

Article

Narrating a Sacred Universe. A Study of *The Universe Story* through the Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur

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Abstract: This essay examines the use of language in narrating a sacred universe, focusing specifically on the text of *The Universe Story* by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. It applies the narrative hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, who argued for the role of narrative in influencing a life through its creation of a world, to the text. It focuses specifically on Ricoeur's five traits of a phenomenology of the sacred. This step in Ricoeur's hermeneutics is a reminder that religious language has been shaped by demythologisation, and this in turn impacts any attempt to articulate in language what is interpreted as an experience of the sacred. In designating the universe as sacred, *The Universe Story* is confronted with the task of narrating such an experience. In examining the language of the text, this essay analyses how this is preformed and the effectiveness of such an approach.

Keywords: narrative; world of the text; *The Universe Story*; Ricoeur



Citation: Brennan, Niamh. 2021. Narrating a Sacred Universe. A Study of *The Universe Story* through the Hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur. *Religions* 12: 344. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050344>

Academic Editor: Alison Milbank

Received: 7 April 2021

Accepted: 12 May 2021

Published: 13 May 2021

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1. Introduction

At the centre of ecological religious thinking is the relation of the human to the world around her, and how this relation is interpreted and understood. This points to the phenomenologically hermeneutical character of such thinking, in that to understand is to interpret, and furthermore, that this understanding is essentially linguistic¹. For German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer, understanding is concerned with the process of the coming into being of meaning, and so the mark of understanding is a deeper self-understanding². Gadamer stressed the linguistic nature of human intelligibility in relation to the world, with language being the centre through which our mediation of understanding occurs³. He stated that “language is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a world at all. The world as world... is verbal in nature.”⁴ This relation between language and life was also at the forefront of the thought of French philosopher and hermeneut Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur viewed the text as a primary example of the hermeneutical task of interpretation and argued for the significance of the role narrative plays in informing our self-understanding. He argued that confining narrative to the region of fiction is to oversimplify the relation between life and fiction. Rather, he stated that there exists a relationship between life and narrative, and as part of his narrative theory, asserted that “fiction contributes to making life, in the biological sense of the word, a human life.”⁵ This is done through the creation of a world that the reader can inhabit and appropriate. This world is activated in reading and becomes praxis in the way that it influences a life. In terms of the narrative, understanding the dynamics of its configuration, Ricoeur argued, is the preparation for understanding the dynamics of transfiguration in the reader⁶. Central to this aspect of configuration is language and plot, which underscores the relationship between language, thought, and being and points to the role narrative can play in interpretation⁷.

The narrative turn in ecology, as evidenced by such works as *The Universe Story*⁸ and its successor *Journey of the Universe*,⁹ attests to this belief in the capacity of narrative to re-figure a life. *The Universe Story* is an example of using narrative to create a world that re-imagines the human being and relations with the wider Earth community. Written as a response to the ecological crisis, *The Universe Story* attempts to develop a narrative

representation in chronological form of the events as currently understood in the natural sciences of how the universe and its components, including the human, came to be. It is neither singularly a science narrative, a religious creation story, nor a re-mythologisation of science, although draws from all three. Rather, I argue that *The Universe Story* is an attempt to articulate a “world” that is sacred in order to propose a new human understanding within an evolving universe. In its presentation of the universe as “a story”, it offers a framework through which to think and experience the universe anew and to re-imagine our human relationship with Earth.

In this essay, beginning from the presupposition that narrative has the capacity to be transformative¹⁰, I will examine, through the configurative aspect of *The Universe Story*, the way in which the text narrates the universe as sacred. The essay will be divided into two parts. The first part outlines Ricoeur’s narrative hermeneutics, beginning with his notion of the world of the text. This is to briefly outline the way in which Ricoeur argued narrative relates to life. This is followed by the role of language in the creation of this world. I then focus specifically on Ricoeur’s essay “Manifestation and Proclamation”, where Ricoeur elaborates on five traits of a phenomenology of the sacred and the tension that exists between a phenomenology of manifestation and a hermeneutic of proclamation¹¹, which outlines the challenges in bringing an experience of the sacred to language. The second part of the essay focuses on the text of *The Universe Story* and the challenges of narrating a sacred universe. This is succeeded by an examination of the world of the text that is proposed through such use of language.

2. The World of the Text

In his essay “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation”, Ricoeur argues that language has no “world” on its own¹². Rather, it is realised as discourse in that it refers to something that it describes, represents, or expresses. In this way, Ricoeur notes, discourse is always about something. He defines discourse as an event in that “something happens when someone speaks.”¹³ In relation to this paper, it is his argument that a text is a work of discourse that projects a world, and how it is this “world” and the “work” of discourse that mediates self-understanding. Ricoeur argues that language, by being actualized in discourse, surpasses itself as system and realizes itself as event, so discourse, too, by entering the process of understanding, surpasses itself as event and becomes meaning. The surpassing of the event by the meaning is characteristic of discourse as such. It attests to the very intentionality of language¹⁴.

Ricoeur argues that discourse is a “work” in that it is composed and as such belongs to the category of labour and production. This composition places a form upon the material in its organisation of language and gives to the work a unique configuration that links it to its author. This is what Ricoeur terms as “style.” Style, he states, is the “promotion of a particular standpoint in a work that, by its singularity, illustrates and exalts the eventful character of discourse.”¹⁵ It is style, he argues, that links together the event and meaning of the narrative.

Ricoeur then introduces his notion of “the world of the text”, which is an extension of the reference of discourse. This reference of the text is that which distinguishes discourse from language. It is its “claim to reach reality.”¹⁶ Ricoeur goes on to argue that there is no discourse that does not connect with reality, although the world of the text refers to another level of reality than that accomplished by ordinary or descriptive language. Ricoeur states, and I will reproduce it in full, that:

“The abolition of a first-order reference, an abolition of fiction and poetry, is the condition of possibility for the freeing of a second-order reference, which reaches the world not only at the level of manipulable objects but at the level that Husserl designated by the expression *Lebenswelt* [life-world] and Heidegger by the expression *being-in-the-world*.”¹⁷

Second-order reference, Ricoeur argues, is what is released when the first-order reference of descriptive or ordinary language is suspended. This second-order reference Ricoeur refers to as the epistemological status of intelligibility displayed by the configurational

act of emplotment and that Ricoeur argues has “more kinship with practical wisdom or moral judgement than with theoretical reason.”¹⁸ Through a second-order reference, fiction introduces a distancing from the real itself into our apprehension of reality, and with this, Ricoeur argues, “new possibilities of being-in-the-world are opened up within everyday reality.”¹⁹ By suspending a first-order reference, claims on reality are loosened, and the second-order reference introduces an altered “state” of being or perception of being. Pellauer interprets this to mean:

“His [Ricoeur’s] point is that the vast majority of poetic texts do refer to the world, though not the world accessible to thoroughgoing positivism and aestheticism, but the world now refigured under the tutelage of the imaginary and the possible. Poetic language does intend reality—it is not a language unto itself divorced from any referential function—but its power of reference is the power to set forth novel ontologies that disorient readers in order to reorient them by way of an ever-expanding vision of the whole.”²⁰

