



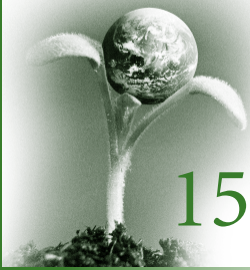
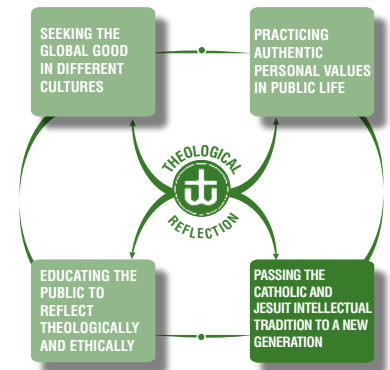
# WOODSTOCK REPORT

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## Evolution and God: Darwin and Theology 150 years after *The Origin of the Species*

By Aloysious Mowe, S.J.

Anniversaries are often occasions for bombast and exaggeration, but this year’s double celebration of Charles Darwin – the 200th anniversary of his birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species* – justifies the superlatives used to describe the significance of the man and his work. “The most incendiary book in the history of science” and “the most revolutionary scientific idea in history” are phrases plucked from just two of the many articles published to mark these anniversaries.

Scientists do not doubt the theory of evolution. It is science, pure and simple. As Theodosius Dobzhansky wrote 36 years ago, “Nothing in biology makes sense, except in the light of evolution.” A scientist would as soon call into question the existence of germs as doubt evolution. Nevertheless, Darwin’s theory of evolution continues to have the word “controversy” attached to it (as any Google search will demonstrate). We have to wait until 2022 to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Louis Pasteur, but no one would describe as “controversial” the germ theory of disease that he proved. There is no need to conduct opinion polls to find out the number of Americans who believe in germs and viruses as causes of disease, or to expose the proportion of religious believers who think that leprosy is the result of divine retribution.

A Gallup poll conducted for the Darwin anniversaries showed that 39 percent of Americans believe in evolution. It gets worse: Gallup found that only 14 percent of Americans believe in Darwin’s theory of natural selection, while 43 percent believe in creationism.

Compare that to the 36 percent of Americans who believe in UFOs, according to a 2008 Harris poll, or the 68 percent who told a Pew poll in 2007 that they believe in angels and demons actively intervening on earth, and we see the abysmal depth of the problem. In fact, a 2006 study of public acceptance of evolution in thirty-four countries showed the United States to be behind thirty-two European nations and Japan. It is scant consolation that the US came ahead of Turkey in the poll.

According to Gallup’s editor in chief, Frank Newport, the main determining factor for respondents’ views was not their level of educational but their religious beliefs. Only 24 percent of weekly churchgoers believe in evolution. By contrast, of those who seldom or never attend church, 55 percent believe in evolution.

This is not simply a battle between science and religion.

Darwin’s theory of evolution continues to have the word “controversy” attached to it.

Prominent people in public life, from the three Republican candidates in the 2008 presidential elections who said that they did not believe in evolution, to Cardinal Schönborn, the Archbishop of Vienna, who has

written extensively against evolutionary theory, pit themselves against Darwinian biology while, we must assume, continuing to trust to the ministrations of their healthcare specialists, and without losing sleep at night over the witchcraft that operates their cellphones (“What? No wires? What demonic device is this?”).

The touted alternatives to evolution, creationism and intelligent design, are not science. The scientific establishment knows this, and the courts have acknowledged this in various rulings, such as in *Edwards v. Aguillard* and *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*. Speaking of the latter case, in which he was the lead expert witness for the plaintiffs,



*On January 21, 2009, the Woodstock Theological Center hosted the inaugural event of a year-long celebration marking the 200th anniversary of Darwin’s birth. A special Woodstock Forum featuring celebrated American biologist and author Ken Miller and Catholic theologian and Senior Woodstock Fellow John Haught, two of the most knowledgeable people in this field, examined the implications of Darwin’s ideas in today’s culture before a standing-room only crowd at the Bunn Intercultural Center Auditorium.*

*In this issue, International Visiting Fellow Aloysious Mowe, S.J. has written the feature article focusing on this extraordinary forum and several other fellows have written their reflections from the perspective of their own program areas.*

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# From the Director's Desk

## Believing in the God of Promise



This issue of the *Woodstock Report* takes up the fascinating dialogue between Science and Religion. While this is a different kind of dialogue from inter religious dialogue that we reflected upon in our last issue, it is no less crucial for the future that Catholic intellectuals and professionals engage with the world of science. Many questions arise when we say “Happy Birthday Darwin.” Are science and religion doomed to be forever at war? Is there hope for a Christian theology of evolution that appreciatively and constructively engages modern science in facing the crucial human problems of our day

Let’s begin by asking ourselves how, in an evolutionary world, we understand our own personal faith in God. At the outset I have to confess that Woodstock’s “Happy Birthday Darwin” reflections have had a curious effect on me. They began challenging and stretching my sense of God, when I thought that at my age, the issue of who God is would have been quite settled! But they have also carried the seeds of new hope in ways I had not expected. When Professor Jack Haught said that “God is the God of promise and fidelity to promise” in the context of evolution, he helped me realize that the God of my grandmothers and grandfathers is even “bigger,” grander, more wonderfully creative and personally awesome than they or I had imagined.

