

Wanderings in the Cosmic Garden –

Inaugural lecture by Lisa Isherwood (2008)

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As always there are many thanks to be made because a feminist theologian never stands on her own she stands with a community and as I look out at the audience I see many women who have dedicated their lives to expanding the social, political and theological/religious space women and men share. Women who have been my inspiration and to whom I owe a great deal. Thank you sisters for your unshakeable faith in justice AND your enduring strength.

When I was invited to give another inaugural lecture it seemed the ideal opportunity to implement plans that Erna & Michael Colebrook and I had hatched some years ago, a garden based on their version of Walking the Sacred Story. Our vice Chancellor Prof Joy Carter immediately caught the vision and decided to back the plan and so my heartfelt thanks to the Colebrook's and Prof Carter for their vision and their faith that I could bring it in small part to fruition. Of course this was not a solo project and so there are other thanks to be made, Elaine Bellchambers from the Faculty of Education has been an inspirational colleague ensuring that the garden developed in a way that would be of use to students and children. Tommy Geddes the Pro VC and Richard Webster, the Estates Officer, have been guiding hands in this and Head gardener, Jon Ward and his team particularly Dave Riggs & Dave Weare who tend the West Downs gardens. Without them we could not have brought the whole project to birth.

As you walk the garden later you will be confronted by vibrant and challenging art work depicting the birth of the cosmos in both its physical and mythological forms created by artist and theologian Megan Clay. Megan my deep thanks to you your work has brought the project to life and made it accessible. Megan has been aided in her hours in the store cupboard by an array of people among them Jack Hide who with his mother gathered sea shells for the art work. Jack thank you. And no event would be complete without a creative input by Prof June Boyce Tilman- thank you June.

As you will have seen behind the singers there is a web page and my thanks to Pam Maunders for this wonderful work- Elaine, Pam and myself will be taking this project forward and we hope to create an interactive garden that can be accessed by all age groups from 4-99 who will find there resources appropriate to their level- resources that tell them a new cosmology and invite them to enter a new dance with the universe and therefore themselves.

So why do I want to start theology in a cosmic garden??? Well didn't it all start there for Christians? But as we know it has not been an unproblematic start when placed in the hands of theologians and centuries of dualistic thinking. As an **unbiased** feminist liberation body theologian I will give you my take on where the problems lie and it may then become clear why I want to try again from the ground up.

The problem begins with the tree in Eden and the way that Christians have interpreted it and the event surrounding it. We have been slow to acknowledge the Babylonian background to the story and quick to read it through the lens of Platonic cosmology. The results have been disastrous. It has meant that the story is not seen as male polemic¹ against a much older and more ecologically sound goddess culture, a point that is much less veiled in the Babylonian tales than in the Hebrew copy. This has lead to a disembodied male Word being viewed as the creator of all and the one who sets in place, as divine, the hierarchical ordering of nature ending with humans, the pinnacle of creation. The male, who is given the power of naming is in fact the pinnacle. However, humans are commanded to subdue the earth [Hb kabas = stamp down] and dominate it [Hb rada = trampling]. Man follows the disembodied voice but the woman prefers to explore and engage with the sensuous delights of her surroundings and to respond to the voices she hears within them. The result of this non-hierarchical and sensuous engagement with the world was, according to the story teller, devastating, it brought about the fall of man! He could no longer be master, namer, of all he surveyed but was to be thrown from this rigid and controlled environment, this walled garden, paradise, into a place where the world would seem more real and uncertain.

¹ See, for example the work of Asphodel Long, *In a Chariot Drawn By Lions. The Search For The Female in Deity*, London, Women's Press, 1992; C. Westermann, *Creation*, London, SPCK, 1974.

