

The Promise of More*

BY JOHN SURETTE, SJ

Billions of years before our own appearance in evolution it was already seeded with promise.

—Theologian, John Haught

No matter where we focus our attention in the 13.7 billion year unfolding of the universe, we find the promise of *more*. We find it in the beginning and we find it in our present moment.

In its original flaring forth, the universe expressed itself as a plasma of charged particles and energy. The temperature of the plasma was in the order of a thousand million degrees centigrade. That primordial furnace contained the promise of atoms. And so it happened, after less than a million years the plasma cooled as it expanded and the particles were drawn together forming atoms of hydrogen and then helium. Very quickly the universe took the form of galactic clouds of these gases. These proto-galaxies, hundreds of billions of them, foamed into existence.

The galaxies held the promise of stars. And so it happened, due to the attracting force of gravity, the molecules of hydrogen and helium were drawn together where they ignited, and the primal stars burst into being. These stars, hundreds of millions of them in each galaxy, lit up the universe like a cosmic Christmas tree.

One of these stars contained the promise of our Solar System. And so it happened, some five billion years ago, a primal star recently named "Tiamat" grew old, swelled, and exploded with the brilliance of a billion stars, scattering its dust in space. It was a supernova! Again the uniting force of gravity was at work. Over time that star dust was drawn together where it ignited and gave birth to our Sun. It was from the scraps of this birth that the planets, including our beautiful planet Earth, were born.

The early Earth contained the promise of life. And so it happened, some four billion years ago, conditions were such that life was able to emerge within Earth's ocean in the

form of tiny one-celled creatures. For millions of years they cleaned the waters, added oxygen to the atmosphere, and prepared the way for every differentiated and complex form of life that was to follow. Among those who followed were we humans, the most creative and unpredictable of creatures.

The promise of *more* was embedded in humankind. And so it happened, over the past 200,000 years, we humans moved from being hunter-gatherers into being village and city dwellers. We dared to dream dreams and see visions. We created language and art, literature and poetry, philosophy and theology, science and technology, and in modern times took into ourselves the very powers of the universe itself.

The evolving universe is essentially promise. Its Creative Energy carries this great promise of abundance, of fulfillment, of *more*. That *more* turns out to be galaxies, stars, planets, Earth, life and each one of us reading these words at this moment with all that moves deeply within us. Reflecting on this cosmic reality, David Toolan, SJ, wrote that the promise of *more* "shines through the whole of things, not just at the beginning but throughout all time and history and at every instant."

This *more* is often not predictable or even imaginable. A charged particle in the primordial plasma could not have foretold atoms of hydrogen and helium. Those atoms could not have imagined stars and galaxies. Tiamat could not have predicted our beautiful planet Earth, and Earth's early life forms could not have forecast the human adventure. In recent times who among us could have predicted the disintegration of the Soviet Union or the collapse of Apartheid in South Africa or the emergence within Maoist China of a capitalist economy.

The *more* the universe promises often turns out to be a total surprise. Such a universe points to an Ultimate Mystery that is more than we can imagine, a Divinity full of surprises and delights in change and adventure. Such a universe provides the cosmic basis for the hope of fulfillment that resides at the core of the great religions and in the hearts of all peoples. This hope invites us into our future and moves us into action in the present moment.

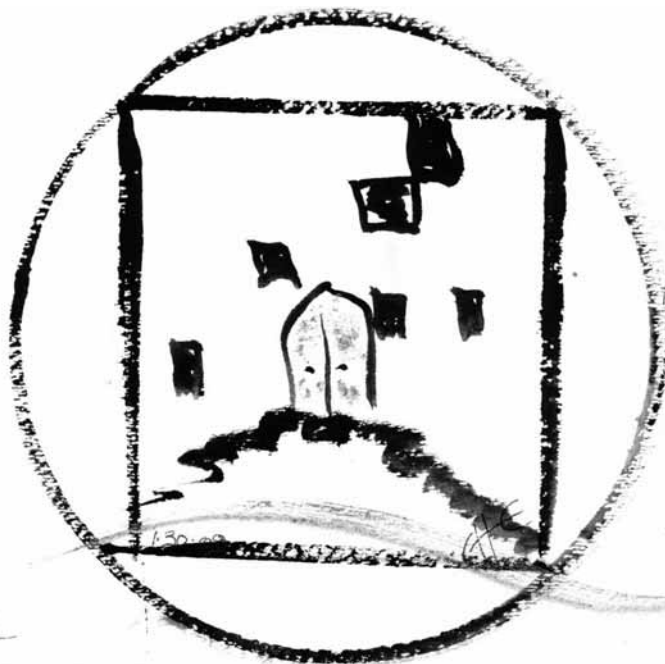
The promise of *more* also provides us with the basis for an ecological ethic. It nurtures within us humans an intensified sense of responsibility for Earth within which such promise is embedded. It fosters an ecological justice, a justice that is sensitive to all creatures that carry within themselves such a promise. It makes evident to us that to contribute to the diminishment of Earth and its human community is to despair of the promise and of the Maker of the promise.

Many look at our 21st century world with its ever-growing problems and they perceive an historical process leading to ever-greater chaos. Experiencing a lessening of their optimism for the future, they yearn for the good old days. Others look at the same radical changes are taking place in our world and they perceive the resulting chaos as being a necessary condition for the emergence of

something more that is promised. These people become our “cultural creatives” and they are the ones who will lead us into our promised future. These people experience the promise as a source of potential energy, an energy for moving forward and dealing creatively with the challenges and invitations of our time and for the enhancement of our human adventure.

As children of the universe, we know the dynamics of the cosmos play out in our individual human lives. If the promise of *more* is carried by the whole cosmos, we know the promise is available to us in our present moment. And so it does not surprise us we are never satisfied and carry deep within ourselves an endless aching need. Theologian Karl Rahner has said we live in a world in which “all symphonies must remain unfinished.”

Our hearts are restless and when we experience this restlessness we are participating in the promise of *more* that pulsates throughout the universe. The macro and the micro are involved in an “interbeing.” The universal is present in the particular and the particular participates in the universal. The cosmic yearning for *more* and our individual yearning for *more* are one yearning. An evolutionary universe encourages us to believe and to trust there is always *more*!



self-critical