Similar to Aristotle, Ricoeur argues that poetry has the capacity to teach and to convey meanings. In configuring a plot, action is made understandable and “typical” and this “typification of the story allows poetry to be connected with this other kind of intelligibility, that of ethics, which Aristotle called *phronesis*.²¹ History describes being, but fiction, it could be argued, has a greater task in that in re-describing being, it *intends* being. This is not in the sense of “being-given” but in the sense of the “power-to-be.” Everyday reality is then transformed through what Ricoeur names the “imaginative variations that literature carries out on the real.”²²

What must be interpreted in a text then, Ricoeur argues, is “a proposed world that I could inhabit and wherein I could project one of my ownmost possibilities. This is what I call the world of the text, the world proper to *this* unique text.”²³ This is to interpret “the type of being-in-the-world unfolded *in front of* the text.”²⁴ In this way, understanding is no longer tied to authorial intention nor to the structure of the text, but becomes a structure of our being-in-the-world. To understand, he argues, is “*to understand oneself in front of the text*. It is not a question of imposing upon the text our finite capacity for understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed.”²⁵

3. Figurative Discourse and Its Role in the Creation of a “World”

Central to Ricoeur’s philosophical enquiries is the journey to selfhood, which he argues is made possible by the willingness of the subject to receive “new-ways of being through its interactions with the text-worlds of literature, myth and religion.”²⁶ In Ricoeur’s early work, *The Symbolism of Evil*,²⁷ Wallace argues that Ricoeur brings religious studies to “the threshold of a new methodology” as hermeneutical rather than a dogmatic or purely philosophical discipline. This is achieved through Ricoeur’s focus on an interpretation of the symbols and myths that surround the concept of evil. Ricoeur’s first definition of hermeneutics is conceived as “a deciphering of symbols, themselves understood as expressions containing double meanings: the literal, usual common meaning guiding the unveiling of the second meaning, the one actually aimed at by the symbol through the first.”²⁸ This, Ricoeur conceives of as an amplifying interpretation in that it was attentive to the surplus of meaning included in the symbol and which reflection was to uncover. The symbol functions as a mediation between experience and reflection on that experience. Religious symbolism, he argues, cannot be studied through a direct rational analysis of human culture and history, as it contains a surplus of meaning that is only available “to the theorist who values the efficacy of mythical literatures.”²⁹

Similarly, figurative discourse is the language used to speak about symbols, and in this way, it can be considered what Ricoeur names a “semantic innovation” in that it says something for the first time and so also contains a surplus of meaning³⁰. This is the level where initiatives are taken and that “governs the transformations that takes place on the deeper levels.”³¹ The symbol is a sign, signifying something beyond itself but ultimately rooted in life. It retains a primary or literal meaning because it is bound

to the configurations of the cosmos. Ricoeur argues that myth is built on symbolism and illustrates this relationship when he writes how “I shall regard myths as a species of symbols, as symbols developed in the form of narrations.”³² The expressive power of the myth lies in the presence of symbols within it. According to Ricoeur, myths incorporate our fragmentary human experience into narratives of origin. In telling how the world began, the myth tells how the human condition came about. It provides order because of its cosmological interpretation and through its explanatory schemes³³.

Metaphor is a demonstration of the form of symbolic and figurative language onto which the myth is grafted. Ricoeur draws a continuation between his two works *The Rule of Metaphor*³⁴ and *Time and Narrative*³⁵ under the question of “how do we create meaning in speaking?”³⁶ He answers this by stating that meaning is created through metaphor by “placing together incongruous semantic fields” and through narrative by constructing a plot so that “there is a certain homogeneity of the two subjects, under the sign of semantic innovation.”³⁷ As a figure of speech, metaphor, Ricoeur argues, constitutes a displacement whereby its explanation is rooted in substitution and so there is an extension of meaning to its words. Ricoeur states that the metaphor “is the most brilliant illustration of the power of language to create meaning by the means of unexpected comparisons, thanks to which a new semantic relevance suddenly emerges.”³⁸ The metaphor takes the word as its unit of reference, while the myth takes the narrative and in turn narrative is specifically grafted, as Ricoeur states, onto symbolic form. Ricoeur argues that metaphor is the rhetorical process “by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality... the metaphorical ‘is’ at once signifies both ‘is not’ and ‘is like’.” If this is really so, we are allowed to speak of metaphorical truth, but in an equally ‘tensive’ sense of the word ‘truth’.³⁹ Metaphor works with existing language, but in introducing a “twist” or a new semantic innovation creates new meaning. In doing this it enables the reader to “see” things in a different manner. Metaphor in this sense, like poetry and fiction, intends reality and points to possibilities of being in the world by reconfiguring and conceptualising the world in a previously unimagined and undescribed way. Such figurative uses of language as myth, metaphor, and religious language are resistant to analysis through a model of symbolic logic, as, according to Ricoeur, they carry a “double-meaning” structure and yet are not bound as strictly to life as a symbol is. Ricoeur’s narrative turn, and in particular the power of second-order reference and figurative language to disclose new possibilities of being, led him to understand both non-religious and religious fictions as potentially revelatory. In this sense, “revelation” for Ricoeur is performative and not propositional. It becomes “an event of new meaning between text and interpreter, rather than a body of received doctrines under the control of a particular magisterium.”⁴⁰

4. Five Traits of a Phenomenology of the Sacred

I turn now to Ricoeur’s focus on a phenomenology of the sacred and how this is articulated in language. This step in his hermeneutics is a reminder that religious language has been shaped by demythologisation, and this in turn impacts any attempt to articulate in language what is interpreted as an experience of the sacred. Ricoeur addresses this challenge as a tension between a phenomenology of the sacred and a hermeneutic of proclamation. In relation to *The Universe Story*, this is manifest as the tension between a phenomenology of the sacred and a narration of the sacred, although there are clearly overlaps. It is also the point at which ecological religious thinking is performed in the text, and on which its effectiveness depends.

