

University of the South

Citation

Among the most startling scientific discoveries of recent decades is our newfound sense that we inhabit a physical universe of almost unimaginable complexity and magnitude. Lately we have been learning that the observable universe, to say nothing of the rest, may contain as many as 1-2 *trillion* galaxies – exponentially more than previously suspected. So what do we now make of meaning, in light of this transformed worldview? How might we endeavor to locate our own existential place and spiritual destiny amid such a colossal cosmos, especially as scientists keep announcing the detection of yet more exoplanets that could shelter life? Arnold Benz, an internationally renowned astrophysicist and author, has for years been addressing questions such as these.

Dr. Benz is an emeritus professor and previous group leader at Switzerland's Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. His expertise in plasma astrophysics, planet and star formation, solar flare emissions, and radio astronomy, has led to significant roles in space research and exploration projects conducted both by NASA and by the European Space Agency. He is the author of several books and hundreds of research publications. He has been President of the Community of European Solar Radio Astronomers, President of the Sun and Heliosphere Division of the International Astronomical Union, and lead Swiss investigator for the Herschel Space Observatory.

However, his contributions also reach more broadly into the culture at large. Throughout the world, but especially across German-speaking Europe, Dr. Benz has often explained the nature and significance of recent astronomical discoveries to general audiences on television and radio programs, as well as through newspaper features, magazine articles, and personal appearances. Some will recall that the late Carl Sagan once gave televised talks to help ordinary Americans learn more about cosmology and advances in space science. Arnold Benz has long played a similar role in Switzerland – appropriately enough, since Carl Sagan had been one of Dr. Benz's graduate-school professors.

He has won further distinction for his searching reflections on the interplay between scientific inquiry and religious experience. He has thus far published three books on the nexus between cosmology and spirituality. The first of these, which appeared in English as *The Future of the Universe: Chance, Chaos, God?* (2000) has been translated from its original German into nine different languages. The translation of Dr. Benz's latest such volume, a multi-layered meditation on *Astrophysics and Creation*, was prepared by Sewanee's own Professor Martin Knoll.

In his latest book, he writes that while "the perceptions from which science and religion originate must remain distinct" they can and "should be brought into a common view and relation." He argues further that science and experimental faith represent "different perspectives on one reality which at a deep unfathomable level constitute, I believe, a unity." Therefore, for his distinguished contributions to astronomical inquiry *and* for his illuminating, interdisciplinary reflections on spiritual implications of the New Science, the University of the South is pleased to confer on Arnold Benz the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*.

13 May 2017

Samuel Johnson Howard
Chancellor

John M. McCardell, Jr
Vice-Chancellor and President