



A Question of Story, by Thomas Berry

For peoples, generally, their story of the Universe and the human role within the universe is their primary source of intelligibility and value. Only through this story of how the Universe came to be in the beginning and how it came to be as it is does a person come to appreciate the meaning of life or to derive the psychic energy needed to deal effectively with those crisis moments that occur in the life of the individual and in the life of the society. Such a story communicates the most sacred of mysteries â€” and not only interprets the past, it also guides and inspires our shaping of the future.

* * *

The Universe story is the quintessence of reality. We perceive the story. We put it in our language, the birds put it in theirs, and the trees put it in theirs. We can read the story of the Universe in the trees. Everything tells the story of the Universe. The winds tell the story, literally, not just imaginatively. The story has its imprint everywhere, and that is why it is so important to know the story. If you do not know the story, in a sense you do not know yourself; you do not know anything.

* * *

Itâ€™s all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we are in between stories. The Old Storyâ€”the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into itâ€”sustained us for a long time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, energized action, consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, guided education. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. We could identify crime, punish transgressors. Everything was taken care of because the story was there. But now it is no longer functioning properly, and we have not yet learned the New Story.

--Thomas Berry