

## Podcast «Mysticism Today», February 28, 2025

### Episode 13: More than stardust?

#### Intro

Bernhard: From a materialistic perspective, it is clear: human beings, like all matter in this universe, are stardust. Created in a cosmological process of unimaginable dimensions, an evolution of more than 4 billion years, only to remain nothing more than stardust. But is that really the whole truth? Isn't there still a secret, a mysticism to it that goes beyond this materialistic view?

I am preoccupied with this question and I am aware that it is extremely complex. In this episode of my podcast "Mysticism Today", I would like to approach it from a perspective that attracts me and that I find exciting, namely from a musical perspective. I therefore asked my violin teacher Georg Jacobi, whom I hold in high esteem, if he would be willing to talk with me about this topic. I am convinced that the exchange with him will lead into an extremely exciting adventure.

I would, therefore, like to welcome anyone who would like to take part in our discussion on the topic "More than stardust?". I am Bernhard Neuenschwander, a reformed pastor and doctor of theology. Mysticism is the theme of my life - in silent meditation, in my studies and in my practical work with people. Adina Hermes is responsible for the technology today, too. Thank you very much, Adina.

So welcome, Georg! I am delighted that you are willing to appear as a guest in this podcast.

*Georg: Thank you very much for the invitation!*

I would like to briefly introduce you to our audience. Professionally, you are first and foremost a violinist. You've been a member of the Bern Symphony Orchestra for 35 years, so you have a huge amount of concert experience. But you are also the founder and leader of the Colla Parte Quartet, with whom you have rehearsed and performed a large repertoire over the past 30 years. You have also recorded several CDs, including premiere recordings. So on the one hand, you are here as an experienced and accomplished musician. On the other hand, you are also an amateur astronomer, have your own observatory and spend many nights observing the starry sky. I find this combination exciting and extremely interesting for today's topic.

*I would perhaps describe myself more as a stargazer, as the term amateur astronomer has become almost professional these days. My small garden observatory is still under construction and my night-time observations have so far been rather limited due to my workload. I've been interested in astronomy since I was a child, but I don't think I'll be able to fully enjoy it until I retire.*

## Getting started

Would you like to start by saying something about how you, as a violinist, come to look at the stars? Do you see a connection between you as a violinist and you as an amateur astronomer?

*That's a bit difficult to say. First of all, I actually look at the starry sky with all its mysterious beauty as a person with a very universal interest. Albert Einstein once said: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the basic feeling that stands at the cradle of true art and science. Anyone who does not know it and cannot be amazed, can no longer be astonished, is dead, so to speak, and his eye has gone out."*

*I wouldn't necessarily want to establish or construe a direct connection between my interest in astronomy and my profession as a musician.*

So is it simply a personal preference or is it not that unique? If I remember correctly ... Wasn't there William Herschel in England in the 18th century who discovered and cataloged thousands of nebulae in the night sky?

*Exactly. Wilhelm Herschel was originally from Hanover and is a very good example, as he was a professional musician before he turned his full attention to astronomy. In addition to his jobs as a violinist, orchestra leader, organist and even composer in Bath, England, he was also very intensively involved in mathematics and astronomy.*

And he discovered the planet Uranus, didn't he?

*Yes. Using telescopes he himself built, he and his sister Caroline spent years systematically scanning the night sky for unknown nebulae and, above all, comets - that was the main interest at the time - and in 1781 discovered the planet Uranus (which, incidentally, is still occasionally called "Herschel" in English-speaking countries). This brought him worldwide attention, as well as a monthly pension from the English royal family and admission to the Royal Society. From this point on, he was able to devote himself exclusively to astronomy and laid the foundation for the cataloguing of star clusters and nebulae that is still in use today.*

Is there a connection for you between music and looking at the sky? The idea that the planets create an inaudible music of the spheres is an old idea that was already held by the Pythagoreans. However, this idea of a harmonious cosmos seems rather antiquated today...