Once the Babylonian background is understood the highly polemic nature of this material is crystal clear. Here is a story that wishes to advocate the absolute power of a hierarchical male god over the cosmic body of the mother goddess. This is of course not to be understood as a battle between divine beings but rather as a battle between ways of living in the world. Profs Goldenberg, Christ, Gimbutas and others have highlighted for us that Goddess consciousness is creative and fertile, has an intensity of engagement, loves paradox, emerges from diversity, has relationality at its heart and embraces the immanence of the cosmic process. This way of being in the world sat at the heart of most of our human history with the above and beyond God being relatively young emerging perhaps only about 5,000 years ago. It is the beginnings of this emergence that we see in the pages of Genesis and the battle was eventually won, some would argue, through the lens of Platonic cosmology. Western culture was henceforth doomed to a dualistic understanding of the world and a struggle to subdue it. Under this scheme women and nature are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy of control and Christian salvation is later seen to lie in escape from both. The way we have read this story places us at odds with the world in which we perhaps now only half live and I would wish to argue has brought us to the uncomfortable point where we now find that we have exploited the planet to the edge of extinction, we have maimed more than half of humanity and we even find it difficult to live in our own skins believing our real home is elsewhere and this discontent has made us victims of a genocidal economic system that has hold of us even though we created it.

And why do I want to wander? Well, theologians have not always walked we have preferred to sit in ivory towers clothed in the comfort of elaborate metaphysics removed from the messy realities of life and from this safe distance we have forgotten that theology based in Christian incarnation is an ever changing reflection on action instead of a set of fixed abstract codifications that lend themselves to power and privilege. I have for some time argued that incarnational theology can never lend itself to certainty, the God who abandoned the heavens in favour of enfleshed existence gave up the assurance of good/correct and perfect outcomes and instead embraced risk as central to the divine unfolding. In grounding theology in incarnation I am declaring for the God who we are told in the Prologue of John's Gospel, pitched his tent amongst us. A tent, not a house, a moveable dwelling, one fit for the walk, one that expands and changes shape with the winds of change, best understood perhaps as the

breathe of the Spirit. It was this incarnation who became god in community/God in society/God in creation. The gospels show us Jesus becoming the Messiah through walking with, being affected by, marginalized communities and individuals. Marcella Althaus-Reid² believes that the life of Jesus presents us with a communitarian reading of rupture that is it challenges us to move beyond a nostalgic dwelling place from where we remember past utopias or promised kingdoms and propels us into an ongoing process of imagination and creative engagement. It is not the task of theologians to heal the rupture that the divine incarnate made in the world we previously knew rather it is our task to continue the discontinuity. It is this life and this walk that we need to take in the garden one that embeds itself in the ecological/evolutionary process, itself a process of continual rupture, with eyes wide open and senses available for knowing. This is not a walk in search of perfect origins and the comfort of utopian endings it is one that moves us out into ever expanding life and so perhaps it is Eve who is our best companion as we walk.

But what kind of walk did I find myself in as a Welsh woman working in an English landscape? This land did not grow me, these skies did not call me to dream and wonder and there are no mountains to show me that the space between humans and the divine is one step into the mist. I realized very quickly that the kind of theology that this walk would open for me would include ,but be more than, one based in the oneness of all creation, as I put my feet on this land I understood that such a view was in itself a potentially dangerous metanarrative. Having been working in theology that requires we each name ourselves it would I realized be counterproductive to slide into a cosy form of universal belonging that may overlook deeply significant political considerations under the blanket of cosmic connections. So where could my own theological reflections start, would this be a postcolonial theology from a Celtic perspective exposing the pervasive normality of constructed and co-opted space, an ecotheology focusing on the plight of the planet and calling for just systems of production that empower the marginalized both human and non-human. Yes it could be both but above all it is a body theology and this did take me a little by surprise. I want to put lived in bodies back in the everyday story, back in the garden as sensuous inhabitants not as those whose reality is told through the pages of scripture and

² Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, London, SCM, 2005.

hierarchical thinking. It is Ada Maria Isasi Diaz who reminds us that radical change fails when we do not pay attention to the everyday and we create the everyday when we 'walk, when we dance, when we work and when we make love. Let us not forget the everyday is an element of liberation'³ In the everyday in the garden is where I want bodies to be and I found myself wondering what an uninterrupted engagement with our enfleshed cosmic story would yield in theological orthopraxis.

I believe the full impact of quantum theory and the new cosmology on Christian theology has not yet been felt but here are some musings.