Everyone who believes in God today, old or young, poor or rich, sick or healthy, faces questions posed by an evolutionary understanding of our universe. How can we believe in God and also say that all of creation – including the human species – has been and will continue to be in the process of evolving? This is a faith question that tries to understand what science is saying. It is really a modern expression of an age-old theological question. Is our twenty-first century understanding of nature compatible or not with our rock-bottom faith in God’s saving grace – God’s love poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit?

Addressing precisely this kind of question is the task of people like us at the Woodstock Theological Center. And because science and religion issues are also public policy matters, we have good reason to consider how our religious faith sheds light on public debates related to evolution.

In these pages, the Woodstock fellows offer their reflections with the intention of both providing solid reasoning for our minds and stirring up hopefulness in our hearts. Building on these questions, our Woodstock Science and Religion Program will continue to provide theological reflection in the crucial dialogue between faith and scientific reason on which the future health of our planet rests.

Please continue to help us in whatever way you can so that together we can carry on the kind of work that this *Woodstock Report* represents. We are counting on your generous financial support especially now as we are nearing the end of our Fiscal Year on June 30!

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Joseph F. LoBiondo, S.J." The signature is written in a cursive style.

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## Evolution and God: Darwin and Theology 150 years after *The Origin of the Species*



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Kenneth Miller, professor of Biology at Brown University, said, “What really happened was that intelligent design literally collapsed in court in very clear cross-examination as anything remotely resembling a scientific theory.”

Miller was one of two speakers at the Woodstock Forum titled “Evolution and God: Darwin and Theology: 150 years after *The Origin of Species*”, held at Georgetown University’s Bunn Intercultural Center Auditorium on January 21. The other speaker was yet another witness in the Dover trial, John Haught, a Woodstock senior fellow in science and religion, and Distinguished Research Professor in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University.

The judge in the Dover trial ruled that intelligent design could not disentangle itself from its religious antecedents. “It clearly was a religious doctrine and clearly was not science,” said Miller in his summing up of the judge’s verdict. The fact that evolution is science, with the ability to make testable predictions, and not a mere conjecture or “only a theory” (as it is often accused of being by its opponents), was ably demonstrated by Miller in his gripping and admirably lucid discussion of two issues in evolutionary science: the chromosomal evidence for the common descent of humans and great apes, and the discovery of fossils of transitional forms between major species. Some of the more recent discoveries in the latter area, such as that of Tiktaalik and Gogonasus in the evolution of fish to tetrapods, have essentially ended any possibility of debate between scientists and the creationist or intelligent design opponents of evolution. Miller said that Colin Purrington, a professor of biology at Swarthmore College, has expressed the situation in its most succinct and devastating form: “We have the fossils. We win. End of story.”

### Why then does evolution continue to be rejected by so many people who should know better?

Miller locates the problem in the area of morality and purpose. “If we’re just a mistake, our lives have absolutely no significance,” he said. “The claim that evolution is a chance or random process is really at the heart of objections to what people refer to as Darwinism.” Miller’s riposte to this is that evolution is not random, but is in fact “an inherent and predictable quality of nature.” Evolution is not “a mistake”. Evolutionary processes explore what biologists



Speakers Dr. John Haught and Dr. Kenneth Miller with Moderator Gasper LoBiondo, S.J. prior to the forum.

call “adaptive space” in matter, in a way that is predictable and driven by non-random natural selection and laws in nature. This is the idea of evolutionary convergence: there are certain preexisting “niches” in nature to which species adapt so as to fill them.

Miller is a leading proponent of the idea that there is a human “niche” in nature: “I would argue, and other people have argued as well, that one of those evolutionary niches involves the emergence of sentient self-aware organisms like us. And that emergence is directly driven by

the physical constraints of our universe.” The emergence of the present world as it is cannot then be described as a mistake of nature or a random accident. On the contrary, said Miller, “it is an outcome made possible and maybe even inevitable by the organization, by the fabric, of nature itself.” Miller’s claim, as expressed in his most recent book, *Only A Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America’s Soul*, is that “we could be almost certain...that eventually evolution would produce an intelligent,

“...the capacity for evolutionary change is built into nature and as such, a person of faith can very easily understand evolution as part of God’s providential plan.”

self-aware, reflective creature endowed with a nervous system large enough to solve the very same questions that we have, and capable of discovering the very process that produced it, the process of evolution. To argue otherwise would be to maintain, against all evidence, that our appearance on this planet was not the

product of repeatable natural events. It would be to maintain, for no particular reason, that this corner of adaptive space was found once by the evolutionary process but could never be found again. Everything we know about evolution suggests that it would, sooner or later, get to that niche.”

