

The Garment of God

From the series: Creation – God's Ecstasy

Text: Genesis 1:24-31; Psalm 8; John 1:1-5, 14-18

Richard A. Rhem
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Transcription of the spoken sermon

Before we begin the Reading From the Present, let me introduce the author to you. She is Beatrice Bruteau, an author I do not know. Someone gave me her book, which happens now and again, and it went on that tall stack, "To be read." Then I was pursuing things and thinking about what I would be preaching, and for some reason, I picked up that book and found out that it was precisely what the preacher ordered. Bruteau understands the things I have been contemplating. Beatrice Bruteau is a contemplative and co-founder of *Schola Contemplationis*, an international network of contemplatives. The Roman Catholic tradition does that a lot better than the Protestants. The whole contemplative tradition in the Roman Catholic Church is very strong. Bruteau was part of the founding of the American Teilhard de Chardin Association and founded the Teilhard Research Institute at Fordham University. Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit scholar, worked in the science field and had a fascinating conception of nature, of reality as moving toward an omega point. Fordham is a great Catholic university where scholars have done a great deal of work in spiritual formation and the mystical tradition.

Beatrice Bruteau is also a scientist and handles with great facility chemistry, biology, and physics as they play into cosmology. She lays open the universe, the cosmos as it is understood scientifically in our day, but doing so as a contemplative, as one who follows exercises and disciplines which enable one to be in communion with that transcendent reality, that mystery we call God. In short, she is a scientist who is also deeply spiritual, and her pursuit of science is really to have a better understanding of natural reality in order that her spiritual life be consistent with her understanding of nature and vice versa.

Beatrice Bruteau's book *God's Ecstasy* provides us the theme for these summer messages. She speaks about the nature of reality in a way that a spiritual person can pray and contemplate. At the end of her book, she addresses the contemplative because, all the talk about the cosmos, about science is really so that one may pray, that one may speak of God in a significant and meaningful

way. (That is true here, also, in case you didn't know it.) In this paragraph, she addresses the contemplative:

So, what now in light of this cosmic miracle, this cosmic drama that I have been talking about, what about the contemplative? Does the contemplative have some special role? I say to the contemplative, "Feel at home in the universe. Study it. Try to understand at least some of its innumerable marvels, including ourselves who are more and more capable of this understanding. Marvel at that. Rejoice in the cosmos. In spite of all its hurtful ways, look at what it has done, is doing, is capable of doing. If you can see the God you love as present in, even as, this world, then feel that union and rejoice at that. And be active in it. Contribute to it, participate in the building, in the artwork, in the healing, in the understanding. This is where reality is. You yourself are both a member of the finite and a member of the infinite. You are a participant in the trinitarian life cycle, for you are doing the incarnating and the creating and the realizing and the rejoicing. God's ecstasy creates the world and the world's ecstasy realizes God, and you are right in the midst of it all."

You can read that again this afternoon, but let's see if I can make some sense of it for just a moment. The sermon is entitled "The Garment of God," and my intention is to point to the natural world, the universe, as the garment of God. You will remember that we are talking about all of this because what we want to try to do is to be able to speak of God in a meaningful way in the light of everything else we know about our world. Too often, tragically, the conflict between science and religion caused science, in part, pridefully to say, "We don't need the hypothesis of God." And it caused fearful religionists defensively to say, "That science can't be true." So you get an impasse and there has been a conflict.

The first Sunday in October, David Ray Griffin is coming, and he is a process theologian, a process philosopher, who is doing very much what the author of the morning is doing. His latest book is *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*. His book before that, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, is an attempt to deal with the world and its "stuff" as we know it today, and translate our understanding of God in such a way that there is not dissonance between our understanding of the world and our image and imagination of God. And so, in Griffin and in Bruteau, the world is understood not as being static, something simply there, but rather as process, something underway. It is an unfolding drama which involves matter, beginning, they tell us, with an infinitesimal spark or speck of explosion, and an expanding universe has been a consequence of that initial "Big Bang."

This universe, which is expanding as we speak, has eventuated not simply in matter, but also in people like us who are matter, flesh, but who have minds and spirits as well. This cosmic process has moved to a point where the conscious human is aware and able to reflect back on the process and to conceive of an infinite mystery that becomes incarnate in the finitude of the universe. The

universe has moved to a point of consciousness and awareness where it is able in its finitude to have a sense of the infinite. So the loop is closed, as it were. From that Infinite Mystery we call God, the ground of everything, being flows out, and the being that flows out is incarnate in cosmic reality. The cosmic reality in us becomes conscious so that we are able to look back to our source, and to worship, to be moved, and to offer alleluias to that Infinite Mystery.

The world, then, is the garment of God, the incarnation of God. Ecstasy, God's ecstasy. Ecstasy comes from the Greek preposition *ek*, which means "out of," and *statis*, and when you are ecstatic, you are out of yourself. We speak of people in ecstasy as being beside themselves. Well, God is beside God's self in ecstatic flow in a world which is matter, a cosmic reality which is in process—not a thing, not a static being, but an event—a happening that has eventuated in us who say, "Oh, a happening! Hallelujah!"