As I have already mentioned engaging with our enfleshed cosmic story moves us away from a search for perfect origins and back to beginnings, There is no place from which we were cast out but rather a place that grew us that nurtured us and generously gave and gives us life. A cosmos that, as Matthew Fox says, has conspired for us or we would not be here- this is not to say it had blueprint human implanted from the start but rather we are one of the outcomes of its constant and volatile shifting and changing. We are made of the stars and emanate from Tiamat's fiery womb- we could not be more embedded in the cosmos. Yet Christians still tend to build theology around the notion that our home is elsewhere, a place we once dwelt and have had re-bought for us by the redemptive death of Jesus. Engaging with the cosmic story then asks radical questions of this high Christology based in a story of perfect origins. Is there a way through- I believe there is. And strangely it is a journey back to beginnings! Edward Said reminds us that beginnings are always relative, contested and historical whereas origins are absolute and power laden. Beginnings then give the Christian theologian the chance to decolonize this space of origins in creation and the inevitable creator who sits apart and to challenge as Catherine Keller puts it ' the great supernatural surge of father power, a world appearing zap out of the void and mankind ruling the world in our manly creator's image'.⁴ We are thrown back to cosmic beginnings, to void and chaos and we are asked to make our theology from that ground. To understand who we are and who we might be from *tohu vabohu*, the depth veiled in darkness. Once we give agency to void and chaos there can be no creation out of nothing as our power laden dualistic origin. Creation ceases

³ Ada Maria Isasi Diaz, *Mujerista Theology*, Orbis, 2004, p92

⁴ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, London, Routledge, 2003, 6

to be a unilateral act and the theological vista is cosmic! The divine speech in the pages of Genesis is no longer understood as a command uttered by the Lord and warrior King who rules over creation, but as Keller tells us 'let there be' is a whisper of desire and what comes forth emanates from all there is rather than appearing from above and beyond. In this shift we also see the possibility for incarnation to be understood as the rule rather than exception of creation because the whisper desires enfleshment.⁵ Keller certainly moves us significantly from creation out of nothing to a place where the divine is more humble and entices ever unfolding acts of becoming grounded in the chaos at the heart of the cosmos. However she perhaps still leaves that gap between the divine and material order that the cosmic story itself seems to challenge- there is after all nothing outside the unfolding of the multiverse. But can Christian theology engage with the cosmic story in such a way that it too closes that gap?

It is this gap that secular theorists have no difficulty challenging. Val Plumwood, an eco –philosopher is amongst those who insist that it is this gap that continues to harm both us and the planet. While we understand ourselves as something other than the rest of the created order we will inevitably see that as 'better' or 'higher' and this false consciousness leads to alienation and destruction. She is quick to point out to us the logical absurdity of such a position, monological relationships will eventually weaken the provider, the earth on which we rely. We need to move to dialogue between mutually recognizing and supporting agents or as Thomas Berry puts it we need to realize we live in a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects. Plumwood argues that removing agency from the cosmos, a technique we have so often used in our colonial history in relation to the discovery of 'new lands', makes it and all that lives in it an empty space, one that can be used for profit through the maximization of its development potential. She reminds us of the knock on effect of this way of thinking nature is no longer viewed as a creator of our environment and the land and those who depend most directly on it are relegated to the realm of 'Other'. They are backgrounded which means that we deny our reliance on both the land and those who toil in it- we live as though they have no impact on our lives and as though we lived outside the biosphere.

⁵ Ibid, p56

Plumwood argues for a return to what she calls the 'heart of stone' in order to overcome the 'sado-dispassionate rationalism of scientific reduction.' This involves a re-enchantment of the realm designated as material, the rematerialisation of spirit as speaking matter. She warns that this project should not slide into the world of the romantic and in order to guard against this it needs to be ever mindful of the spirit/matter dualism and resist it at every turn. Western culture has placed speaking matter in the rarified world of fairy tale and legend from where it cannot really impact on ethical or philosophical thinking but it is this world that we need to foreground if we are to return intentionality and agency to matter. By journeying to the heart of stone we have to walk a different path, one that moves stone [the material world of nature] from the background of consciousness to the foreground, from silent to speaking and from the ordinary to the extraordinary, to the wonderful and even to the sacred. This move is needed in order to challenge the false consciousness of the western world, so rooted in our Christian heritage, that tells us we no longer live in nature but in culture. Environmental philosophy is attempting this through stressing that attention must go 'all the way down', or as Deborah Bird Rose puts it, 'Nothing is nothing'. This move Plumwood claims opens the door to a wide range of interspecies dialogues, drama and projects that would otherwise be unimaginable which free us to rewrite the earth as sacred, earth exploration as pilgrimage and earth knowledge as revelation. Hard to imagine after centuries of thinking which has confined us to another realm. Where Plumwood and I agree most heartily, is that in order for this way of thinking to be honest it has to be grounded in cultural practices that reinscribe the material with everyday wonder and this includes the human body and material labour. The political and economic implications of this I think are quite clear. What impact would such thinking have on logging companies, chemical companies and the bodies of those who labour to make out £2.50 T shirts?