This is Miller’s key move in his project to reconcile evolution with Christian belief. Evolution cannot be left to chance, or we would not be able to speak of a providential God in relationship with us, and the doctrine of the Incarnation would be the result of an afterthought rather than part of God’s loving plan

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from all eternity. Miller’s “lesson”, as he himself expressed it during the forum, was that “the capacity for evolutionary change is built into nature and as such, a person of faith can very easily understand evolution as part of God’s providential plan.”



Dr. Ken Miller fields a question from the audience as Dr. Haught and Fr. LoBiondo look on.

### Theological approaches to the nature of God’s providential plan

John Haught focused on theological approaches to the nature of God’s providential plan as expressed the process of evolution. He rejected what he called “the blind faith” approach, in which the believer, while accepting evolution because the science is incontrovertible, at the same time skims over the issues that seem to militate against the notion of a providential God, such as accidents in nature, natural selection, the apparent cruelty and pain involved in the evolutionary process, and the great amount of time taken for the process to unfold. “The thinking here is that we humans all have a very limited sense of what constitutes decent order or design, and whenever anything happens that doesn’t fit into that scheme, we refer to it as an accident or an absurdity. But religions tell us that there’s a wider scheme, a wider vision which we do not have, and which God does, and perhaps in Darwin’s recipe there lies a wise and mysterious and providential plan which we shouldn’t even be trying to pry into.” Haught pointed out that this kind of fideistic approach runs contrary to the Roman Catholic tradition of theology, which was expressed by St Anselm as “*fides quaerens intellectum*”, faith seeking understanding.

One way to speculate about what divine providence was up to when God created a universe that sponsors the Darwinian process is to understand evolution as divine pedagogy. The harshness of the evolutionary process is a school for life, or a school for souls, in which obstacles are needed for vitality and creativity. Haught cited as one example of this approach Guy Murchie’s *The Seven Mysteries of Life*: “Honestly now, if you were God, could you possibly dream up any more educational, contrasting, thrilling, beautiful, tantalizing world than Earth to develop spirit in?...Would you...try to make the world nice and safe – or would you let it be provocative, dangerous, and exciting? In actual fact, if it ever came to that, I’m sure

you would find it impossible to make a better world than God has already created, namely the world in which Darwinian processes give rise to living diversity and complexity.”

Haught acknowledged that there are objections to this pedagogy approach when it comes to making sense of suffering. It is an approach that goes back to the theodicy of Leibniz, that we live in “the best of all possible worlds”, and has possibly been satirized beyond all redemption by Voltaire’s *Candide* in the character of Dr Pangloss. While

we acknowledge the role that suffering can play in pedagogy, we cannot help but ask if there has to be quite as much as there seems to be. A toothache, surely, can teach us about compassion just as well as the amputation of both legs.

“We should never think of divine providence or divine wisdom or any divine qualities, at least in a Biblical setting, without thinking of the fundamental Biblical motif of promise – that God is the God of promise and fidelity to promise,” said Haught. He defined “promise” as something that opens up

The key element of God’s part in the universe is promise rather than design.

the future, and suggested that “the ultimate Biblical explanation for what we call evolution is God’s opening up the future, not just to the people of Israel, not just to Abraham, not just to the Church, not just to human history - but opening up a future for the whole of life, and, together with that, the whole of the universe.” The key element of God’s part in the universe is promise rather than design, which

Haught said was “too lifeless and deadening a way to reflect the Biblical sense of the...intricate involvement of the divine in the world.” If we think of nature and life as promise, we find it to be consistent with the human experience at this moment in the unfolding of life, realizing as we do that we live in an unfinished universe, one that is still coming into being.

The elements of contingency, accident and chance in the evolutionary process can then be seen as necessary parts of that opening to the future and new possibilities that is implied in the rich notion of promise. At the same time, the law of natural selection provides this opening up with the element

## Evolution and God: Darwin and Theology 150 years after *The Origin of the Species*



of reliability – as do all the laws of nature. Deep time, the enormously long process it has taken for life to emerge and develop into complexity and sentience, gives the cosmos an immensity, a sense of a great drama unfolding, a Ring Cycle for the ages. These elements of chance, reliability and deep time combine to create a grand narrative.

“One time a great Rabbi was asked the question: Why did God create human beings? And the reply came: God created human beings because God loves stories,” said Haught. “Maybe we could ask the same question: Why would God create a universe? Maybe because God loves really really big stories.”

### No easy or comprehensive solutions

The perspectives offered by Miller and Haught during the forum served to highlight one of the purposes of the Woodstock Theological Center: “Educating the public to reflect theologically and ethically.” If to be ethical is to act in truth, then the hard task of discovering the truth about the world we live in is an essential part of our theological reflection. Neither speaker offered easy or comprehensive solutions to the problem of reconciling the discoveries of evolutionary science with the Christian account of God and the purpose of the cosmos. Many scientists, for example, would find fault with Miller’s near certainty that the evolution of humans – or, more accurately, of intelligent, self-aware, reflective organisms that would occupy the niche that humans now have occupied - was inevitable, given that Darwinian natural selection driving organisms to fill adaptive spaces is not the only significant mechanism driving evolution. Haught’s evocation of the accident of the asteroid that impacted the Yucatan Peninsula, wiping out the dinosaurs and opening up

ecological niches that led to mammalian, primate, and then human development, unwittingly highlighted this dilemma. If the dinosaurs had not been wiped out by an asteroid, might it not be the case that mammals would never have had the ecological space in which to develop to the point of primates? Are there good scientific reasons for thinking that self-aware, intelligent, reflective reptiles or invertebrates would have developed instead if the Yucatan catastrophe had not occurred?