In his organisation of his five traits of the phenomenology of the sacred, Ricoeur acknowledges his debt to Mircea Eliade. In addition, the first trait of a phenomenology of the sacred, he states, is brought to light by Rudolf Otto⁴¹. This is the sacred as experienced as awesome, powerful, and overwhelming. According to Ricoeur, the numinous element of the sacred is not firstly associated with language, even if it may become so. Ricoeur argues that to speak of “power” is in fact to speak of something other than “speech.” This,

he states, “is a power that does not pass over completely into articulation since it is the experience of efficacy *par excellence*.”⁴²

The second trait is connected to the notion of hierophany. Although we cannot describe the sacred as such, we can describe how the sacred manifests, so “anything by which the sacred shows itself is a hierophany.”⁴³ This phenomenology of the sacred is possible, Ricoeur states, because these manifestations have “a form, a structure, an articulation”⁴⁴. Ricoeur states how this manifestation is not originally a verbal one and that there is no privilege conferred on speech. The sacred can manifest itself in trees or rocks that the believer venerates and therefore in cultural forms of behaviour. On this point, Ricoeur notes that the fact that a tree (or a rock) can manifest the sacred means that “this profane reality becomes something other than itself while still remaining itself.”⁴⁵ This relates to the amplitude of the field of hierophanies but also how it belongs to an aesthetic level of experience (in the Kantian sense) and not a verbal one. Ricoeur writes that “what is most remarkable about the phenomenology of the sacred is that it can be described as a manner of inhabiting space and time.”⁴⁶ We speak of “sacred space” and “sacred time”, Ricoeur states, in order to indicate the fact that space is not homogenous but delimited and oriented around a “midpoint.” Ricoeur returns to Kant’s “Critique of Judgement” in order to express the space–time constitution philosophically. He states that Kant related aesthetic ideas to the productive imagination that Ricoeur cites Kant as writing “gives us more to think about.” This is so because “the capacity to determine an object by a concept is surpassed by the capacity to present the ideas of our reason in images.”⁴⁷ Ricoeur argues that the sacred is in the same position in relation to its manifestations, as the ideas of our reason are in relation to their presentation “in the products of the imagination.”⁴⁸ In other words, the sacred, according to Ricoeur, and borrowing an expression from philosopher and theologian Henri Corbin, opens a space of manifestation that is imaginary rather than logical in nature.

A third trait of the sacred that is less relevant to this paper, so suffice just to mention it, is the connection between ritual and the symbolism of the sacred. The sacred, Ricoeur states, does not just reveal itself only in signs that are to be contemplated but also in behaviour. The ritual is a mode of acting, a way in which “to do something with this power or powers.”⁴⁹

The fourth trait concerns the role of nature, and Ricoeur paraphrases Eliade in articulating the sacred “as a function of certain great cosmic polarities.”⁵⁰ The symbolism of the sky represents the Most High and in general that of divine transcendence, and to this are attached images of ascension such as mountains and ladders. This symbolism refers back to divine immanence, which is manifest in the hierophanies of life that Ricoeur states “relieves” the inaccessibility of the divine. The proximity of the gods, he argues, is attested to in the “fertility of the soil, vegetative exuberance, the prosperity of the flocks and the fecundity of the maternal womb.”⁵¹ Nowhere else, Ricoeur states, can we witness the “point of rupture”⁵² in the battle between the sacredness of nature and theologies of the word so clearly. Furthermore, nowhere else is the solidarity between natural powers and the sacred so attested to.

Ricoeur elaborates on the sacredness of nature and states that the sacred power of nature is first attested to by the fact that it is both threatened and uncertain. This illustrates the dramatic nature of the sacred. The universe emerged from chaos. Nature speaks of the depth “from which its order has emerged and toward which chaos it may always regress.”⁵³ The symbol of the tree of life represents the fundamental sacrality of life. The symbolism of Mother Earth who is fecund and gives life remains so powerful that Ricoeur argues it has marked all of religious humankind. However, within this sacred universe, the symbolism used is a bound symbolism. As stated, a metaphor is a free association or invention of discourse, but a symbol is bound to the configuration of the cosmos. Thus, symbolism only becomes significant when it is borne “by the sacred valences of the elements themselves.”⁵⁴ We might say that water symbolises potential, but it is “we” who speak about potential. However, it is the “epiphanies” of water itself that bind this statement. It is the appearance

of the water and therefore the appearance of the sacred in and through it. Ricoeur writes, which I will reproduce in full, as it pertains to the aim of *The Universe Story*, that,

“A creation story is necessary if symbolism is to come to language, but the myth that recounts it returns in a way to nature through the symbolism of the ritual where the element becomes immediately ritualized... the sacredness of nature shows itself in symbolically saying itself. And the showing founds the saying, not vice versa. Its sacrality is immediate or it does not exist.”⁵⁵

Thus, Ricoeur summarises the four traits of a phenomenology of the sacred in the following way: the antecedence of the powerful over its meaning, the aesthetic (spatial-temporal) manifestation; the correlation between myth and ritual; and the bound character of natural symbolism. Each of these traits concern the relation of discourse to the sacred universe.

The fifth trait, Ricoeur argues, sums up the previous four. This is what Ricoeur terms the “logic of meaning” in the “sacred” universe. The above traits, Ricoeur argues, attest that in a “sacred universe” the capacity for saying is founded on the capacity of the cosmos to signify something other than itself. In this way the logic of meaning proceeds from the structure of the universe itself and therefore its law is a law of correspondences. These correspondences Ricoeur lists as the correspondence between creation *illo tempore* and the order of natural appearances and human action, and the correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm.

Mediation between the “Logic of Meaning” in the “Sacred Universe” and the “Logic of Meaning” in Proclamatory Discourse

In a hermeneutic of proclamation, Ricoeur argues that the “word” outweighs the numinous. In fact, the “word”, Ricoeur argues, breaks away from the numinous and becomes its own version of sacredness. Hierophanies are replaced with theologies and while there are still sacred spaces and times, the ethical has priority over the aesthetic. As regards ritual, in the Hebraic faith this ritualisation is not founded on the correlation between myth and ritual, but rather on a historical vector that runs through the time of repetition. The sacredness of nature withdraws, Ricoeur argues, before the element of the Word, before the ethical element and before the historical element. A new “logic of meaning” is created that is directly opposed to the logic of correspondences of the “sacred universe.” Ricoeur argues that religious language uses “limit-expressions” to open up our experiences, which are themselves limit-experiences, and gives the example of the parable as redescribing experience in the “extreme.” He poses the question in the same essay of what is specific to religious language as regards to poetic forms of language. The difference, he responds, depends on the logic of correspondences in the sacred universe; thus, we must return to the most originary, pre-theological level of religious discourse possible. Here Ricoeur provides the examples of parables, proverbs, and sayings. In all these forms of discourse Ricoeur argues how the logic of meaning,

“Depends on the use of limit-expressions that bring about the rupturing of ordinary speech. This act of rupturing the ordinary is what I oppose to the logic of meaning of the sacred universe founded as it is on the correspondence of the macrocosmos and the microcosmos, of humankind, its dwelling place, and the universe, of our mother and the earth. The universe of the sacred, we said, is internally ‘bound’. The paradoxical universe of the parable, the proverb, and the eschatological saying, on the contrary, is a ‘burst’ or an ‘exploded’ universe.”⁵⁶

Such use of language includes paradox and hyperbole to bring about an “intensification” that “abuses” the “change of fate.” This intensification implies its own logic of meaning that dislocates the imagination in that it turns it away from a vision that is a continuous sequence, and by dis-orienting us, re-orienting us. These limit-expressions are “indexes” pointed in the direction of “limit-experiences.” Religious language, Ricoeur writes, “uses limit-expressions only to open up our very experience, to make it explode in the direction of experiences that themselves are limit-experiences.”⁵⁷ In re-describing

reality, these discourses intend the “extreme” and are touched by the demand for “something more.”