*Not necessarily, because despite all the interest in the latest achievements of modern astronomical research, I think it is definitely worth taking a closer look at where in history harmonies of the spheres were actually mentioned, when, by whom and, above all, why.*

Okay. But that might go beyond the scope of today's discussion...

*Yes, for sure. So perhaps Johannes Kepler, co-founder of the modern heliocentric view of the world, is just one example. He saw his groundbreaking discoveries and calculations on the laws of planetary orbits as synoptic with a divine harmonic principle. In*

*Kepler's third law, for example, after years of determining positions and calculating orbits, he discovered - and here comes some math - that the square of the sidereal orbital period of a planet around the sun (measured in earth years) in relation to the third power of the large elliptical semi-axis of the same planet's orbit around the sun (measured in astronomical units, AU) always equals 1 with great accuracy. You first have to come to this conclusion - through pure observation, without a telescope - before Newton and his calculation of masses, mind you. The result appears neither chaotic nor random to the unbiased observer and was incorporated into Kepler's five-volume work "Harmonices Mundi", in which he sets out his concept of a divine law of celestial harmony. - Kepler's idea of harmonic relationships lives on in a certain way in modern astronomical research, for example, in that exoplanet systems are being researched today whose bodies have apparently been moving in integer "resonances" to each other for billions of years, i.e. 3:2, 4:3 etc., which has a stabilizing effect on the respective systems. The same applies to many small bodies in our solar system, including the moons of Jupiter.*

Kepler apparently believed that he recognized a divine order in the cosmological constellations. That is impressive. From today's perspective, I am much more cautious about the idea of a divine order in the universe. Do you think these ideas are still relevant today?

*I think so. The thoughts behind the idea of the harmony of the spheres were and are taken up by many people, thought about further and also applied in practice, e.g. in music therapy. Paul Hindemith wrote an entire opera on the subject, and there is a very extensive body of secondary literature on the subject of man / music / cosmos. The legendary conductor Bruno Walter even commented, with reference to Pythagoras, that the spiritually understood harmony of the spheres is a reality attainable for - as he says - "richer natures". The laws of the harmony of the spheres can also be found, for example, in the floor and wall elevations of Gothic cathedrals and in rose windows. In my opinion, this timeless beauty in stone alone, as well as the beauty of the ideas behind it, is more relevant today than ever in terms of the aesthetic education of human beings - to use Schiller's words.*

## **Geocentric and heliocentric view of the world**

Okay. Let's go one step further. I sometimes get the impression that even in the 21st century we are still emotionally and socially stuck in the classic, geocentric view of the world: the earth is a disk, the sun revolves around it, and the firmament provides a stable roof that God holds in his hands. The Copernican world view, which exposed this world view as an illusion, seems to be an affront to human self-awareness. It makes us humans aware that we are not in the center of the universe and that we are not simply the crowning glory of creation. The conflict surrounding Galileo Galilei in the 17th century still seems to resonate today.

*Maybe so. But I don't believe that for modern man, world views are in conflict with each other - at least initially from a purely astronomical point of view - as far as a center of the universe is concerned. I like to imagine an open clockwork that can be held by various cogwheels. If you hold the "planetary clockwork" to Saturn, for example, then the planetary system, including the sun, rotates around Saturn, resulting in the most interesting orbital patterns. There are very nice animations of this on the Internet, and they produce wonderful geometric flower patterns ([gerdbreitenbach.de/planet/planet.html](http://gerdbreitenbach.de/planet/planet.html)). If, on the other hand, the*

*great “Milky Way clockwork” is fixed to the galactic center in the constellation Sagittarius, then our solar system is a micro-clockwork that slowly moves along its orbit over thousands of years within the framework of the proper motion of the so-called fixed stars (which are not so fixed when viewed in the light). With today's astronomical knowledge, the question of a “center around which everything revolves” has become virtually obsolete.*

You are undoubtedly right. But just that: I do observe how the sun rises in the east in the morning and sets in the west in the evening. Even though I know that the earth revolves around the sun, my everyday perception is that the sun revolves around the earth...