The idea of an eternal soul infusing the human person can also appear to be so much dualistic nonsense when viewed in the light of evolution. When the first self-aware primate evolved, did God then infuse it with a soul, thus intervening from outside the created universe? Or is the soul simply that complex of intelligence and self-awareness, completely organic and therefore mortal, because it is the body? Have we misstated the central truth of Christianity by saying that the Word was made Flesh, when perhaps it is the case that the Word was made Matter? Should we then be speaking of the

resurrection of the body on the last day, or can we take in the enormity of all matter that has ever existed – every cherry tree, every Portuguese water dog, every fly, every earthworm - somehow being made anew in the New Jerusalem?

Take evolution seriously, as the forum rightly told us we should, and the questions about our place in the world, or the scope of Christ’s redemptive action, or the nature of eschatology, come hard and fast.

Evolution does not threaten faith or theology. If it seems to diminish the place of the human race, perhaps it does so only to open up wider and richer perspectives on a God whose purposes are greater than we have hitherto imagined and on a universe whose promise we have barely glimpsed.



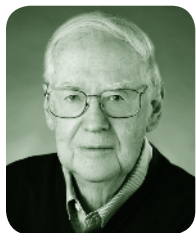
*Audience members absorbed in learning the relevance of Darwin and evolutionary science to their religious faith.*

*Books by Dr. Ken Miller include: Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground between God and Evolution (1999) and Only a Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America’s Soul (2008).*

*Books by Dr. John Haught include: God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution and Deeper than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution. His most recent book, God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris and Hitchens, provides compelling answers to popular charges against religion.*

# Baptizing Deep Ecology

By John C. Haughey, S.J., Senior Fellow



Remarks made by Woodstock Research Fellow John Haughey, S.J. on the occasion of his receiving an award for outstanding contributions to the Catholic Intellectual Tradition.

The honor was given at Loyola University Chicago, April 27th by the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage. The other awardee was Robert Bireley, S.J.

Tonight I want to give you an example of how a developing body of knowledge, unconnected to faith or to Catholicism, can be a source of development of the Church's doctrines.

There are a number of us in the academy who are beginning to think about the incarnation in a different way. We are being pushed by what our counterparts in the environmental, physical, natural sciences have been learning about the biota and abiota, as they call them. Their findings are a way for us and the Church to attain a deeper insight into faith, here the doctrine of the incarnation. The term "deep ecology" was coined by Arne Naess, a Norwegian naturalist philosopher. He thought his fellow climate scientists and evolutionary biologists were being shallow and that their findings should move them to make a whole philosophy of life out of what they had learned. I was teaching about his ideas the day he died this February at the age of 96. Some of the ideas of this father figure of evolutionary biology: our world views must begin with the earth and its myriad forms of life, not with homo sapiens, since we are late comers on the scene. We must enlarge the community of what we respect and enfold all things operating in the biotic community within it. We might try to begin 'to think like a mountain.' We must repent of and so transcend our unconscious species arrogance in order to see that all things are a part of a single unfolding whole and that each part must be given a chance to unfold in its own way.

Naess called for a radical change in the modern understanding of the self; contending that the only Self worthy of the name is an ecological self and that the flourishing of all dimensions of it has to become the focus of an ethics that transcends the self interests of one species of earthlings – us. Without having the slightest interest in the afterlife (which is his present condition, I should add) he would have us humans seek to maximize the happiness of all creatures who are our contemporaries. He believed that this should be the ultimate goal of human beings' endeavors during their brief lifetimes.

## DEEP ECOLOGY TRIGGERS DEEP INCARNATION

Without subscribing to his idea of making a whole philosophy of life out of their findings, it seems to me we should take our belief in the incarnation into the same depth as evolutionary biology has gone so that our faith could attain a fresh appreciation and love of the flesh the Word emptied itself into when the Word was made flesh. So, deep ecology triggers deep incarnation, if you will.

The incarnation did not result in a Divinity pretending to be flesh.

That phrase "deep incarnation" comes from a Danish theologian, Neils Gregerson. His work has been theological reflection on the science of the self-organizing emergent complexities – of plants, animals, humans, planets, galaxies. Without going into that material here, I find it important and consoling to link together these two directions of research about two very different areas of knowledge. Besides enriching our Catholic intellectual heritage, I think it could give the enormous energy being poured into the environmental movement the energy of faith and a foundation for integration.