According to Ricoeur, all discourse is touched by this demand “for something more”, which is hinted at in the parable, the proverb, and the saying. He claims in his mediation between a phenomenology of the sacred and the kerygmatic that “humanity is simply not possible without the sacred.”⁵⁸ The word, he argues, breaks away from the numinous. There would be no hermeneutic, he states, if there were no proclamation, but there would be no proclamation if the “word” were not powerful enough to set forth the new being it proclaims. The “word” then takes over the function of the numinous and is addressed to us and constitutes us rather than it being we who articulate it. The “word” translates the values “tremendum” and “fascinatum” into obedience and fervour and articulates what Ricoeur names the religious attitude of absolute dependence. This, he states, is the essential relation of humankind to the sacred, which is transformed into speech and thus reaffirmed while also being surpassed by that speech.

5. Introduction to *The Universe Story*

The Universe Story is a text written in 1992 by Passionist priest Thomas Berry and mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme. It is the result of a decade-long collaboration between Swimme and Berry as a response to the ecological crisis that has since generated its own secondary body of work in literature, music, and the arts. In addition, it has been responsible for inspiring communities to combine an ecological ethic with a form of spirituality through practices in agriculture, education, and commitment to ecologically sustainable living⁵⁹. In its introductory pages, the authors write that a new narrative is needed that brings to light the insights of human history and the history of the universe, and the narrative itself is based on the major scientific insights of the past centuries. In the book four main points are emphasised. They are that the universe is not a fixed, mechanistic object but that it continues to develop and evolve, and as such we live in a context of cosmogenesis and not a static one-time creation event or “genesis”; that the universe, Earth, life, and the human are deeply interconnected, so much so that “this story of the Earth is also the story of the human”⁶⁰; that the human species is the universe become conscious of itself in our ability for self-reflection; and finally, that human activities need to be brought “into alignment”⁶¹ with the planet so that we can begin to live in “mutually enhancing” relationship⁶². Underpinning all this is a lyrical celebration of the beauty, grandeur, and mystery of the universe. While presented as a “story” and indeed “a new story”, the use of language in the text points to a deeper motivation than just narrating the history of the cosmos and describing its interconnectedness. Rather, when examined with the narrative hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur, the text reveals itself to be re-imagining our structure of being-in-the-world, and although it avoids any explicitly theological terms, it is a world the text narrates as sacred with its own philosophical and theological implications.

As an ecological narrative there are evident limitations in Swimme and Berry’s approach. The first is that the effectiveness of the narrative for ecological change is solely dependent on the transformation in self-understanding of the reader. In addition, the time required for such a transformation may be greater than the time left for action in a rapidly deteriorating environment. In other words, it may be too late for Swimme and Berry’s approach to be effective. On the other hand, there is growing research that testifies to the role that emotions play in environmental action⁶³. De Tavernier and Van den Noortgaete see a hermeneutical dynamic at work in the construction of environmental identity through the process of repeated interpretation⁶⁴. This hermeneutical approach of relating the outer environment to the identity of the self can, they state, help to bridge the value–action gap between attitudes and behaviour. This gap between knowing what courses of action works and enacting them, they argue, helps to explore why cognitive approaches to changes in behaviour are not always effective. Rather, they argue for a re-orientation of self-identity that can engender environmental engagement.

6. How Does *The Universe Story* Perform Its Sacredness? An Examination of the Language of the Text

Ricoeur's five traits for a phenomenology of the sacred highlight the non-linguistic element of the sacred and attest to an inscription of the sacred "in a level of experience beneath that of language."⁶⁵ *The Universe Story*, in intending to designate all as sacred, is immediately confronted with the paradox of proclaiming that which is non-linguistic, and of bringing to language that which is experienced as powerful, awesome, and overwhelming and which, according to Ricoeur, "does not pass completely into articulation."⁶⁶ Ricoeur's first trait is drawn from Otto's concept of *mysterium tremendum*. This begins not with a description of the numinous, but with a description of the feelings evoked upon experience of the numinous. The sacred, Ricoeur states, is experienced as "awesome, as powerful, as overwhelming."⁶⁷ The protagonist of *The Universe Story* is the universe itself, a protagonist that the narrative tells us created, but is also part of, all that it creates. This produces a challenge in narrating how the universe produces such feeling in others, if others are constitutive of the universe, and relates to the way in which the narrative presents the reality of the universe. Notwithstanding this, there are two ways that Swimme and Berry attempt to convey the *mysterium tremendum*. The first is their own enthused and reverent response to the universe, as encapsulated by their narrative. The other is the way in which, through their use of language, they endeavour to simulate a similar effect in their reader. When referring to the beginning of the universe, the authors use such phrases as "primordial energy blazed"⁶⁸ or refer to "the power" that brought forth the universe that is also "a condition of every moment of the universe",⁶⁹ including, we are told, the present moment, a power, they inform us, that can still be experienced now.

In chapter nine, "Neolithic Village", the authors refer to the development in language as being one of the most significant aspects of the Neolithic period. This period, they state, established "more of the power words in the languages of the planet than any other period."⁷⁰ In describing these "primordial power-words", Swimme and Berry write that they are words that took on their "form and meaning at that moment of total intimacy of humans with the natural world and with the deepest immersion of the human in the mysteries of existence."⁷¹ This they narrate as a revelatory moment when the archetypal symbols communicated to the human were activated for the first time, and when rituals were established whereby the human entered into and participated in the cosmological order. As Matthew J. Ashley⁷² points out, however, the narrative gives no concrete example of such power-words, only stating that this is "a moment" that, as readers, we are invited to assume is one of "total intimacy with the natural world" and that we return to constantly "in our efforts to understand the true meaning of the words that we use, words that determine our most profound sense of reality and value."⁷³ Ashley interprets the emergence of urban culture in the narrative as a "fall", as the narrative implies a move from total intimacy to less intimacy⁷⁴. This is convincing, but may be better understood, I argue, as a difference in language. Rather than speak in terms of fall and redemption, some thirteen lines later Swimme and Berry write that "every perfection imposes limitations. Liberation in one aspect implies bonding in another."⁷⁵ This language underscores the authors' emphasis on the "wholeness" and "singular event" that they refer to as the universe. In addition, and here the complexity of their project is highlighted, the ability to return to this moment of total intimacy is also emphasised. This is achieved, they argue, in re-examining our language and its meanings. Swimme and Berry repeatedly appeal for a return to experience and a return to intimacy with the natural world. When we position this in light of their above statement about words, it is not the experience of total intimacy that is unreachable but our language that needs ever more refinement in order to capture such an experience. Elsewhere, Swimme and Berry have written about the limits of our current "human-centered dictionary"⁷⁶ and how a more symbolic language is needed. However, as Otto and Ricoeur argue, and what Swimme and Berry either choose to ignore or believe is attainable, this numinous element of the sacred is a trait that is pre-linguistic, mainly encapsulated in feelings and experience, and while it might later be brought to language,

it initially implies a “power” that is other than that which can be rendered in speech. Although arguably unable to create the experience of such a power in the reader with language, the narrative does direct the reader’s attention to the possibility of such an experience and places where it may be sought, in this instance, specifically in experiences of the natural world.

