

**The Great Story:
Giving God Glory in Evolution**
How Science Will Usher Christianity Into Its Greatness

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1. IF WHAT THE SCRIPTURES SAY about Jesus is true, as our understanding of the universe expands, so will our understanding of the scope, meaning, and significance of the gospel.
 - A) *"A mistake about creation will necessarily result in a mistake about God."* – St. Thomas Aquinas (one of the church's greatest theologians)
 - B) *"The more I learn about this amazing universe, the more awesome my God becomes."* – James "Gramps" Roberts, 82-year-old farmer and amateur astronomer.
 - C) The disciples and early Church leaders, reflecting on Jesus' ministry within the context of their own first, second, and third century A.D. political, judicial, religious, and cosmological understandings, formulated creeds and doctrines about him and the significance of his life and mission. Since then, however, our view of reality has grown *enormously*. Whereas those alive in biblical times (and well into the Middle Ages) believed the world was flat, stationary, and at the center of the universe, and that stars were pinprick holes in the dome of the heavens that allowed God's glory to shine through, we today know that planet Earth is part of a solar system in an outer spiral arm of the Milky Way, a galaxy of some 100 billion stars, which is itself only one of 200 billion or more other galaxies in a cosmos 13.7 billion years old. So if our tradition is right, if Jesus incarnated God's great news for humanity, then the meaning, grandeur, and this-world relevance of the gospel today would reach far, far beyond what any previous generation, including the biblical writers themselves, could have possibly known.
 - D) *"It was not those closest to the historical Jesus who first gave the gospel its geographical breadth and theological depth. It was Paul, who had never known him. In addition to that, impressive achievements in biblical scholarship have, in many ways, brought our era closer to the constituent events of the Christian movement than were, say, the Gentile Christians of the second century. If the life and death of Jesus is historically central, then people living a hundred thousand years from now will be in a better position to appreciate that than we are. Furthermore, when they look back they will surely think of us as 'early Christians' – living as we do a scant two millennia from the mysterious events in question. They will be right, for the Christian movement today is still in the elementary stages of working out for itself and for the world the implications of the gospel. There isn't the slightest doubt that the greatest and boldest creedal assertions are in the future, not the past. It may be only at rare moments that this flawed and unlikely thing we call the 'church' even remotely resembles something worthy of its calling, but it is nonetheless embarked on a great Christological adventure. Even against its own institutional resistances, it is continually finding deeper and more profound implications to the Jesus-event."* – Gil Bailie, literary critic/historian/lay theologian
 - E) A God who would finish revealing truth vital to human existence 2000 years ago, when people believed the world was flat and rain fell because floodgates in the sky opened, would be a less than generous God. A loving God would still be revealing truth today.

2. GOD'S IMMANENCE AND OMNIPRESENCE are as real as God's transcendence.
 - A) There are two Bibles: the written scriptures and the scriptures of nature. If ever they seem to be in conflict, the problem is in our interpretation of one or the other.
 - B) "The universe" is a story of nested creativity and emergent complexity.
 - C) Using the analogy of nesting dolls (atoms within molecules within cells within organisms within planets within solar systems, etc.), "God" is a proper name for that Ultimate Creative Reality (the largest nesting doll) which embraces and includes, yet transcends, all other levels of reality. God is the great "I am" of Existence: The Holy One, the Alpha and Omega, the Great Mystery, the Wholeness of Reality, the Lord Almighty, the All.

- D) God is not a supreme Being; God *is* Supreme Being. Everything that exists does so within God. Nothing exists outside of God.
- E) A "God's eye" view of the world is not merely the view from outside or above all; it is also the view from *within* every set of eyes, human and non-human. God feels the pain and suffering of *all* creatures from the inside. God is Love, and Infinite Compassion.
- F) What does God look like on the outside? Only God knows! What does God look like on the inside? Look around you. Look in the mirror. Look deeply within your own heart.
- G) God has been loving, creating, communicating, and redeeming for 13.7 billion years. What kept us from appreciating this fact over the last few centuries was our thinking that the universe is like a machine, which essentially divorced Creator from creation.
- H) Evolution is another name for Holy Spirit in Action, or God creating in each moment.
- I) The entire cosmos can be thought of as the hand of God, and we, like atoms, or cells, in the hand of The Holy One. I like to call this perspective "nested creatheism".
- J) Throughout the 4 billion year history of Earth life, God's main way of communicating has been through feelings, circumstances, and relationships, rather than words. This is still the way Spirit most often speaks today, clearly yet silently in each and every moment.
- K) The Great Story (the gospel) is progressively and inexhaustibly meaningful. The cosmos is going somewhere. It has a direction (Jesus' way). And we are all part of the process.
- L) Humanity is the fruit of 13.7 billion years of unbroken evolution, now becoming conscious of itself. We are, each and every one of us, quite literally the universe becoming aware of itself. Jesus knew this intuitively, and lived it fully.
- M) We did not come *into* this world; we grew out from it – just like an apple grows from an apple tree. We are not separate beings *on* Earth, living *in* a universe. We are a mode of being *of* Earth, an expression *of* the universe. Genesis 2:7 is a traditional, sacred way of saying the same thing: we emerge from nature thanks to the immanent Creator.
- N) "*Four billion years ago planet Earth was molten rock; and now it sings opera.*" – Brian Swimme, physicist/cosmologist
- O) With faith in God, when I trust time and trust that reality as it actually shows up is perfect for my growth and learning, I know a peace that passes all understanding.
- P) All concepts, language, and stories about God, or Ultimate Reality, derive from a people's experience of their world. If we lived on the moon, our understanding of the divine would reflect the barrenness of the lunar landscape. Religious differences make complete sense given the different bioregions in which each religious tradition emerged.
- Q) In prayer, we are a cell communicating with the heart of the body of which we are a part.
- R) To pray and work toward ensuring a just, healthy, beautiful, and sustainably lifegiving world for future generations of all species, and to do so as an act of faith and devotion to God, is to embody the gospel and model real Christ-ian love.

3) OUR DESTINY (as a species and as individuals) is to further God's evolutionary creativity in Christ-like ways that bless the entire body of life. The role of the church includes spreading the Great News of The Great Story – evangelizing the nations – and thus ushering the entire human family through a process of death and resurrection, to the glory of God. In this way, like Jesus, the church becomes a vessel of God's saving grace. We no longer passively wait for Christ's return; we fully participate in it. This is our mission, our calling, our Great Work. And it's why the scriptures refer to the church as the both the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

Our website: www.TheGreatStory.org is a free, non-commercial educational resource for those wishing to explore the epic of divine grace and evolutionary creativity in more depth. (Over the last year our site has averaged just under 25,000 hits *per month*.) Be sure to see the following pages:

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