*... which initially corresponds to an unbiased perception of reality and is completely justified ...*

... Yes, it's my unbiased perception, but I'm obviously misinterpreting it. After all, the sun does not revolve around the earth. Today, this interpretation is taken to the extreme, in that I can imagine that the sun not only revolves around the earth, but that the earth also revolves around myself. The postmodern world view is hyperanthropocentric. Everything revolves around my perception, my feelings, my perspective. But we forget that the universe is much older than us human beings and that it is given to us.

*I see this not only as a reason to look at the sky from time to time, but above all to acquire fundamental knowledge about our position in the universe. Astronomical knowledge should become general knowledge in the broadest sense. Anyone who ignores every “where from” and “where to” and only focuses on themselves will sooner or later have their life and that of their fellow human beings fall on their feet with full weight. I think it is, in the broadest sense, a question of education for each individual to say goodbye to their anthropocentrism - where it exists - to put their position in the universe into the right perspective and, above all, to become aware of their responsibility towards the world around them.*

I fully agree with that. However, a world view that places the earth and itself in the center is obviously so ingrained that it is difficult to put it into perspective. But it is actually extremely exciting that we can now view the universe from the perspective of the European space probe “Gaia”, for example, which has been observing the entire sky at a distance of 1.5 million kilometers from Earth for years with high precision and sends huge amounts of data back to our Earth. This opens up a whole new perspective on our galaxy and far beyond.

*Already decades ago, the perspective of a photo taken by one of the Voyager space probes, for example from the region of Neptune, where you can see the sun as a glistening bright star against a night-black background, and next to it, barely perceptible and pixel-sized, a small dot: the earth, was also exciting.*

*But back to your comment about the relativization of a geocentric world view: Instead of “geocentric world view” - the term has an almost dogmatic medieval quality to it - I would actually prefer to speak of a “geocentric perspective”, which - once again seen in astronomical terms and for once not sociologically - is neither right nor wrong, but is still important and relevant today for various areas of life on Earth. For example, decades of experiments in biodynamic agriculture have shown that the positions of the moon and planets in front of the images of the zodiac have a considerable influence on the quality of*

*plant growth from a geocentric perspective. This is 100 years of purely empirical long-term research with clear results.*

Ok, exciting. So we are faced with a twofold task: on the one hand, we have to think about how we can gain the freedom not to think anthropocentrically, i.e. to become free of ourselves, but on the other hand, we also have to remember that we live on this earth, look up to the sky from here and are responsible for life on this planet.

Exactly. The concept of responsibility will come up in the course of our conversation.

***Intermission music (Excerpt from Béla Bartók, string quartet 1, played by Colla parte quartet)***

### **Freedom to change perspective**

Let's first turn to the question of how we can get more freedom to not take ourselves so seriously and instead grasp what is given to us. What do you think: Should we simply look up at the stars more?

*By all means! Even the staunchest atheist will be amazed by an Alpine or desert starry sky from which you think you can pluck the stars, or by the sight of an ancient globular cluster in the telescope reminiscent of diamonds, or by the impression of a complex gas nebula, a star birthplace (or, in the words of Albert Einstein, he is "dead and his eye has gone out").*

We are talking about huge spaces and unimaginable dimensions of time!

*Exactly, and it is absolutely fascinating that we can see with the naked eye the light emitted by our neighboring galaxy, the Andromeda Nebula, which has been traveling towards us at the speed of light for over 2 million years! That is an almost unimaginable distance.*

Realizing this may shatter a narcissistic self-image, but it could also be beneficial today and lead to humility.

