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## SPEAKING OF CREATION

Seeing Creation as the Dynamic, Multifaceted Work of a Loving God,  
who is also our Father

by

B.K. (Bev) Mitchell

## INTRODUCTION

This series of essays is written with Christian students in mind. Even in this new millennium tens of thousands of university students find little support in their home church, family or community for dealing with the intellectual challenges to their faith that they will encounter in the modern, secular university. Worse, those in Bible schools and Christian colleges will often still find reactionary curricula that want to explain away, debunk or simply ignore established evidence gained by the last hundred years of recognized scholarship. As a lifelong Christian, and an experimental biologist with more than thirty years research and teaching experience in a

major secular university, it saddens me to have to acknowledge the truth of the sentences that I have just written. This series of essays is offered in the hope and with the prayer that some students will find herein some intellectual and spiritual footholds that will help them come to a combined understanding of faith and science that is a blessing to them. All truth is from God, so we are most content when the truths we know, regardless of their source, fit together to form a consistent world view. So, humbly, these essays are presented to help you find a world view that is a blessing to you, so that you may better bless others.

A major result of recent advances in science and other scholarship is to encourage many believers to enlarge their views of God, sometimes appearing to come into conflict with traditional views. Tradition is, of course, very important, and we must make progress together with a clear understanding of what our ancestors believed, and to the fullest extent possible, why they believed it and why they expressed their beliefs as they did. Yet, like us, they were fallible, and adjustments to our thinking will always be necessary. We really do want to have the living faith of the dead, and to avoid having the dead faith of the living.

Coincident with an expanded view of God, I believe that we need a greatly expanded view of creation. The impetus for this comes from both scientific advances and advances in biblical scholarship and in theological thinking. Creation is a very dynamic affair. The nineteenth century's view that much was static and set, that perfect types existed, at least in principle, that humanity has diverged from some perfect point in the past

have been effectively challenged by twentieth century science and theology. Science has moved on to recognize the dynamism inherent in creation (nature) while important parts of the church have often resisted, on the grounds of some version of biblical inerrancy, and an incorrigible theology. For many Christians then, after more than one hundred years of resistance, there is a seemingly huge gap between the foundational tenants of their faith and the generally accepted facts of science.

One aspect that often seems to be missing is the idea of unfolding – that is, the dynamism of what God has made possible and continues to make possible. We should consider the resurrection of our Lord to be the most perfect creation event revealed in Scripture. Beside that unique act of God, the rest of material reality is simply good and very good, and it is the product of a long unfolding. If we want to move seamlessly from truth as determined by scientific observation of the material world to truth as revealed in Scripture, we must get rid of the static, fixed views that pervade discussions of this sort.

An orthodox Christian understanding of Scripture should see dynamism, change, growth, evolution everywhere. It begins, for Christians, with a relationship. This relationship is not a single event, it is a process, a daily dying that Christ might live in us to remake us into the person he always intended. Working backwards, Israel's relationship with its God is a very long process – a rocky evolution. Moving back still further, creation is not a single event, it is a process – for life, a 3.7 billion year process. From this perspective we can move seamlessly from scriptural revelation to

biological, geological and chemical facts, for our best science agrees that all we know in a material way is the result of a process – a process that continues.

It is most helpful to think process, unfolding, and, for believers, to add a loving creator who makes all this process possible and sustains it. This includes, of course, the unfolding of the material world and the unfolding of our relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit. We serve a very active God. He is doing great things. They are all related, and all truth is his. He has made, is making and will continue to make it all possible. And, we do not need to point to specific places along the way where he intervened – all of it is his idea.

In thinking this way, we certainly do not have to include God as part of creation as does process theology. We do, however, have to envision a God who cares. A God who suffers when we suffer, a God who does not always get his way because in making everything possible, he also made and makes freedom possible. His acts of making possible include allowing creation to be and to become, including allowing sentient beings to say 'no' to him, to rebel against him, to ignore him, to conclude that he does not even exist. As believers, our challenge is to look to his Spirit for the faith to believe that his perfect love is so completely effective that his will will ultimately prevail.