But can Christian theologians truly address the intentionality and re-enchantment of nature in their story? After all we have a story of speaking snakes and beckoning trees as a cautionary tale in our beginnings. And so we will require a rethink of beginnings and flowing from that a reimagining of what we understand by redemptive activity. We are not starting from scratch here as we have foremothers in theology who have helped us begin this painful but liberating process. Mary Grey has for example shown

us how redemption understood as at-one-ment brings us into a new and exciting world of co-creation and becoming. She argues that if relationality is at the heart of reality then it is at the heart of the creative redemptive process. So entering more deeply into this reality is the kind of 'redemptive spirituality' needed to transform the world. Sin is going against this relational grain. Very early on in our FT journey Mary encouraged us to realise that liberation while including justice needed to engage at another level if it was to be seen as redemptive. For her a 'passion for justice' increases our participation in the divine creative ground of our existence- creation and redemption go hand in hand.

I, rather predictably, have total confidence that radical incarnation, that is taking incarnation seriously without the comfort of metaphysics and delayed parousias, is the key to our living this profound reality. Believing that the God Christians speak about did indeed leave the heavens and that the human and the divine dwell in one flesh, ours as well as Christ's. This is an understanding of incarnation based in empowerment and the shared heritage of *dunamis*, that raw energy which is our birthright, the energy that attracts us to the world and those in it. This is the concept spoken of by Jesus in the gospels when he rejects 'authority over' and urges those who come after him to claim their empowerment to live in vulnerability, mutuality and relationality. In naming those who were around him as friends he was declaring that this *dunamis* lived in all and increased in the free sharing between equals. Joan Casanas also reminds us that those who made an opening in reality as Jesus did want others to make it bigger, in other words the power we see in the life of Jesus is the power we are asked to embrace in order to continue the bursting forth of the divine in the every day.

The raw dynamic energy that exists between and within us is, according to a feminist reading of Mark's gospel, the power of incarnation- it can also be seen as the cosmic explosion that still resonates through the universe, that raw dynamism that empowers all that lives. In calling it divine we have perhaps enabled ourselves to shape our understanding of who we are and how we should live but we also run the risk of disempowering its wild and challenging core by attempting to capture it in systems and dogmas. However, incarnation as the Christian story illustrates is a risky business

because it throws us into any number of possibilities .It seems then that risk and potentiality go hand in hand in the cosmic story and in radical incarnation.

Those of us who have reflected on dunamis and erotic Christology and the power of godding, that is the way we bring one another forth through vulnerable and mutual relationality, have for the most part reflected on how this impacts on humans and their relationships. Carter Heyward has taken this further by acknowledging that this power infuses the whole of creation and as such invites us into mutually empowering and vulnerable relationships with all that exists. When her article ‘The Horse as Priest’ first appeared I am sure some of us thought that, not for the first time, she had gone too far. Here she was an Episcopalian priest suggesting that a horse performed the same Eucharistic function as she did- could she be sane! For Heyward the argument was a logical one, if God is the wellspring of all, if the dunamis that enlivens us is the stuff of all life, then a horse can be the one who helps us in our godding and opens us to sacred energy. And horse riding like the Eucharist ‘can be an occasion of thanksgiving in which creatures and our divine life are united through mutual participation in the holiest of sacrifices- God’s giving up of control in order to be with us .’ She says that therapeutic riding demonstrates our capacity ‘ to give ourselves over to one another and other creatures to go together in right more fully mutual relationship, in which we move together, more nearly as one, creatures united.’ The sacredness of this action is the sharing, in this case across species- giving an agency to the non-human that Plumwood would applaud. Here is a Christology that is not simply anthropocentric and power laden it is a truly liberating narrative that opens us to life in abundance. In my view it creatively and empoweringly collapses dualisms and finds a way for Christian theology to move with the cosmic unfolding. It illuminates for me a saying of the Christian mystics which is ‘that which you are looking at is looking back’- and in this case not from above and beyond but as an active and shaping agent embedded within all that is.