I love the prologue of John's gospel. That is why I go back to it again and again. "In the beginning was the word...." I like to translate that as "In the beginning was the intention." I'm not claiming this morning that the biblical writers had the sense of this that David Ray Griffin or Beatrice Bruteau have, but something's going on in that writer. "In the beginning is the intention and the intention is with God." Or, let me say, if we don't quibble too much about terminology, that Infinite Mystery had an intention which flowed out in the form of cosmic reality, and in the midst of that process, that intention became flesh, human.

In classical Christianity, we have said that the word became flesh, meaning Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ becomes the revelation of God the Father, and we have made that a unique, once-for-all kind of event. But what if we move beyond that? What if we sense behind that a deeper genius, an insight, an intuition that the intention of the Infinite Mystery which becomes flesh in Jesus finds Jesus not once-for-all, but as the paradigm or the model of that which is true of the whole process? What if the intention becomes cosmic reality and in the human becomes conscious, able to pray and to praise?

In verse fourteen, "the word became flesh and dwelt among us." And then we have the eighteenth verse: "No one has ever seen God." No one has ever seen the Infinite Mystery but the only son, the one that became flesh and revealed this God. Someone translated that in a marvelous fashion, particularly if you are one of the rather to be pitied people who ever went to seminary. What you do in seminary is take a text and learn how to exegete a text. Exegesis is a particular disease of people who work with the Bible. Exegesis is how you open a text, interpret a text. Someone marvelously translated the eighteenth verse as this eternal, this only son exegeted the father. Isn't that beautiful? As though Jesus is the exegesis of God. The Infinite Mystery becomes manifest in the exegesis of the human.

I wonder about the Hebrew poet who penned Psalm 8: “When I consider the heavens, the moon and the stars, what am I?” The writer knows, and we know: a speck of cosmic dust that has breath and mind and consciousness and is able to contemplate the moon and the stars and the heavens and is able to wonder and to sing “Alleluia.” But then he says, “You have made us,” not as the old translation has it, “a little less than the angels.” Someone translated it that way because they didn’t dare say what it really says: “You have made us a little less than God.” I suspect that was a reflection of Genesis, the first chapter, which speaks about the creation of the human, the male and the female, in the image of God, the likeness of God.

The ancient writers are not dealing with cosmology as we know it. They have not a clue as to the cosmic reality which is unfolded before our eyes through all of the sciences. But wasn’t there some deep intuition of that close connection between the Infinite Mystery and the finite creature bearing the image of God? Wasn’t there an awareness and consciousness that as they looked into each other’s eyes, they were experiencing God? In our human experience, we have personified God as a father, or as a mother, a mother hen gathering her chicks, or a nursing mother who would never forsake her child. We have learned in our human relationships, we have intuited, we suspect that that Infinite Mystery is the source of all and the expression of that which is the highest and the best of our own human experience.

And so the world, the cosmos, is the garment of God, the finite incarnation of that Infinite Mystery, an incarnation that has become conscious in the human who is able to pray and to praise and to be in communion with the source of all being in contemplation.

Beatrice Bruteau has another book which I have never seen, but I smiled as I read the title. I suspect what she says in that book entitled *Radical Optimism*. Because as the Infinite Mystery in ecstasy flows into being, and that being becomes conscious and in communion again with the Infinite Mystery, who knows where it is going? Who knows what is yet before us in the unfolding drama?

I have to say this: We can no longer sit passively by as spectators, for we have become actors, indeed co-creators, and we have it in our capacity to make heaven on earth or let it all go to hell. We have it in our capacity to make it a humane cosmos or to allow the horror of which we also are capable to run loose over the earth.

Ah! What an amazing way to live—with wonder and awe before this miracle unfolding. But you say, “What I really want is that intimate relationship with God. What I really want is that immediate intervention of God the Father.” I understand that. That is a totally natural desire and yearning, and it is probably much of the source from which religion arises. But you can’t have it, because that is not the way the world is.

If we are honest about our human experience, as much as we wish we had that personal immediacy and a God who now and again would tweak and twist and arrange, we know we are part of a self-creating universe. That is the most difficult thing as a pastor I have to say to you, my people, because I take away from you then that which is dearest and most desired. Do I leave you desolate? No. Because if you have my arms, you have God's arms. If you have my tears, God weeps with you. If you experience grace and forgiveness from me, that's a cosmic experience, and of course, I receive the same from you.

Does that mean, then, that all simply is human? No. The human is divine, the finite incarnation of the Infinite Mystery. After all, God is a speculative idea, friends. It is a philosophical idea. God is a word. It is a label. But, flesh, flesh and blood, arms, compassion, human compassion, human love and care, all this is the incarnation of God. It is not to say that's just human. It is not, and you ought not to say, "You're not enough." Because I'm all you have. But I'm God, and you are God. We are God to one another. We are the flesh and blood of God. We are the incarnation of God, and as the future unfolds, that Infinite Mystery with the lure of love beckons us to love, because God is love and the one who dwells in love, dwells in God, and God dwells in that one. To love one another is to make heaven on earth, and it is wonderful. It is amazing, and when you have loving human arms around you, there is nothing you cannot go through.

References:

Bruteau, Beatrice. *God's Ecstasy, the Creation of a Self-Creating World*. New York, NY: 1997.