Swimme and Berry instruct on the feelings that the experience of this power in the universe “must” evoke. They state that “from the beginning [the universe] has its mysterious self-organizing power that, if experienced in any serious manner, must evoke an even greater sense of awe than that evoked in earlier times at the experience of the dawn breaking over the horizon, the lightning storms crashing over the hills, or the night sounds of the tropical forests.”⁷⁷ This, they tell us, can be experienced through “the story that is told here... for it is out of this story that all these phenomena have emerged.”⁷⁸ Here, unwittingly, the story, as outspoken critic of *The Universe Story* Lisa Sideris has argued, becomes the revelation and the narrators, as a consequence, those to be admired⁷⁹. Swimme and Berry’s attempt to reproduce the irreducible and non-linguistic element of the sacred, that of which the religious experience is an experience, cannot surmount the obstacle of language and its component of distancing that necessarily involves mediation and interpretation. Although they name this element “power” and expressively draw the reader’s attention to it as something that is present and that can be experienced, the naming of it does not make it so. Without the use of categories, it becomes ephemeral and weakened, a thing that the narrative points to without explanation rather than something that the narrative reveals or makes intelligible, and the *mysterium tremendum* as being the very root of religious feeling in its daunting “awefulness” and “majesty” remains untranslated⁸⁰. Swimme and Berry’s refusal to interpret or give definition to this, combined with their circumvention of any definition of the term “divine”, raises questions about what they wish to avoid or conversely to achieve through this. This could be read as the desire of the authors to let the natural world speak for itself, which suggests the basic commitment of a religious naturalism and even a natural theology meant here in the sense that Manning describes it as “the operations of human intellect and the ways the world seems to be to us as we encounter it are not merely self-contained but rather tell us something, however imprecise, uncertain, and incomplete about ultimate reality, or, God.”⁸¹ It could likewise be interpreted to mean that the authors implicitly take for granted that naturalism in itself is insufficient to satisfy the cognitive, moral, and religious longing of the human, hence the implicit space for a horizon that can never be grasped⁸². In light of the author’s emphasis on story and the mythical style of the text, I argue that such deliberate refraining from any definitive naming or conceptual demarcation is to offer an overflow of meaning to the productive imagination of the reader. This has no closed horizon but rather draws on the reader’s imagination by placing the reader at the root of the spoken word before, to quote Bachelard, it becomes “a new being of our language.”⁸³ This has the effect of making the reader an active determinant in what the meaning is.

Despite the narrative’s inability to reproduce this aspect of the sacred, the narrative’s charged language does bring to life the element of energy or urgency that Otto argued comprises part of the *mysterium tremendum*.⁸⁴ This non-rational element Otto describes in terms of “wrath”, albeit a wrath Otto tells us that is unconcerned with moral qualities. Rather, it is a “force that knows not stint nor stay, which is urgent, active, compelling and alive”⁸⁵ and that Otto describes as being “gravely disturbing” to those who only recognise gentleness, love, and goodness in the divine nature⁸⁶. Swimme and Berry repeatedly highlight the energy of the universe. They speak about “frenzied particles”, “the primeval fireball”, supernovas “that matched a billion stars in luminosity and spewed stellar materials throughout the galaxy”, or the “charged” early planets that “boiled.”⁸⁷ The authors tell us that the creativity and fecundity of the universe “identifies with the deepest energy of the universe as its primary expression.”⁸⁸ In the epilogue “Celebration”, the reader is invited to celebrate existence, an existence of “color and sound but especially in movement, in flight through the air and swimming through the sea [and]... the pathos

of both living and dying, of consuming and being consumed.”⁸⁹ The universe they narrate is creative and dynamic, an unfolding of wild, unfettered energy that is its vital source, and is undergoing a process of cosmogenesis that compels it forward. It is not a benign or gentle energy, but destructive, as witnessed in the cataclysmic events narrated in the text⁹⁰ and as described unequivocally in the sentence as “that originating and annihilating power that is the marrow of the universe.”⁹¹

While naming the source of the universe as numinous with words such as “numinous fire”,⁹² the narrative is not explicit in defining the numinous. It is that, as Swimme and Berry tell us, which is “too subtle, too overwhelming and too mysterious” to ever be definitively captured⁹³. They do, however, with the concept of a hierophany, describe how it manifests. Eliade has stated that the sacred and the profane “are two modes of being in the world”⁹⁴ and that the sacred is equivalent to a power or to “reality”. The sacred is saturated with *being*.⁹⁵ The religious person, he argues, “deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power”⁹⁶ and attempts to dwell in a sacred universe by making the world sacred through sanctifying space and time, nature and the cosmos, and her own human existence. In this narrative, it is the universe entire that becomes a manifestation of the sacred, a hierophany, and refers to Ricoeur’s second trait that the sacred shows itself as a hierophany that has a form and structure, and belongs to the aesthetic level of experience. This presentation of the universe as sacred belongs to the “aesthetic” level of experience in that it can be described as inhabiting time and space. In *The Universe Story*, the beginning of the universe signifies the beginning of time and space and so the sacred begins to take on “a form, a structure, an articulation”,⁹⁷ which the narrative states is further expressed as the universe develops and increases in its physical complexity. The universe in the narrative becomes a space of manifestation that opens up the imagination to a myriad of interpretations of the sacred through these inhabitations and in doing so, “gives us more to think about.” What is crucial in the idea of a hierophany is the way in which a “profane reality” becomes “something other” than itself. The universe in the narrative becomes transformed into something “super-real” while simultaneously the authors emphasise its active role in ordinary reality. Super-real, in this instance, refers to that which Ricoeur terms “saturated with efficacy.” It is saturated with being, with power and energy, a power and energy that the human, the narrative informs us, participates in. The phrase used in *The Universe Story* to describe the human is that of the universe come to consciousness. Upon a superficial reading, this immediately indicates that the human is not separate from, but rather a significant part of the universe, with a specific role. The narrative presents consciousness as something that has developed until it reaches this “special mode” of self-awareness in the human. From the approach of environmental hermeneutics, Clingerman has argued for the idea of emplacement as a complement to Ricoeur’s concept of “emplotment.” “Emplacement”, he argues, approaches the environment as a way in which to understand oneself, and he connects it to narrative identity. In reading “the book of nature”, Clingerman states, we also encounter the world of our own existence, and in turn, our emplacement within nature is how we understand the narrative of nature⁹⁸. Clingerman is metaphorically referring to nature as a text. In *The Universe Story*, the text narrates nature. The emplotment of the human is the place that we are given in the story, our “emplacement” in the universe, and as argued, is central to the telling of the story. In the narrative the authors construct a universe that the human belongs to and is part of. The narrative describes how that same power that brought forth the universe is present in the reader, and so humanity assumes what Eliade names “a humanity that has a transhuman, transcendent model.”⁹⁹ Such a model invites the reader to regard themselves as “made” by history, in this instance not just human history but sacred history, and is offered as the model to attain. As central to this story, the human then takes their place at the very centre of what is considered “most real.” It is a cosmically structured and constructed account that seeks to transcend ancestry, tradition, and culture with all the limitations and consequences of such an approach¹⁰⁰, and is essentially that of belonging to a place, in this instance, a universe. In doing this, the narrative “opens”

the human life. Eliade has also argued that the life of *Homo religiosus* “has an additional dimension; it is not merely human, it is the same time cosmic, since it is a transhuman structure. It could be termed an open existence, for it is not strictly confined to man’s mode of being.”¹⁰¹ *The Universe Story* explicitly identifies the human with the cosmos, and in doing so places humanity in such a structure. So to live, in this narrative, is not to live merely as the individual one is, but to participate in the universe in its sacredness.