There is always the temptation to make wholes too readily out of parts. The deep ecology naturalists do this; so do the su-

pernaturalists for whom no doctrinal development is even conceivable. No matter how deep one's ecology goes, the meaning of our distinctiveness among the species is still the question we face by nightfall. And no matter how deep one's faith goes, the vulnerability and mortality humankind has in common with all other-kind is the question our faith must also answer by nightfall. To reconcile the two, something beyond each is needed to make a whole. I think that revisiting our belief in the incarnation can answer both these questions and give an up to date account of the hope that is in us who are Christian.

Our Catholic heritage can become too complacent and settled into its understanding of Christ's humanity, scripturally through John's Prologue as well as metaphysically by having found terms from Greek philosophy, to explain how two substances, one divine and one human, could become one person. But what deep ecology can bring to Christology is an awareness of the fragility of the human beginnings of Jesus of Nazareth in time within the complex layers of tissue, neurons, molecules etc. The flesh the Word became becomes more and more awesome if after the Word exited the scene, little by little a Gospel begins to flesh out what God would have us know about God from one who became one of us in every way and still is. So the Gos-

pel's articulation, to be very concrete, was dependent on a human brain, one that was in part mammalian, in part reptilian, with a neocortex and a limbic structure that makes a human brain whole. I'm speaking about Jesus' brain. That's the scandal of the incarnation. The emptying out of his divinity into the developmental challenge of becoming a human being is something we should let ourselves be newly astonished by. We can enter into deep incarnation through deep ecology. This is a kataphysical route, one that learns *through* matter, a route we aren't used to go in our doctrinal understandings.

When the Word became flesh, he wasn't saved from a total immersion into

the evolving stew of life that had been developing over 3.8 billion years before his appearance on this planet. The incarnation did not result in a Divinity *pretending* to be flesh. It was yet another instance of flesh eking out a human existence and coming slowly into meaning: his own, ours, nature's, God's. Deep ecology invites one to savor the intrinsic connection Jesus had with nature – human and physical – from his conception on and which he continues to have and will have forevermore.

### THE RECONCILIATION AGENDA OF CHRIST

Jesus' agenda in history and nature did not end with his resurrection, but has been continuing since he had first entered into the depths of matter. After his resurrection, his agenda has been "to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in heaven, making peace through the blood of his cross." (Col 1:20)

The reason why deep ecology should be consoling is it makes clear that he does not reconcile things from a distance but from within them because of his being part of both earth and heaven. This should render obsolete the spatial illusion that "up above" and "down here below" are any longer apt descriptors of where God is in relation to us.

The reconciliation agenda of Christ also needs reconcilers, in this case, those who can take the real insights of naturalists like Arne Naess about how we are all in this thing together and add Christ to the mix. Here's the point: when our scriptures about the incarnation were written and our dogmas pronounced, there was no knowledge of evolution nor of how deeply inter-

twined the human species was and still is with minerals and fluids, with carbon and nitrogen cycles, with stardust and bacteria. Even after our having come to knowledge of the emergence of homo sapiens from these elements, the illusion of our being independent of all of these is a tribute to our inattention or ignorance, our amnesia or arrogance.

Deep ecology can inform us human beings of how deeply intertwined with the most complex and simple life-forms Jesus was and still is. If you think I am exaggerating his continuing connection to the physicality of the earth, you might want to reflect on the meaning of his *bodily* resurrection that we have been celebrating in this Easter season.

### WHERE IS KNOWING GOING?

I have a book coming out next month published by Georgetown Press. Entitled, *Where is Knowing Going*, it is about how scholarship makes wholes out of things that otherwise stay disparate. As a result of the course I taught at Loyola University this spring, two worlds that I had not been able to make into one whole have come together nicely. I call them the kataphysical and the metaphysical worlds: the former being *through* matter, the latter *transcending* matter. This is one of many connections I have been able to make from the Jesuit chair I have been honored to fill this semester that helps to conjoin the Catholic intellectual tradition to the world of the ecological and evolutionary sciences. I might add, if we were to gather together these two parts of what could be a whole, not only our faith but the environment too might be the beneficiary.

# Theology & Evolution

By Thomas J. Reese, S.J., Senior Fellow

While most of the discussion of theology and evolution revolves around how the two are or are not compatible, there has been little discussion of how the theory of evolution may affect theological thinking, for example, Christology or ethics.

At the 2006 Easter Vigil, Pope Benedict hinted at how evolutionary thinking might affect Christology when in his homily he spoke of the resurrection of Jesus as the next step in human evolution. "Christ's Resurrection is something more, something different. If we may borrow the language of the theory of evolution, it is the greatest 'mutation,' absolutely the most crucial leap into a totally new dimension that there has ever been in the long history of life and its development: a leap into a completely new order which does concern us, and concerns the whole of history." If he had said this 50 years ago, he, like Teilhard de Chardin, would have been reprimanded by the Holy Office.

On the other hand, social Darwinism, which argues that survival of the fittest should guide social planning and organization, is an example of how nature may not be the best place to find our ethics. A Christian vision of evolution would see cooperation and love as a step forward, while fighting and selfishness is a step backward.