Liz Stuart has so often warned me of the dangers of abandoning metaphysics seeing this realm as the one that gives us the critical distance to create alternate reality. I have always resisted her caution understanding our birthright of dunamis to be the spur for our dreams and our utopian visions. With the new challenge of quantum theory I am ever more aware that we have a much larger and more complex material

vista, now re-encharmed, in which to dream and be visionaries. Our Christian stories remain the spur because as Graham Ward shows us we have within them transformation through a wide range of the material world, from flesh and blood to bread and wine and from human to cosmic spirit – this is a truly complex and enchanted vista . I believe we have, however, narrowed the vision of these stories though a tight knit working of metaphysics, one that removes their power to transform. We have stopped telling the stories as though they spoke of our birthright and have given them away by interpreting them as a tales of hero Gods and their power to save us through **their** magical powers and actions. We and the whole of the cosmos are disempowered. Quantum theory gives us a way to look again at these stories of material transformation and radical incarnation empowers us in the retelling. We are perhaps able to see that the animate and inanimate are all agents in the cosmos and all engaged in redemptive transformation. Christianity does have within it a way to overcome the old dualisms and re-enchant the world, it does not have to cling to the Christ of imperial absolutes who has overcome the earth, it can instead embrace the erotic divine that infuses it.

I think we begin to realise that truly putting bodies back in the garden and allowing their sensuous engagement does not come without its challenges!! But there are more!!! If we have the possibility of a Christology that enables us to live in the world rather than imagining that our true home is elsewhere then we have to keep asking what it means to be alive and embedded in the cosmic story- and, if we are to be authentic we have to ask what impact this has on the theology we have created so far.

We are creatures made from the stuff of the universe, our brains carry remnants of ancient mammalian structures, every fibre of our being is related to ancient bacteria and our ancestors are the stars. We are members of a symbiotic universe in which nothing stands alone and so in short we are creatures of belonging and relationality. Our alienation then from this process is entirely a fiction. But what kind of belonging is this; it is belonging to creatively interacting systems, a network of interplay that moves always towards novelty woven from instability and an ever moving universe. Not the kind of belonging that Christian theology has been used to with its Alpha and Omega point, the unchanging God, the same yesterday and tomorrow. Indeed the One who remains ever constant for our sakes seems rather at odds with a universe that changes and does not have our interests at heart at all- that is to say it is not here for

us, it exists for its own growth and becoming. Gaia goes on living and her species come and go- this rather turns on its head the notion that we have a special place in creation and are here to subdue the earth, it becomes crystal clear that the earth can trample us in an instant and that we more complex creatures are utterly dependent on what we regard as the lowest. Do we, then, have to come down on one side or the other here- declare for the cosmic or the traditional Christian story? Or does radical incarnation give us another way of looking, it certainly decentres the anthropocentrism that makes us see the world as here for us and assures us that we have as our birthright the embodied knowing to live with change, paradox and constant becoming. Furthermore to do this with sisterly regard for everything on the planet. Can we argue that it is dunamis that propels us and the universe towards greater complexity, creativity and becoming, towards ever new possibilities? I think we can certainly say that a Christology underpinned by this notion allows us to sit easier with the realities of the cosmic story.

The Christian story tells us that we are people of promise? What can that mean if our privileged position in creation is not that promise nor is there an escape to a real and glorious life elsewhere. What then does this language mean? Diarmuid O'Murchu⁶ believes an answer lies in not asking it as an anthropocentric question? Promise should be understood as that which we give to honour and promote creation's own wishes which are to enable a meaningful future to all creatures. It is our promise to come home to the cosmos. In his words feminist theologians will hear Nelle Morton who told us that our journey as women was a journey home – interestingly in coming home to the cosmos we also come home to millions of women whose relationship with nature is direct and harsh. Our industrialised world has widened the gap between rich and poor and women bear the brunt of this since they and their children make up the largest number of the poor. Vandana Shiva has highlighted for us how economic growth has become another form of colonialism that drains the resources from those who need them the most. Many women are actually being removed from the means of growing food through such activities as cash cropping. This simply highlights how productivity for survival is very different from productivity for the capitalist market. Shiva claims that the connection between women and the earth needs to be honoured

⁶ Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Evolutionary Faith*, Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2004, p 29.

and used as a way of critiquing the dominant approach to both. In our coming home to the cosmos we are not propelled into some safe and fluffy existence but rather into ongoing political struggles for economic justice.