*Yes, those who are willing to admit it become humble in the face of these unimaginable dimensions and their own place in this gigantic universe, as is well known, even very hard-boiled, strictly materialistically oriented natural scientists, of which there are many beautiful testimonies.*

## Confronting one's own transience

Looking at the starry sky makes us aware of our own smallness and creates humility. But I think there is more than that: It also confronts us with our own transience. Whether I live or die is pretty irrelevant in the face of the vast expanse of the universe.

*You should never say that to someone who is suicidal. You would be talking to them about how unique every single person is and how irreplaceable. That can't just be down to the sum of their molecules. I don't necessarily associate the inner gesture of humility with a feeling of smallness, but rather with a sense of inner conversation - some might say with God - I'd cautiously say with the incomprehensible depth and beauty of the cosmos. When theology talks about the love of God, then perhaps that would be a moment in which you can certainly have the feeling of being allowed to give something of this love back, an almost meditative and - in your words - perhaps a mystical moment.*

Absolutely. But we are mortal. From my point of view, it's not so easy to stand up to this insight and not immediately compensate with a "But, we are...". But that is exactly what I find healing: to admit to myself that it is pure coincidence that I am here and now and - for example in silent meditation - to place myself in the dichotomy of life and death without ifs and buts. My mortality accompanies me every moment like a shadow that I cannot get rid of. I am stardust through and through.

*The extent to which it is pure coincidence that I am here and now is, in my opinion, extremely complex. Certainly, the molecules of my body are naturally made of building blocks of the periodic table and ultimately probably of matter from the protoplanetary disk of our early solar system or "stardust", as Prof. Dr. Altwegg aptly called it in the last podcast. At some point, my body matter will turn back into dust, at the latest with cremation, and in the distant course of our sun's death into stardust. But I see my body with all its vital functions - metaphorically speaking - more like a kind of instrument on which my personality - whoever that is - plays during my life, which is permeated by my consciousness and which I will leave behind again at some point, with a destination unknown to me at the moment - perhaps like the cocoon of a butterfly. Whoever or whatever the "I" or the personality is that looks at us from the eyes of a person and that is clearly extinguished in the eyes of a deceased person: I am firmly convinced that consciousness, personality - however one speaks of it - is not a result of biochemical or neurological processes and thus to a certain extent subject to arbitrariness, but that - exactly the other way around - these processes are the observable and measurable physical consequences of our free thinking, feeling and acting. And this basic feeling of not being a slave to arbitrary physical processes, but being absolutely free in my thoughts, feelings and actions at every moment, also allows me to face my own mortality without any fear.*

Yes, it is also evident to me that we are more than just stardust. However, when I am confronted with my own mortality or that of people close to me, it becomes clear just how resilient this evidence actually is. What I am more than stardust must prove itself in the face of death. It is precisely then and there that the freedom must come into effect in which I am myself in being and non-being, can take on any other perspective and view the world, the universe, from this perspective. But that is something mystical for me, something personal and universal at the same time.

*Yes, the thoughts of each of us on this are certainly very personal, also shaped by personal experiences. And in touching on questions that are not easy to answer, they certainly have something mystical within our search for the universal within us. I agree with you wholeheartedly.*

### **Mysticism of God's presence**

In a moment of silence, it is there immediately, this mystery of the present. It is not this and not that, but a non-dual presence in the midst of all being and non-being, in the midst of my life and the shadow of my death. For me, it is something that is absolutely evident, but which I cannot grasp. I am hit by the information of love and wisdom, the information of freedom and beauty, the information that connects everything and creates community. This non-dual mystery of the present attracts me enormously - in my meditation, in my thinking, in my dealing with other people. Because of my Christian socialization, I call this the mystery of God's presence. But more important than any linguistic designation is the immediate event of presence.

*What you describe is a thoroughly meditative moment and thus in a certain sense defies any conceptualization. But there is hardly a better way to describe the moment you are referring to and how it radiates into your own attitude to life.*

When I am there in the stillness of the moment, I immediately realize that this mystery of the present is much more important than I myself. It is indeed the secret of my own existence, my true self, but also that of every human being, of animals, plants and stones, of everything past and future, of all matter in this universe. If I am one with this mystery of the present, I am also one with everything else. This is an immediate experience of presence that gives me freedom from myself.