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# Our Place in the Grand Meta-Narrative

By Rev. John H. Huntington, Senior Fellow



Paleontology and genetics teach us that our natural bodies exist in kinship with all members of the animal kingdom, and further that our bodies' physical and chemical makeup are products of a very long process of evolution. In other words, we must agree that Charles Darwin was correct in speculating that we human beings are materially products of a process something like the "natural selection" or "survival of the fittest" he described in his famous book *The Origin of Species*. Geology and cosmology teach us that the perceptible universe is very ancient compared to the period over which *homo sapiens* evolved, and that the universe continues to unfold. Evolution is continuing, with us in the middle of it!

Our Judeo-Christian tradition teaches us that every person is unique in all of history, and that God breathed life into our nostrils in order that we could keep him company. It was the mission of Jesus of Nazareth to restore that relationship by his ministry, death and resurrection.

This brings up the great mystery of personhood. Some say that we are simply physical-chemical systems that have evolved to become self-conscious, and that our experience of *meaning, value and purpose*, which science cannot explain in any direct way, is probably just a useful social adaptation. Our tradition disagrees with this, and so must I.

When we thank God for the gift of our life, are we not giving thanks not only for our natural body with its senses and faculties, but also for the gift of our personhood, our supernatural and eternal identity? This expressed quite beautifully in *Evangelium Vitae*, the papal encyclical from John Paul II:

*Man is called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of his earthly existence, because it consists in sharing the very life of God. The loftiness of this supernatural vocation reveals the greatness and the inestimable value of human life even in its temporal phase. Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence.*

The story of human life on earth is a story with a beginning and an end. Its beginning is lost in the mists of time, and God's action in the creation of supernatural *homo sapiens* remains a matter of conjecture. How and when the end of human life on earth will occur is also an open question. There are numerous ways that the extinction of *homo sapiens* might come about. But it is inevitable.

Because each person is unique, so is every relationship unique. Each of us has a unique relationship with God. The meaning of our life is to be found in reflecting on our place in the grand meta-narrative that is the human-God story. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote:

*How embarrassing for man  
to be the greatest miracle on earth  
and not to understand it!  
How embarrassing for man  
to live in the shadow of greatness  
and to ignore it,  
to be a contemporary of God  
and not to sense it.  
Religion depends on what man does  
with this ultimate embarrassment.*

# Design and Change are Not Incompatible

By Neil Ormerod



*Neil Ormerod, a Woodstock International Visiting Fellow, is Professor of Theology at Australian Catholic University and the author of numerous books and articles on ecclesiology and systemic theology.*

For me, one of the central issues in the debate over Darwin is captured by Dr. Miller when he notes the "real issue" behind resistance to evolutionary theory: "does man have a purpose? Is there purpose to our lives? Or are we just, you know, the result of chance?" Both anti-deists such as Dawkins and proponents of Intelligent Design hold to this disjunction between design and chance.

However, are chance and design truly incompatible? Consider the link between smoking and lung cancer. It is well established that smoking increases the chance of lung cancer. If we reduce the rate of smoking, we will reduce the incidence of lung cancer. Suppose we introduce an advertising campaign to reduce the incidence of smoking. Some will see the ad, others will not. Some will be moved by the ad to quit smoking, others will not. Some will succeed in quitting, others will not. If the campaign is successful we will see a decrease in the number of deaths by lung cancer. We will have achieved our goal intelligently (by design) using a method full of chance processes. Perhaps the dichotomy between chance and purposefulness is somewhat overstated.

Recognition of the tension between divine design and contingency of outcome is not new. In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, Thomas Aquinas deals with questions concerning divine providence, chance and necessity.

*"If all things that are done here below, even chance events, are subject to divine providence [read: divine design], then, seemingly, either providence cannot be certain [read: there is no real design], or else all things happen by necessity [read: there is no chance]"* (SCG, 3, c.94.).

However, Aquinas does not accept either conclusion. In his response we find the following comment:

*"If God foresees that this event will be, it will happen ...But it will occur in the way that God foresaw that it would be. Now, He foresaw that it would occur by*

# What Do Prayer and Evolution Have in Common?

By Dolores R. Leckey, Senior Fellow



When the Woodstock forum on evolution concluded (January 21, 2009), a member of the audience was heard to say: Can I still pray if I'm an evolutionist? He later told me it was a serious question, and it made me stop to reflect upon the meaning of prayer and its relationship to the principles of evolution.

The fact that theologian John Haught, who is known throughout the world for his commitment to Darwin's theory **and** to the Christian tradition, was a presenter that night, helped my reflections. Dr. Haught argues that evolution's randomness seems consistent with a God who loves freedom enough to let the world be and become itself, something distinct from its creator.

God loves. How is love expressed? Certainly in the gift of time and attention to another, *in being with*. It seems to me that prayer fits these categories. When we enter into a space, materially or spiritually or both, to **be** with God, we are honoring our relationship with the Divine. We are in a state of prayer, and the overall environment is one of humility.

Humility and prayer are closely linked. And I think, by and large, scientists are persons of humility. I remember how moved I was reading some autobiographical writings of E.O. Wilson, the Harvard biologist. He doesn't speak of God or claim any religious affinity, yet his writings are infused with a sense of wonder and humility before the smallest forms of life on earth (in his particular case, ants). People like Wilson (and Einstein and Darwin) realize they are not the center of the universe.