Of course in one sense the promise that Christians may be speaking about is the abundance of life all around us- which as we see we misuse. The cosmos itself is one of outpouring generosity and gift for no reason but the giving. As John F Haught⁷ explains there are three persistent elements in cosmic evolution, gratuity, extravagance and surprise. This he believes suggests that we should move to a more humble and receptive mode of being accepting all as gift and changing our way of living accordingly. When God was understood as Mother there was less of a problem accepting this fundamental aspect of existence but under the patriarchal father God we have rather confused the issues and created a world that cannot possibly sustain us. The body of the Mother was abundant and fertile nurturing her children with her multitude of gifts, the gift of the Father God of Christianity was to give the life of his son for the forgiveness of our sins. Certainly an abundant gift but one with a price tag. Of course I am aware that there are many ways to interpret this story and not all need to lead to the worst excesses of substitution atonement but it is worth exploring where this **has** taken us.

Marian Grau in her book 'On Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption' lays before us the link between the plan of creation, the divine economy of salvation and modern economic systems. She skilfully shows how modern homo economicus⁸ is a variant of the hysterical male who believes scarcity of goods and scarcity of salvation to be at the heart of life. This is the male who has evolved from a mindset where personal salvation is bought in blood and therefore believes that all interactions are based in the same system of debt and repayment; this is the male who walks through the pages of much patristic theology and some contemporary right wing theology. Grau is of course not the first to point out the close relationship between a debt economy of salvation and a genocidal economic system, Weber highlighted the links between Protestantism and capitalism many years ago. The generous and extravagant outpouring of the cosmos somewhat challenges this view of scarcity and personal

⁷ Ibid, p31

⁸ Marian Grau, On Divine Economy. Refinancing Redemption, London, T&T Clark, 2004, p89

redemption and offers challenges to those who would wish to wall in their God in this way or conduct their economic lives in this way. There seems to be a call here for generosity and hospitality in theology and economics on a scale that we find hard to even imagine.. Of course I cannot be allowed to skip the thorny question of if there is no personal salvation what happens to reward in heaven- I would like to duck but I won't!! The extravagant life in abundance that the cosmos offers to all does away with a select heaven for the faithful but it also offers everlasting recycling on a grand scale- each atom of you has been here since the beginning and will be here forever. Is this a comfort- well the universe is not here to comfort you!

So why would it be necessary to lead a good life if the notion of reward was removed. In part that has been answered by Plumwood's analysis of the irrationality of disregarding the earth that sustains us- if we want to remain as a species we need a planet. Does this then mean developing some perfect life based on cosmic principles rather than the laws of the father? Of course the idea of perfect is itself a human construction. The cosmos did not emerge from Platonic forms but rather from tehomic chaos , there was no blueprint, there is no blueprint there is instead glorious outpourings of surprise and novelty. Christian theology has been so used to neat packages of divinely laid out intentions that this comes as something of a surprise. Keller offers a proposition for a tehomic ethic and it is this- that we bear with the chaos, neither liking it nor fostering it but recognising that **there** is the unformed future⁹. This unformed future is made up of repetition but from very early in cosmic development this repetition always adds something new, in every repetition is a transgression, our bodies and that of the cosmos are in constant flux, as they regenerate they change, they are in essence transgressive. It seems little less than perverse to insert an unchanging God with a worked out plan into that cosmic picture. If we abandon ourselves to the cosmic, and I would argue incarnational process, we may find that we do not need the unchanging rock like father protector of moral perfection in order to lead holy lives. I suspect we will not disintegrate into moral decline but rather begin to embrace our responsibility for the unformed future we face and slowly understand that we are as Mary Grey tells us co-creators and co-redeemers, here and now this is the reality of our cosmogenesis. We will of course

⁹ Keller, p29

have to learn to sit easy with more commitment and connection and less divinely orchestrated destiny.