Ricoeur argues that the sacredness of nature shows itself by symbolically saying itself. It is this “showing” that founds the “saying” and relates to Ricoeur’s third trait, that of the tie between the symbolism of the sacred and ritual. Berry and Swimme echo this in their assertion that this “entire range of natural phenomena impinged on human consciousness... with a wonder that easily turned into ritual celebration. The transition moments of the cosmological order evoked awe and reverence and invited participation.”¹⁰²

There is also a parallel with Ricoeur’s fourth trait, the role of nature. Crucially, in *The Universe Story*, nature becomes the way in which the cosmological process is revealed. Eliade has argued that for *Homo religiosus*, nature is never only natural but is also “fraught with a religious value”,¹⁰³ and so in contemplation of the world the many modes of the sacred are uncovered. Swimme and Berry write “That all this was related to danger, to the struggle for survival, to death provided the challenge and excitement that is itself, perhaps, an imperative deep within the entire cosmological process.”¹⁰⁴ The sacred power of nature is attested to by the very fact that it is threatened and uncertain. Nature, Ricoeur states, “speaks of the depths from which its order has emerged and toward which chaos it may always regress.”¹⁰⁵ The symbolism of nature is bound to the cosmos, but this symbolism is only significant “when borne by the sacred valences themselves.”¹⁰⁶ This bound symbolism and the order it assumes, which underscores the entire narrative and is accentuated by the authors’ call for “alignment”, is evident in the manner in which the narrative describes the emergence of life: “life was evoked by Earth’s dynamics, ignited by lightning. Not from a single branch of lightning, but a planetwide lightning storm stinging the oceans for millions of years... these ordering patterns hide until the material structures and free energy of the region reach that particular complexity and intensity capable of drawing such patterns forth.”¹⁰⁷ Life, the narrative states, can emerge because there are ordering patterns in the world, which, despite the violence and instability of conditions, can and continue to overcome those “chaotic depths.” This in the narrative makes the universe ordered and life blessed.

7. The Proposed World of *The Universe Story*

Through its use of language, specifically symbolism and metaphor, and the manner in which these contribute to the reproduction of the traits of a phenomenology of the sacred, *The Universe Story* creates a world that begins to re-describe reality with all the connotations of phronesis and the “intention of being” associated with this task. Reality is interpreted as a sacred universe that manifests the divine and the sacred is attested to through the power of the universe and, most directly, the natural world. The universe itself becomes the primary symbol of the text, the ultimate hierophany, and the sacred comes to manifest in a space that is imaginary, more than logical, giving us “more to think about” and expanding the revelatory dimension of religion and traditional concepts of sacredness. The capacity in the text “to say” something about the universe is founded on this capacity of the universe to signify something other than itself. In Berry and Swimme’s hands it becomes a manifestation of the “numinous origins” or “ultimate mystery.” As a symbol the universe is bound internally to the reality that it symbolises. It is symbolically configured as the primary meaning-event that draws all the discourses at work in the narrative together, but it is also the point where something escapes them. It is a “cosmos” that is ordered to overcome its chaotic depths and witnessed through the precision of events in time and the emergence of life. As metaphor, however, reality is re-described and the universe of the metaphor becomes an exploded universe. Humanity is provided a transhuman and transcendent model as “the universe” come to consciousness in human consciousness,

signifying the bond between human being and “total being.” This limit-expression of the text ruptures the ordinary by opening the human to an experience of the extreme¹⁰⁸. It also makes the human central to the universe (and the narrative) and claims that the role of the human is that of “enabling the Earth and the universe entire to reflect on and to celebrate themselves, and the deep mysteries they bear within them, in a special mode of conscious self-awareness.”¹⁰⁹

This redescription of reality in the text highlights the Universe, Earth, nature, and its components all as intentional agents that exist in their own right. What is noteworthy is not that this is just another personification of nature or the universe, but that it is within the very structures, laws, and functioning of the universe, that meaning is to be found. It is a claim that cannot be made by a scientific discourse nor a religious discourse alone for two reasons. First, it is not an empirical claim, although rooted in an empirical model while also highlighting that the empirical sciences are still looking for a model that encompasses both the physical world and what the natural sciences refer to as consciousness or mind, and that includes the ability to value and to create meaning, all central aspects of the human life. Second, it is not a religious claim. In this narrative it is not a theophany of “the Name” that is being held up, but rather a hierophany that is the universe. In addition, the narrative is primarily aesthetic over ethical. The text’s aesthetic is built on the fact that the narrative is a description of time and space. This time and space is a manifestation of an unfolding and developing universe. The different events that interrupt and transform this time and space are interpreted as cosmological moments of grace¹¹⁰ that Swimme and Berry name “[a] sacred intensification of the universe’s journey.”¹¹¹ The narrative contains no instruction or doctrine or explicit ethical commandments. Here “the word” gets no privilege and the sacredness of nature does not retreat before it, but is what the narrative continuously calls the reader’s consciousness to. It takes centre stage. The authors’ plea is for attention to the experience rather than its description, attention to the non-philosophical reality that precedes philosophy, and the non-rational numinous “fact” before it becomes schematised. If, as Berry argues, it is experience of the sacred through nature that creates the religious consciousness¹¹², he is calling us back to the numinous before it is overtaken by the “word.” If also, as Ricoeur argues, when “the word” takes over the function of the numinous it is addressed to us, rather than it being us who articulate it¹¹³, it can be argued that *The Universe Story* seeks to challenge this inherited world of meaning in urging us to return to the starting point from which religious consciousness emerges and to re-orient the manner, and towards what this religious consciousness is directed. If we concur, too, with Sideris that “the word” in this instance can be that of science, it, too, although privileged, is tempered with insights and observations from other disciplines. The narrative consistently draws the reader’s attention back to the wonders of the natural world, to poetry, art, literature, and other forms of the humanities.