The scientific world seeks **to know**, and that knowledge is important for human progress. But there are many paths to knowing, paths different from the scientific method. There is the artistic path, for example. Photographer Robert Frank,

best known for his book *The Americans*, says about his work: I am always looking outside trying to look inside, trying to say something that is true. Except what is out there and what's *here* is constantly changing. Robert Frank understands something important about truth: it's not encased in concrete. Like the evolutionists, he recognizes the centrality of change in life; like mystics and saints, he searches for the inner truth.

When we pray we are engaged in change, a slow evolution of consciousness. We may come to prayer seeking help for a problem, or clarity regarding our life's purpose, or understanding about the universe. We pray for, search for, courage or consolation. And what happens? We discover, experientially, that Jesus was right: "Seek and you shall find." But what we find is often the deeper meanings about the self, about others, about the world and about God. We learn something about the dynamism of God. The pray-er, the learner, is changed.

When we pray we are engaged in change,  
a slow evolution of consciousness.

The pray-er, the learner, is changed.

I have been at Woodstock for eleven years. During that time I have

come to believe that the projects we envision and work hard to bring to fruition reflect something of the dynamics of prayer. They have within them the seeds of development, the capacity to change direction, to become something else, or something more. And sometimes, we "lay them down" as the Quakers say, gently letting them go.

I see in my daily work—church leadership, lay spirituality and ministry, faith in the city, women in theology—the truth that everything that lives, dies, including ideas to which I may have been passionately attached..

Traditional Christian practice underscores this truth in the rituals of our sacramental life. Everything dies, but love and justice, and peace and liberty find new paths of life. Death and love are partners, as our colleague Fr. Patrick Heelan S.J. often reminds us. It seems to me that the evolutionist-theologians echo that point, and it is something worth praying about.

*chance. So, it follows that, without fail, it will occur by chance and not necessarily"*

(SCG, 3, c.94).

This position of Aquinas is so traditional that it was most disappointing when Cardinal Schönborn entered into the debate arguing that, "Evolution in the sense of common ancestry might be true, but evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense - an unguided, unplanned process of random variation and natural selection - is not." What is disappointing here is the juxtaposition of "unguided, unplanned" with "random." This dichotomy is exactly what Aquinas rejected. God can act purposefully and intelligently through chance (providence) to achieve determinate outcomes. Schönborn is attempting to preserve divine design in

creation, but his efforts are in the end not helpful.

More helpful here is the document "Communion and Stewardship" by the International Theological Commission. Its comments on the present debate are instructive.

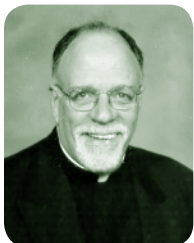
*But it is important to note that, according to the Catholic understanding of divine causality, true contingency in the created order is not incompatible with a purposeful divine providence. Divine causality and created causality radically differ in kind and not only in degree. Thus, even the outcome of a truly contingent natural process can nonetheless fall within God's providential plan for creation ... Divine causality can be active in a process that is both contingent*

*and guided. Any evolutionary mechanism that is contingent can only be contingent because God made it so.*

If this position is adopted, then both the rejection of "God the designer" by Dawkins and the attempt to preserve a divine role through Intelligent Design are misplaced.

Resource: the Australian National Museum held a symposium on Darwin and evolution. Podcasts of the talks and transcripts can be found at [http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/darwin\\_series/darwin\\_symposium/](http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/darwin_series/darwin_symposium/)

# God, Evolution and Preaching the Just Word



By *Raymond B. Kemp, Senior Fellow*

I fight the classicist in me every day. I still want a God who is directly involved in a biblical cosmology working with the firmament in the void and separating land from watery depths, and with all varieties of sea and land monsters roaming about wreaking chaos and confusion. And my ancestors organized in tribes and clans foraging for food and drink, alternately free and subjugated, gradually settling down to the rhythms of summerfallwinterspring and more or less sun and rain – it makes a movie I am happy to leave or play over as my mood changes. Every so often, a leader emerges to throw off the yoke of the tyrant and rally the folk to a new place, often through a sea and a desert, sometimes through a potato field or the ramparts red glare.

I love the stories of real people who recognize the yoke and what could and ought to be, and then turn yearnings and strivings into the work of fashioning some slightly more humane way of being human. Now it turns out that the cosmos has its own system of progress and decline, and though pointed to an end of what we understand as extant, may well contain surprises along the way we can only imagine. Imagine! There's an agenda! New images in wholly new patterns can turn salt water into drinking water, can grab viruses within a body and slow their spread enough so that immune deficiencies become sufficiencies, and you may never even know your neighbor has HIV. The classicist gives way to the empiricist, and the guy who struggled with chemistry and almost set the high school lab afire, drops his jaw when science and medicine heal the blind and the leprous, the halt and the speechless.