*I am thinking of the image of the cross, which you described in the previous conversation as a point of intersection between matter - horizontally - and spirit - vertically. And at the point of intersection, in the meditative moment of God's presence, both interpenetrate. So actually in EVERY moment. Actually ALWAYS! So man is stardust, but permeated by the presence of God - in your words. A very, very beautiful image.*

*I was very surprised to read something similar - in completely different words, of course - recently from a German atomic and quantum physicist - Hans-Peter Dürr, a long-time colleague of Werner Heisenberg and his successor for many years as director of the Max Planck Society for Physics and Astrophysics - who says: "Reality is not material reality. Reality is pure connectedness or potentiality. Reality is the possibility of manifesting as matter or energy under certain circumstances, but not the manifestation itself." So a leading physicist of our time, after a lifetime of studying particle physics and quantum theory, says that reality is far more than its manifestation as energy or matter. That gives me a lot to think about.*

***Intermission music (Excerpt from Béla Bartók, string quartet 6, played by Colla parte quartet)***

**Responsibility**

In the middle of the gap between my life and my death is this unconditional, non-dual freedom - a freedom that manifests itself in a probability field as is or is not, is not in my hands and that sees the universe in many different perspectives. And this freedom is the secret of the present. It places me in the moment and makes me realize that it wants to come into its own right here and now. Or to put it in religious terms: God is also the secret of this speck of dust here on the table. Can you understand that?

*Absolutely. At least the last sentence. The idea of the inseparability of matter and spirit, which is extremely close to me, if not a certainty, runs through the entire history of philosophy, starting with Heraclitus of Ephesus, Philo of Alexandria, in the Middle Ages in the School of Chartres, with Hildegard von Bingen, then, for example, with Bettina von Arnim, Friedrich Schelling and Novalis, to name but a few. Friedrich Schiller severely criticized the Church for definitively placing God in heaven, thereby promoting dualistic thinking in the categories of this world and the hereafter.*

Yes, this is a major topic in the history of philosophy and theology. What I find exciting, however, is that the point where horizontality and verticality intersect, the point where this world and the next intersect, places me under my responsibility. If I am here and now in the freedom of God's presence, I am directly responsible for making this presence felt.

*A big concept... responsibility. In the context of the perspective of our Earth and its place in the cosmos, I think of those astronauts who had the opportunity to see the Earth from the ISS or from one of the Apollo or Soyuz missions. Faced with this fragile blue ball with an eggshell-thin skin above glowing magma, they were deeply moved by this image and sent powerful words concerning our human task and responsibility for peaceful and ecologically sustainable coexistence on our one and only blue planet. Perhaps we should all be able to see the Earth from the perspective of a space shuttle. Fortunately, there are some fantastic images.*

Yes, from so far away, it must be a very powerful and compact experience. Perhaps it's a facet of a mystical presence event. Such an event permeates everything. It takes some time to unpack and work through the various contexts in which we live. First, there is the context that exists here and now, for example, that we are now speaking to one another. But we also exist in social, cultural, moral, and historical contexts, as well as in biological, chemical, and physical contexts, right up to the universe through which we drift on our planet. All these contexts interact and form a complex structure. Figuring out exactly what our responsibility is, where it begins and ends, isn't all that easy...

*Well... I think we shouldn't bury our heads in the sand because of all the complexity. It's not that difficult, after all. We are citizens of this Earth, this fragile blue globe (and not of Mars, as Elon Musk is currently imagining), and we want to leave it as intact as possible for*



*future generations. I believe this is very much linked to responsibility: responsibility toward nature, responsibility for peace between nations, but also in social life, responsibility toward the dignity of every fellow human being, and much more.*

## **Beauty**

Responsibility is therefore a consequence of this mystical experience of unconditional freedom in the face of the starry sky. But I also know that you are a passionate musician. Isn't that also about beauty?

