell has a certain kind of awareness that it is part of a larger whole. And it has an innate wisdom—instructions—that are given to it through its genetic code. And each organ, system and collection of these cells also has instructions coming from enzymes and proteins, telling them how to fit into an ever larger whole—the entire body itself.

With every cell, it’s all about the body—the whole. The cells die and are replaced continually. I have entirely different cells than I did 30 years ago, but it’s the same body.

But these cells can lose their way. Their instructions, their innate wisdom, can get corrupted or confused through mutation or injury. And sometimes it can seem that these cells lose their awareness that they are part of a larger body, and they begin to live simply for themselves, reproducing and consuming with no restraint, upsetting the delicate balance, causing other cells to die and organs to fail and even the body itself to cease working. These cells consume and are concerned only for themselves. They are only individuals now, and not working in concert, part of a whole. They have become mindless.

You can say that cancer cells lose a certain awareness of being part of the whole. And this loss of awareness makes them shortsighted, leading to the death of the larger body and therefore their own demise, as well. They have lost the wisdom of life, you could say.

But we don’t just inhabit one body, we are part of many bodies, from a spiritual and social perspective. We exist within families, within communities, within societies, within ecosystems, within a planet.

And there is a kind of wisdom that is innate, that is within us, that is passed down, leading us to a certain awareness of being part of and serving the whole. Leading us away from hoarding and mindless growth, beyond mere individualism that will ultimately strangle and kill our host, our body.

And humankind, it seems to me, has been behaving not as cells part of a larger body, oblivious to the intricate and delicate balance, unaware of contributing to the life and well-being of the larger body. We have lost the wisdom, the awareness, living simply for ourselves, consuming everything and all that we can for a mindless growth that is killing the planet, destroying our host, bringing death to Gaia—the living, breathing body we call earth.

In our tradition, the church—the followers of Jesus—are often called “the body of Christ.” Paul used this image to convey that there is a special unity and connection that contributes to a living, breathing community. People have died; new people have been born. But it’s the same body. And, of course, this unity does not stop with Christians and Christianity. Just as Jesus did not live just for himself, the body of Christ does not exist just for itself. And so we live in unity with other faith traditions through interfaith dialogue and organizations. Indeed, the unity of the followers of Jesus points beyond itself to an even greater unity of the entire world, the cosmos, the creation itself.

Just like a cell in a body, we have an inner drive to be part of others. We have an instinct to love, and when it comes to our family, this love often knows no bounds. Jesus said, “there is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for another.” What we call human love perhaps has emerged over eons from the natural, instinctive reproductive urge. Or perhaps it is kin to that reciprocal altruism we find in packs, which at its root has to do with enhancing one’s chances for survival.

We have an instinct to love, yet the circle of this love is limited. How many people are we willing to die for? Jesus said, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that for you? For even sinner love those who love them.” Human beings naturally limit the circle of people that we love.

But Jesus and other spiritual leaders have called us to see that we are more than just families, more than just tribes, more than just nations—we are part of a much larger body.

William Sloane Coffin put it like this:

*Our sin is only and always that we put asunder what God had joined together. Human unity is not something we are called on to create, only to recognize and make manifest.*

Jesus calls us to this recognition, this awareness. The unity is already there. It’s always been there. And Jesus calls us to *make manifest* our connections with the whole earth and to expand the circle of compassion to include everyone, saying, “Love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.”

There is a connection between all things, not just on the surface, but a connection that is deeply felt within, underneath the surface. It is what John Muir meant when he said,

*If you try to pick up something by itself, you find it attached to everything else in the universe.*

Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian and scholar of theology, music and medicine, observed the mysterious coexistence of God and the laws of nature this way:

*There is an ocean—cold water without motion. In this ocean, however, is the Gulf Stream—hot water flowing from the Equator toward the Pole. Inquire of all scientists how it is physically imaginable that this stream of hot water flows between the waters of the ocean, which, so to speak, form its banks, the moving within the motionless, the hot within the cold: no scientist can explain it. Similarly, there is the God of love within the God of the forces of the universe—one with God, and yet so totally different. Let ourselves be carried away by that vital stream. (from Christianity and the Religions of the World, 1923)*

Part of what Schweitzer was saying was that the deeply felt inner connection to the whole world, the hot within the cold, is God. God is like this river flowing within us, within all things, and so we are connected through God. When we “let ourselves be carried away by that vital stream,” we live more compassionately and with an awareness of the whole.

Last week, 100 years after Schweitzer wrote this, I read that the AMOC, or Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, which includes the Gulf Stream, is close to a disastrous collapse according to new research. (published in the journal, *Nature Climate Change*)

The AMOC is a large system of ocean currents, like a conveyor belt, driven by differences in temperature and salt content – the water's density. As warm water flows northwards it cools and some evaporation occurs, which increases the amount of salt. Then the cold water comes back around to the ocean floor moving southward.

But climate change has shifted the balance. Higher temperatures make ocean waters warmer and lighter. An influx of freshwater from melting ice sheets and glaciers dilutes North Atlantic's saltiness, reducing its density. If these waters aren't heavy enough to sink, the entire current will shut down. This could lead to a 30 degree temperature average drops in Europe, dramatic droughts and sea level rise in the US, and stronger hurricanes along the east coast. The study's authors said a collapse could start as early as 2025.

So we know more scientifically about the Gulf Stream that Schweitzer used as a metaphor, but we have forgotten the ancient wisdom of our cosmic unity.

The 13th century nun, Mechtild of Magdeburg, described this spiritual reality:

*The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw—and I knew I saw—all things in God and God in all things.*

She was able to see that current of water running underneath the surface, under the material world of nature. God is flowing under the surface of all things.

So there is a wisdom that leads to an awareness that we are part of a whole, a larger body. Albert Einstein, a man of deep wisdom and great worldly spirituality, once observed:

*When something vibrates, the electrons of the entire universe resonate with it. Everything is connected. The greatest tragedy of human existence is the illusion of separateness.*

This wisdom, this awareness, leads us from death to life. In his Asian Journal, the mystic and activist, Thomas Merton, wrote:

*My dear brothers and sisters, we are already one. But we imagine we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be, is what we are.*

No one was more aware of this underlying unity with all things than Jesus of Nazareth. He gave up his life not for a family member, but for every living thing. He also lived and died that we, too, might know the way, the truth and the life. He tried to raise awareness that we are connected with the whole creation, and he prayed that his followers would demonstrate this amazing, mysterious reality, as well. Jesus tried to teach us, in the words of Albert Schweitzer, that “until we extend our circle of compassion to all living things, humankind will not itself find peace.”

Amen.