Swimme and Berry claim the universe as sacred, but they also want the reader to recognise it as sacred. They write, “For what is at stake is not simply an economic resource, it is the meaning of existence itself. Ultimately it is the survival of the world of the sacred. Once this is gone the world of meaning truly dissolves into ashes”¹¹⁴. This is emphasised, too, by Ricoeur when he writes that “humanity is simply not possible without the sacred.”¹¹⁵ Ricoeur’s argument is a response to the demythologisation arising from the “scientific-technological ideology”, which he argues has resulted in a retreat of the sacred, whereas Berry and Swimme’s is a response to the ecological crisis. With language, symbol, and myth, Berry and Swimme present a reality that is “in itself” a sacred reality. It is a world that is ordered to overcome its chaotic depths. Furthermore, it is a world, the text proposes, where the sacred is ever more manifest and can be experienced directly, immediately, and paradoxically, without the mediation of words.

8. Conclusions

In this essay, I examined the text of *The Universe Story*, which is an attempt to sacralise the universe, Earth, and existence itself through the medium of language and in the partic-

ular form of narrative. Through the narrative, the authors offer a world for the reader to inhabit and even appropriate. This world is created through the style of the authors, which links together the event of the narrative and its proposed meaning. Central to this is the use of figurative language that contributes to the manner in which meaning is transferred in the text. The text is laden with symbolic imagery and metaphor that paradoxically describes a universe that is symbolically bound to the configurations of the cosmos while also being metaphorically exploded. *The Universe Story* offers an interpretation of a numinous experience, and with it an interpretation of the meaning of being that is integrated with the larger cosmos. In the narrative, the human is presented as the universe come to consciousness, and so the human is offered a transhuman and transcendent model that connects human being to total being in a new way. As Eliade has argued, in understanding the symbolism, individual experience is transformed into a metaphysical understanding of the world and the individual becomes connected to the universal. However, such a numinous experience is arguably reduced in being brought to language, as it is that which can never be fully articulated, just as Berry and Swimme acknowledge, that this universe “story” can never be “fully” told. The *mysterium tremendum* remains opaque, something that is hinted at but never definitively translated. The narrative calls for a re-examination of our language to express and understand this experience, but language is only, as Ricoeur argued, realised as discourse, and yet, as Gadamer stated, on it depends the fact that we have a world at all. In order to recognise the depths of this world, the authors place the onus on the poetic imagination of the reader to be inventive in birthing new “beings of language” that can articulate such depths. The text is successful in bringing the energy of the *mysterium tremendum* to language and the universe narrated is wild and dynamic, both creative and destructive. Furthermore, nature is presented as the way in which the cosmological process is revealed and where the sacred manifests. Its sacred power attested to in the fact that although threatened and chaotic, it overcomes these so that order, and life, can emerge.

In the text it is difficult to make a definitive distinction on whether Swimme and Berry are offering the reader a way in which to think nature or a way in which to think God, and I argue that this is the aim of the authors, to return to the numinous experience and to re-evaluate it, as well as our own relation to language and to being, and how these interrelate. Its use of language highlights both its power and limitations in bringing to expression the entire range of the human experience and, in particular, the need for an articulation and proclamation of the sacred as a fundamental part of that experience. Clearly for Swimme and Berry, it is not enough to experience the sacred, but rather this experience must be uttered as sacred, or in this instance, narrated, testifying to their belief in the power of narrative to influence a life, and once again underscoring the relation between language and life.

Although this representation of a sacred universe can challenge metaphysical and theological conceptions in relation to the divine/Earth/human relation, and indeed the self and other relations, the nature of the project, in encouraging numinous experience over articulation, means that to build a philosophy or a religion on the narrative is, in some way, ironically to undermine the message of the narrative and points to the limitations and contradictions of such an approach. The narrative does, however, offer a symbolic structure within which to re-think ways of human being and acting in the world, whether this applies to religion or philosophy, while also testifying to the role that interpretation can play in pro-environmental behaviour. As an ecological narrative, however, the effectiveness of such an approach remains to be determined.

Funding: This research received no funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- 1 (Wierciński 2005), pp. xiii–xxiv:xviii.
- 2 (Jeanrond 1986), p. 12.
- 3 Ibid., p. 11.
- 4 Gadamer cited in Wiernciski. Hermeneutic Conversion: Through Phenomenology back to Hermeneutics. In *Between Description and Interpretation. The Hermeneutic Turn in Phenomenology*. p. xxi.
- 5 (Ricoeur 1992), pp. 22–33:20.
- 6 Ricoeur, Paul. Life in Quest of Narrative. In *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*. p. 27.
- 7 (Clingerman 2009).
- 8 (Swimme and Berry 1994).
- 9 (Swimme and Tucker 2011).
- 10 Ricoeur takes up this question in his three-part work of *Time and Narrative*. Blamey, Kathleen and Pellauer, David (eds. and trans.) Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985 and 1984. He also addresses it in “Life in Quest of Narrative” in *On Paul Ricoeur. Narrative and Interpretation*.
- 11 A hermeneutic of proclamation Ricoeur identifies with a hermeneutic of religious language. This is “where the accent is placed on speech and writing and generally on the word of God” and relates Ricoeur argues to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Ricoeur, Paul. “Manifestation and Proclamation” in *Figuring the Sacred*, (Ricoeur 1995d, p. 48).
- 12 (Ricoeur 1991), pp. 75–88.
- 13 Ibid., p. 77.
- 14 Ibid., p. 78.
- 15 Ibid., p. 81.
- 16 Ibid., p. 85.
- 17 Ibid., p. 86 emphasis author’s own.
- 18 (Ricoeur 1995e), pp. 236–248:239.
- 19 Ricoeur, Paul. Philosophy and Religious Language. In *Figuring the Sacred*. pp. 35–47:43.
- 20 (Pellauer 2007), p. 8.
- 21 Ricoeur, Paul. Toward a Narrative Theology. Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties. In *Figuring the Sacred*. p. 239.
- 22 Ricoeur, Paul. The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation. In *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. p. 86.
- 23 Ricoeur, Paul. The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation. In *From text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*. p. 86.
- 24 Ibid., p. 86.
- 25 Ibid., p. 88.
- 26 Wallace, Mark I. Introduction to Figuring the Sacred. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Wallace 1995, pp. 1–32:2).
- 27 (Ricoeur 1967).
- 28 (Ricoeur 1995b), pp. 3–53:17.
- 29 Wallace, Mark I. Introduction to Figuring the Sacred. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Wallace 1995, p. 5).
- 30 Pellauer, David. *Ricoeur. A Guide for the Perplexed*. p. 67.
- 31 Ricoeur, Paul. Interpretive Narrative. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995c, pp. 181–199:188).
- 32 Ricoeur, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. p. 18.
- 33 Ricoeur, Paul. Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995a, pp. 249–261:251).
- 34 (Ricoeur 1977).
- 35 (Ricoeur 1984).
- 36 (Ricoeur 1998), p. 81.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ricoeur, Paul. Intellectual autobiography of Paul Ricoeur. In *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, p. 27.
- 39 Ibid., p. 7.
- 40 Wallace, Mark I. Introduction to Figuring the Sacred. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Wallace 1995, p. 8).
- 41 This idea was brought to light in Otto’s work. 1958. In *The Idea of the Holy*. London: Oxford University Press.
- 42 Ricoeur, Paul. Manifestation and Proclamation. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995d, p. 49).
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid., p. 50.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Ibid.