*Absolutely. But not only that. Music expresses our entire human existence and even more without words. The music of the 20th century in particular shows in a shocking way the horrors and grimaces of the almost incomprehensible events that people have inflicted on one another. I'm thinking of Dmitri Shostakovich, for example. But in his music, alongside the glimpse into hell, there is also very direct hope, which smolders in the ashes, or rather, rises from them, and in which—so to speak—the true face of humanity becomes visible. I'm thinking, for example, of the slow movement of the 5th Symphony or the 3rd, 8th, and 10th String Quartets. Music can say so much more than dry words. In my opinion, it completely defies conceptualization.*

*During my time as a student in Cologne, we once played Shostakovich's Third String Quartet in class for Norbert Brainin, the first violinist of the legendary Amadeus Quartet. He listened to the entire work without interruption, was silent for a moment, and then said, "I hope you know you're playing for God." Then the hug, "When will I see you next time?" That was the moment. With music, perhaps, in a certain sense, you give something back... and perhaps, at best, a small, inaudible resonance resonates like: "I got it."*

Isn't the integration of fragility, indeed mortality, that we spoke of earlier, also crucial? The violin, in particular, could be ideally suited for this. The violin's tone isn't simply safe, but constantly hovers over the abyss. Is the awareness of this fragility a key to a good sound?

*Yes, it does indeed take some time at the beginning of violin playing until the painful whining develops into a halfway acceptable tone. The fragility of sound creation, which takes place in a narrowly defined contact area between string and bow, is a constant accompaniment even for professionals. But one shouldn't be afraid of it. The key to a good sound lies primarily in a very clear sound concept. Technically flawless playing alone is of no use. One strives for a specific sound concept that must be as vivid as possible in one's inner ear, and this, in turn, is extremely personal. In playing, everyone reveals more of themselves than they would like. Or to put it another way: When playing an instrument, it is extremely difficult to lie.*

Actually, playing the violin is a wonderful parable for life in all its fragility and beauty...

*It's certainly a long and not easy path to get there, one that requires constant (almost athletic) technical training and a questing understanding of complex processes, but one that also requires a deep penetration into the meaning and message of the works one is dealing*

*with. Life is almost too short for that. In this respect, engaging with the violin AND music is a parable as you described it, and perhaps, in a certain sense, also a path to oneself.*

## **Playing community**

We've talked about responsibility, about beauty, but both are actually revealed in music through playing. Can you describe how it becomes apparent that "it" is playing?

*I think every performing artist knows the word "flow," which quite well describes this state of being highly concentrated in the moment and yet in a kind of trance, in the flow of creation, without any mental distractions. On the one hand, this requires impeccable technical preparation (musicians like to talk about 300%), but on the other hand also requires mental preparation to enter this present state of "flow" at the beginning of a concert and to stay there as much as possible. Unfortunately, this doesn't always work.*

That sounds very much like what I said earlier about mysticism. By this, I mean an immediate sharing of the information of God's presence. No one goes first, and the others follow. If everyone is "entangled" in the moment, they immediately do what they need to do.

*Yes, ideally, that also works, for example, with musicians. For example, in a string quartet, i.e., a four-piece ensemble, especially when you have the opportunity to play together for many years and the "chemistry" is right, as they say. There's no recipe or guarantee for it, but you feel each other in a mysterious way and, in concerts, sometimes experience irretrievable moments of harmony that were neither rehearsed nor ever agreed upon. Taking it to the extreme, one of my quartet colleagues once said: "Why do we rehearse, anyway?"*

If I understand you correctly, good preparation is essential, but for "it" to work, openness to the moment is crucial, knowing that luck and bad luck, and thus chance, are always at play. So a golden moment is a moment of grace?