We preach the just word to cancer survivors and to barren

couples made fruitful, and we do this Sunday in and Sunday out, saying God makes things right, restores right relationships at least for awhile, through the mediation, always through the mediation of artisans of health and peace. We preach and pray with researchers and doctors, with philanthropists and philosophers, with lawyers and lobbyists, pols and prognosticators in churches humble and grand, in venues that look to the woods or the water. Rare are the references to a glory of God, a greater glory of God, that is the value added by those who toil and test in labs and space capsules, underwater and with living tissue, value that makes the fully alive glory of God resound in vocal chords that sing praise, in finger tips that reach into that once full womb to pick up that eighth infant, Baby H.

Our route to authenticity, to a true faith beyond the sound bytes of traditional pieties, is to tread through the terrain of what we have known to what we know we don't know: the wisdom of God becoming more and more fully revealed. "May the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, grant you a spirit of wisdom and insight to know him clearly. May he enlighten your innermost vision that you may know the great hope to which he has called you, the wealth of his glorious heritage to be distributed among the members of the church, and the immeasurable scope of his power in us who believe. It is like the strength he showed in raising Christ from the dead and seating him at his right hand in heaven, high above every principality, power, virtue and domination, and every name that can be given in this age or the age to come." (Ephesians 2, 17—21)

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# God, Evolution and Economic Development

By Rita M. Rodriguez, Senior Fellow



Classical market economics parallels the concepts of Darwinian evolution. The survival of the fittest dictates that only the most efficient companies and industries, the fittest, survive. In this world of free markets, there is also plenty of randomness and the natural selection law of supply and demand rules, regardless of the suffering it inflicts. It is according to these rules that economic wealth is created

in this theory. Like with evolution theory, a person of faith asks, is that all that there is?

When we allow evolution to expand our understanding of God, we also alter how God enters into our lives. It leads us to a vision of God still creating the universe toward a future, calling us to that future, and economic development is part of that future. When we introduce into evolution human beings' basic experience of their inner self, of their capacity to strive to achieve, of their sense of the Divine, we see a *homo economicus* whose behavior is not purely materialistic, but one able to respond to the calling from God. The Woodstock grassroots research project on the global economy and cultures has studied the values that motivate the protagonists of our narratives. We surely find that the material things that they need are important to them and that prices and income determine what they consume. But, we also see that there is more to what motivates these people. They are also guided by

When we allow evolution to expand our understanding of God, we also alter how God enters into our lives.

the values of the culture that gives them a sense of belonging. Furthermore, their decisions are often made in the context of the love they feel for their family and neighbors, as well as by their religious values. Shanti, a tribal woman in India, surely is interested in the new consumer goods now available to her. But she is also willing to even counter her tradition when, in her patriarchal society, she leads a protest to protect the village spring against the coal mine company encroaching on her village. The coal mine has brought a degree of material economic development to the village, but at a high cost in many things that she also values. She is in solidarity with the other villagers who depend on the spring not only as a source of water, but also as a source of religious meaning and a venue for social gatherings. She is willing to engage in non-traditional behavior and expose herself to possible reprisals for what she considers to be the right, moral, thing to do.

When we see economic behavior within the context of a God that creates in an evolutionary way, economic behavior is more than people's selfish response to the forces of supply and demand. We often see them creating a new world as they search for what they value, often but not always doing what they believe to be the right thing to do, often enough at the price of self-sacrifice, the price of love. In this light, economic development becomes much more than manipulating the forces of supply and demand. It becomes the art of tapping into the values that drive human creativity.

# BOOK REVIEW

## CHRIST IN EVOLUTION

By Ilia Delio

Orbis Books, New York (RRP \$28.95)



Wow! This book is a page turner!

Despite being very dense and somewhat daunting to read – given the smallness of the text size and also the depth and sensitivity of the topic – the book opens up a whole new understanding of *Christ in Evolution*.

A brief discourse is given on 'Evolution, Christ and Consciousness' before a history of Christ is offered. Theological content is then provided through looking at the theological perspectives of Franciscan Cosmic Christology; Teilhard de Chardin: The Christic Universe; Raimon Pannikar and the Unknown Christ; and Thomas Merton and Bede Griffiths: The Transcultural Christ.

Ilia then gives the theology 'legs' by indicating how this makes us 'Co-creators in Christ' and what the possible implications are for 'technology' and a thought process that maybe a little out there, 'extraterrestrial life.'

*Christ in Evolution* presupposes the science of evolution and seeks to find meaning for Christ in Evolution. Rather than refute the idea of evolution the book seeks to open up an understanding where "...evolution is....Darwin's gift to Christology." Ilia emphasizes that Christ is the creator of creation, the goal of creation and the centre of creation.

The book seeks to unpack a new understanding where Christ is not a static figure in history but the dynamic "divine creative power that has been present from the beginning." A dynamic power that invites us into the creative process of bringing the world to its ultimate goal in Jesus Christ.

Reviewed by John Ruhle

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Along with being an Associate Fellow at the Woodstock Theological Center, Sr. Ilia Delio, O.S.F. serves as Chair and Professor in the Department of Spirituality Studies at the Washington Theological Union, where she is also Director of Franciscan Studies.



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