Some may argue that God disappears in this picture of the universe, after all what need is there of such a figure if we are all children of the Big Bang and beyond? It may be true that the realist, transcendent and patriarchal arguments for God are weakened but the biblical divine known as Sophia/Wisdom emerges more clearly on our ever unfolding and expanding canvas. She is the aspect of the divine found in many parts of biblical literature and always we are told that her most important feature is relationality. She is the one who weaves the threads of relationality amongst humans and the rest of the created order. Asphodel Long has placed her before us in all her challenging glory in her wonderful book 'In a Chariot Drawn by Lions' and Schussler Fiorenza and Elisabeth Johnson both make the case that Jesus was a prophet of Sophia. That is beyond the scope of this paper. What is not, is the affirmation that the bible holds other alternatives than the dominating God who holds all power to himself and is concerned with lifting us beyond the world to a place of metaphysical safety. There is in our tradition an invitation to counter cultural living to new ways of being beyond power and control and to embedding in the world as our emotional, physical and spiritual home. I believe this tradition is grounded in Sophia/lady Wisdom who as Grey tells us 'shouts epiphanies of connection in a broken world' and comes through, I believe, in the orthopraxis of radical incarnation.

Of course embedding ourselves in the universe as spiritual home is pitching our tent on earthquakes and seismic shifts. Cosmology shows us that new reality all emerges from 'explosive volatile exuberance'¹⁰ which offers us big dreams as well as dangers and risks. However I have argued elsewhere that incarnation itself signals to us such uncertain and ever changing ground and invites us to continue the discontinuity of cosmic ruptures. To commit to flesh is to commit to change and risk but it is also to dream big. I urge us all to have the courage to dream big, to embrace the fire inside us which is the literal ground of our being, the dunamis of creation that resonates through our bodies and the cosmos, to rejoice in making theology on seismic shifts as the only authentic way to embody the life of the divine.

¹⁰ David Toolan quoted in O'Murchu, p85.

In all this we are asked to face the dark and to take it seriously. Our cosmogenesis is ultimately in the great darkness, the nothingness. We find this perhaps the hardest to face seeing it as destruction but actually in our story it is a place/nonplace of creative possibility. Christian theology has had no place for the dark in its picture of God and of course Christ is the light of the world that dispels darkness. It is a well rehearsed argument how this dualistic split of dark and light has led to the oppression of dark people and dark continents and this understanding is increasingly entering discourses about projections and repressions of the shadow from and within our own psyches. In short then it can be argued that by banishing something as fundamental to our existence as the dark from our theological frame we have and do damage to ourselves, others and the planet. There is a great deal of scope for work in this area and perhaps the existence of black holes as one of the most creative realities of our universe will enable Christian theologians to embrace the dark not as negative but as the very substance of our creative/destructive outpouring as our sister theologians have done .

But after our wanderings and musing together why is it important to have such a Garden based at a University with a Church Foundation? Precisely to challenge the whole post-Enlightenment world which has been a much divided one with the power of rationality, economics and the limits of the mind overriding all other ways of knowing and all bodily considerations. By planting and tending this garden and by paying attention to the story it tells we are putting in place at the University an invitation for interdisciplinary research projects to think differently, to dream big, based in the challenge of radical incarnation. This is a place to walk when the comfort of disembodied purely theoretical thinking seems just too inviting and to ground the knowledge we exchange in the unfolding reality of the cosmic story.

Miriam McGillis O.P co-founder of Genesis Farm tells us ‘ We are at a moment where there are no guarantees as to the Earth’s future. It is a question of our own critical choices. And I think what we are deeply in need of is a transforming vision.....a vision that opens the future to hope.’ If any institution should be at the centre of radical thinking and working towards a new and abundant vision it is one with Christian incarnation at its heart; one that declares justice, mercy and walking

humbly on the earth as its highest value and counter cultural living as its guiding principle.

So with our feet on the earth and our hands in the soil we move in vulnerable solidarity into the divine unfolding together, animal, mineral, animate and inanimate, **TOGETHER** in the mutual embrace of fearful/awesome becoming.