*You could certainly see it that way. But it's deeply personal. Everyone has to decide that for themselves, and we don't really talk about it in the quartet. Arnold Steinhardt, first violinist of the Guarneri Quartet, once spoke of a "compliment-free zone" in reference to his 40 years with his quartet.*

In closing, I would like to ask you the following question: In your view, is coincidence an inseparable part of the beauty of musical playing, or not necessarily so?

*My former teachers would probably reprimand me harshly and instruct me to always be so well prepared as a professional musician that I never have to rely on chance. To answer your question, however, I have to go a little further. With regard to a work and the question of chance in relation to its beauty, I would say: Not at all, quite the opposite! No one would seriously claim that a Chaconne by Bach or a string quartet by Schubert came into being "by chance." The beauty of great works is the fruit of deep inspiration, the intense thought of a free spirit, and the rigorous omission of everything immature. The same applies to paintings by Rembrandt or sculptures by Michelangelo, and many others.*

Sure, there's a lot of intentionality and work involved. But my question is about playful activity. Playing, I can certainly pursue a goal and work, but I remain open to the outcome. If this openness is missing, my activity becomes tense and no longer playful. This is obvious in musical interpretation, the moment of playing.

*Yes and no. Concentrated intentionality doesn't necessarily lead to tension. And too much openness to the outcome isn't really desirable in my profession... :-) With regard to an interpretation, I would rather answer the question by saying that the interpreter must, in a certain sense, become one with the idea of the work. If one were to compare it to a Zen master, then this "being at one" would be preceded by years of inner training. He, too, may sometimes succeed better, sometimes worse. This makes the "right," the "golden moments" unique and one-of-a-kind; I was talking about grace earlier. To stay with the image of the Zen master, I would speak of stages of training. The word "chance" doesn't make much sense to me here. The extent to which a moment of grace is "chance" would perhaps be best clarified in a direct telephone conversation with God...*

... and then the answer would have to be so clear and unambiguous that it would be free from the coincidences of human interpretation! In my view, coincidence is always part of the game. What is reality? Fields of probabilities in the game of coincidence, possibilities that are more or less probable, and leaving to coincidence what happens in the here and now. Only thanks to coincidence is there play, freedom, consciousness, spirit, beauty, or indeed the moment here and now, insofar it is more than stardust or "perfect" mechanical functioning. For me, coincidence is the trace of grace in matter, in the creation of the universe, in evolution, in every here and now. Rather, it is precisely in the interplay of laws and coincidence that I recognize the play of his wisdom, the flash of his beauty. For me, it is not to fight against coincidence, but to acknowledge it in the play of spirit and matter and to integrate it into my understanding of God, the universe, and humanity. Do you see it quite differently?

*In the tension between chance and determinism, I see, as a kind of third category, above all, the completely free, creative spirit, both in humans and in the—so to speak—universal intelligence, which, in the aforementioned sense and perhaps with the addition of the incredible word "grace," is hidden behind the manifestations of matter and energy, and about which it was written: "And he—perhaps she—created man in his—or her—image." The great philosopher Hans Jonas wrote in his essay "The Concept of God after Auschwitz": "After he gave himself completely to the world in its infancy, God has nothing left to give. Now it is up to man to give to him."*

Yes, that is a tremendous sentence, born of a deeply felt total zero point of ethical behavior and human tragedy. However, it implies that God, as the mystery of the present, is exhausted and has served his purpose. For me, however, the mystery of the moment is an inexhaustible source, a comprehensive ocean that permeates everything that exists, a river that is different in every here and now and, on its way through time, makes every moment unique and irreversible—with or without human beings.