- 49 Ibid., p. 51.
- 50 Ibid., p. 52.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid., p. 53.
- 55 Ibid., p. 54.
- 56 Ibid., p. 60.
- 57 Ibid., p. 61.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Cf. Genesis Farm, New Jersey, U.S. A (www.genesisfarm.org accessed 1 January 2021); Green Mountain Monastery in Greensboro, Vermont, U.S.A. (www.greenmountainmonastery.org accessed 1 January 2021); An Tairseach, Wicklow, Ireland; (www.ecocentrewicklow.ie accessed 1 January 2021); The Archer Mountain Community, Queensland, Australia (www.thearcher.org.au accessed 1 January 2021); Center for Ecological Living and Learning in the Philippines, (www.cellsilang.weebly). Also informative is Taylor, McFarland Sarah. *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2007.
- 60 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 3.
- 61 The concept of “alignment” in the narrative can be read as an integration or coordination of the human with the natural world, see pp. 256–57. Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*.
- 62 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 3.
- 63 (Smith 2005), pp. 219–30.
- 64 (De Tavernier and Van den Noortgaete 2014).
- 65 Ricoeur, Paul. Manifestation and Proclamation. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995d, p. 50).
- 66 Ibid., p. 49.
- 67 Ibid., p. 49.
- 68 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 7.
- 69 Ibid., p. 17.
- 70 Ibid., p. 178.
- 71 Ibid., p. 178.
- 72 (Ashley 2010).
- 73 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 178.
- 74 Ashley, J M. Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination. In *Theological Studies*, p. 881.
- 75 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 178.
- 76 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 258 In the text, Swimme and Berry argue for an “Earth-centred language” that recognises the languages of the “multitude of beings.” They state that humans are becoming more sensitive to the non-human modes of communication of the world and write that “all the more substantive words in the language are undergoing a transformation, words such as *society, good and evil, freedom, justice, literacy, progress*. All these words need to be extended to include the various beings of the natural world, their freedoms, their rights, their share in the functioning of the Earth.” Italics original.
- 77 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 238.
- 78 Ibid., p. 238.
- 79 Sideris argues that scientific knowledge is increasingly becoming “the possession of an elite priesthood” whereby it is not the information being uncovered but rather the scientist who becomes “the final object of reverie.” Sideris, Lisa H. *Consecrating Science. Wonder, knowledge and the Natural World*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2017, p. 75.
- 80 This could be construed as an intentional attempt to transcend religious particularity, but the tradition and background from which the narrative emerges cannot be transcended and Berry and Swimme’s own history and tradition perhaps even unconsciously re-appear in its pages. The fact of the narrative is testament to the power structures that enable such a telling.
- 81 Manning, Russell Re. “Natural Theology Reconsidered (Again)” in *Theology and Science*, 15:3, 2017 pp. 289–301:290. This is a concise and informed discussion on the history and position that natural theology occupies. I include natural theology here, as ecotheology, according to Guess, can be understood as a natural theology “to the extent that it is patterned by current scientific understandings of the world. Yet as well as being ‘natural,’ it is also

‘theological’ because it is grounded in the texts which have provided the cornerstones of Christian thought and traditions in both pre-Modern and Modern times.” (Guess, Deborah. “The theistic naturalism of Arthur Peacocke as a framework for ecological theology” in *Phronema*, p. 66.). *The Universe Story* is certainly grounded in the natural world, and while being influenced by some of Christian thought such as Teilhard and Aquinas, it is contestable the extent to which the narrative is grounded in Christian texts.

- 82 Cf. John Haught’s paper “Is Nature Enough? No” for an interesting discussion on this. Haught writes that there are three reasons why nature (as proposed by religious naturalism) can never, by itself, be satisfactory to the human quest for knowledge, meaning, and fulfilment. He gives three reasons in the form of human “needs” for this. These are human spiritual needs, the mind’s need for deep explanation, and the perennial human search for truth. Haught, John F. “Is Nature Enough? No” in *Zygon*, vol. 38, no. 4, December 2003, pp. 769–82.
- 83 Bachelard cited in (Ricoeur 1967), p. 13.
- 84 Otto, Rudolf, *The Idea of the Holy*.
- 85 Ibid., p. 24.
- 86 Ibid., p. 19.
- 87 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 7.
- 88 Ibid., p. 175.
- 89 Ibid., p. 263.
- 90 Such examples provided in the text are the supernova explosion (chp. 3), the destruction of the Archean eon (chp. 5), and the mutation of the prokaryotic cells ‘Viking’ and ‘Engla’ (chp. 6).
- 91 Ibid., p. 20.
- 92 Ibid., p. 23.
- 93 Ibid., p. 5.
- 94 (Eliade 1959), p. 14.
- 95 Ibid., p. 12. Emphasis author’s own.
- 96 Ibid., p. 13.
- 97 Ricoeur, Paul. Manifestation and Proclamation. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995d, p. 49).
- 98 Clingerman, Forest. “Reading the Book of Nature: A hermeneutical account of Nature for Philosophical Theology” in *Worldviews*. pp. 72–91:83.
- 99 Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 99.
- 100 *The Universe Story* is criticised for purporting to contain a universal truth that serves to suppress the other and leads to a less diverse and vibrant world cf. Ashley, Matthew, J. “Reading the Universe Story Theologically: The Contribution of a Biblical Narrative Imagination” in *Theological Studies*, 2010, 71, pp. 870–902:885; Sideris, Lisa. “To know the story is to love it: Scientific Mythmaking and the Longing for Cosmic Connection” *Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research*. P. 210; Godfrey, C. Pheobe. “Ecofeminist Cosmology in Practice: Genesis Farm and the Embodiment of Sustainable Solutions” in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*. vol. 19, no. 2, 2008, pp. 96–114; and Eaton, Heather. “Feminist or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry’s Functional Cosmology” in *Ecotheology 5 and 6*, 1998–99, pp. 73–94.
- 101 Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 166.
- 102 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 153.
- 103 Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*. p. 116.
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- 105 Ricoeur, Paul. Manifestation and Proclamation. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995d, p. 53).
- 106 Ibid.
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- 109 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 1.
- 110 (Berry 2014), p. 147.
- 111 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 61.
- 112 Thomas Berry scholar, Heather Eaton argues that for Berry, religions themselves in their teachings or practices were never the starting point but rather these “core human experiences, | “out of which the particular religious consciousness, sensibility or spirituality arose.” She cites Berry as saying that religion takes its origin “in the deep mysteries of what we see, hear, touch, taste and savor.” Eaton, Heather. “Metamorphoses. A Cosmology of Religions in an Ecological Age” in *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry. Imagining the Earth Community*. Eaton, Heather (ed.) USA: Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 149–71:152.

- 113 Ricoeur, Paul. Manifestation and Proclamation. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995d, p. 65).
- 114 Swimme and Berry. *The Universe Story*. p. 250.
- 115 Ricoeur, Paul. Manifestation and Proclamation. In *Figuring the Sacred*. (Ricoeur 1995d, p. 64).

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