*...and with a view to billions of years in the cosmos. I understand Jonas primarily to mean that the shaping of the future lies here and now in the hands of mankind like never before. - But taking up your phrase about the "inexhaustible source that permeates*

*everything," I also think of nature as an inexhaustible source of beauty. In the sight of a rainbow, for example, in the flowing forms of water and clouds, in the diversity of ice crystals, in stones, animals, plants, the starry sky, and in many other things, this beauty comes to anyone who wants to see it at every moment. It seems to me neither chaotic nor deterministic, but rather like a creative game, always based on a prescient intention. It seems to me like an expression of the interconnectedness of everything with everything. Constantly changing, unique, transient, and bringing forth something new from its passing. Quite in the spirit of the quantum physicist Hans-Peter Dürr, quoted above, who—to continue the quote from before—says: "This fundamental interconnectedness leads to the world being a unity. Strictly speaking, there is absolutely no way to divide the world into parts, because everything is connected to everything else."*

Exactly. In the mystery of the present, all matter is one. This is created by the great cosmological play of God's wisdom... Finally, let's look up at the sky again! At the end of a star's existence, massive stars experience an unimaginably gigantic explosion in the form of a supernova. Less massive stars collapse. In the distant future, our sun will also become a supernova, expanding with millions of times its current luminosity, far beyond the orbit of Jupiter.

*Fortunately, we still have a little time until then. The Earth will then become the proverbial drop on the hot stove. It will perish, and something new will emerge. In both of the aforementioned cases of stellar death, clouds of gas are ejected, and the forms of these shells of matter, the so-called planetary nebulae, in the residual light of their dying stars, are often of extraordinary beauty and diversity. Unique and transient in every single moment.*

So perhaps something like a golden moment of an artistic performance, a musical interpretation... or a meditative retreat.

*Yes, exactly. In the beauty of stellar death, the idea of "die and become" is manifested almost pictorially, a reality in constant flux, in which a subtle degree of playful freedom is surely hidden and—in your words—the mystery of God's presence in every single moment.*

## **Conclusion**

Thank you, Georg! In conclusion, can you say what the essence of our conversation is for you – in one sentence, or let's say in a maximum of one minute?

*That's not easy after all the wonderful ideas that were discussed. I would very much like to leave them as they are. In preparing for this topic, I came across interviews with the aforementioned quantum physicist Prof. Hans-Peter Dürr. And his conclusions – after decades of studying quantum theory – that behind everything material lies the creative interconnectedness of everything with everything, spirit, if you will, continuous redesign, that matter would not manifest at all without the creative "spirit" behind it, and that our "comprehensibility-trained" minds are simply still massively incapable of penetrating this world of constant process. The 2022 Nobel Prize winner in physics, the Austrian quantum physicist Anton Zeilinger, expressed a similar view, saying that he believes the findings of*

*quantum physics are quite capable of significantly challenging our current, extremely materialistic worldview. I find that truly exciting. It is, for me, a current quintessence of the topic addressed. I am very pleased, dear Bernhard, about our joint search—along somewhat convoluted paths—for bridges that might perhaps connect spirit and matter more closely. Thank you!*

Wonderful! We started with the question "More than stardust?" In our conversation, I was increasingly impressed by what music has to say about this. In everyday life, I am often unaware of this question. I simply play or listen to the music that I have to play or listen to, or that I like, and I don't think about the fact that it is stardust. But if I consciously expose myself to the question, a dilemma suddenly arises: I am confronted with its finiteness and know that all music—with all its beauty and depth—is material through and through, fading away with the last note and remaining unique as it was. At the same time, however, the mystery of the moment, its freedom, love, and wisdom, is also present in music, and it is immediately clear to me that music is more than stardust. In this way, however, music becomes a sign for the great game that takes place in this universe every moment, bringing me closer to the fullness of this game's facets and inviting me to join in here and now. This makes me happy.

Thank you all for accompanying us on our adventure so far. We are interested in your thoughts. You are welcome to give us feedback. But above all, thank you, dear Georg, for this wonderful conversation. It was a pleasure.

Our conversation can be downloaded as a PDF at [www.ritualart.ch](http://www.ritualart.ch). This podcast was created in collaboration with the Wabern Reformed Church. Thank you for your support. "Mysticism Today" continues—prepare to be surprised!