In short, this entire discussion boils down to our fundamental view of God. Do we envision a God who by application of his almighty power controls

everything, or a God who by application of his perfect love grants libertarian freedom – the real ability to say no, to rebel? These views are fundamental, and fundamentally different. Only with the second view do we have a hope of being able to make the necessary smooth transition from the truth of God’s works to the truth of God’s Word.

We must clearly decide, up front, which view of God we will take, because the path our thinking takes, the trace of our logic, depends utterly on our starting point. Assuming they are reasonable and logical, two people cannot each take one of these starting points and end up in the same place somewhere down the road. Careful readers of Scripture have come up with what they consider good evidence for both the free-will and the deterministic views alluded to above. I'm not trying to argue for one or the other view - there are many books that do that much better than I can. It is true, however, that a free-will position will fit the view discussed in these essays while a deterministic view will not.

Christians cannot expect scientists to help them rationalize their faith foundations with how the world is now known to be. Some scientists even prey upon our fears and our belief in inerrancy of Scripture to question any belief recognizable as Christian. This should not bother us as much as it often does. Christian reading of Scripture and the theology that comes from such reading will always be challenged by new knowledge. In fact, scientific understanding itself is regularly challenged by new results, and good science is completely dependent on such challenges for any future advance. Theology used to be called the Queen of the Sciences, so why

should new knowledge that challenges theology and Scripture interpretation be seen as a threat? This threat arises when we elevate our particular interpretation of Scripture and our particular theology to the level of Scripture itself.

We can have undue faith in our faith, and even faith in our theology. Christians should never lose sight of the fact that our faith is in the risen Lord, the first born from among the dead. It is very useful, even essential, that we begin answering all difficult questions with the revelation of Christ in the New Testament. Or as it is often put, that we read the Bible backwards. In addition to regularly emphasizing the centrality of Christ, and indeed the Trinity, the great Scottish Presbyterian theologian and pastor T.F. Torrance famously said "We should always think of God as Father before we think of him as Creator." These essays are guided by this good advice.

The main question for concerned Christians is not "is science correct about evolution?" For the purposes of practical Christianity the answer is simply, yes! No scientist can claim that our faith is rendered obsolete by science because of what literalists say the Bible says. Think about it. A polemician like Richard Dawkins has a vested interest in our taking Genesis literally, as if it were a scientific treatise. He does not believe that the Spirit of the Lord speaks to us through the text. We do, and we should listen carefully. The Spirit is not teaching us biology, geology, history or cosmology in Genesis. He is revealing himself, the living God. How much better than that does it have to get?

If you are a mature, Bible believing Christian and your faith is upset by someone like Professor Dawkins, get over it. If you are a young believer, don't fall for pseudo theology. Better yet, don't put your faith in particular interpretations or in specific theologies, but in Christ the Lord. Ask God to strengthen your faith. Read and talk to people who can show you how to approach the Scriptures by asking questions Scripture has been inspired by God to answer. Read some of the many authors who will help you in this area. A good number of them are listed in the annotated bibliography at the end of this little book. There are many more.

Secondly, and I mean secondly as in way back, if you are interested in biology, great. I love biology too. But I have also met many students who thought they were interested in this very demanding field but soon discovered they were not. Some reveal themselves in the written course evaluations at the end of term saying, "Now I know I don't want to take any more biology!" The subject is vast. The hurdles in terminology and mountainous detail just in year one are daunting. Research biologists don't usually hit their stride until well into their 30s, if not later. In many ways it's like theology. In fact, I've started thinking of the "Life" sciences as having two parts – biology and theology. This is not to deify the secular, but it is to point out that the study of life on earth, including its grand history, should be expected to reveal much about the one who made it all possible.

That's biology – a mountain of facts yes, but facts that tie together beautifully after much consideration and study. We face exactly the same thing when we come to Scripture. I would no more expect someone to understand biology properly after a few courses than I would trust a “theologian” who has just aced Greek, Hebrew and Survey of the Bible in first year seminary. So, in these essays I do not presume that you know any biology, nor counsel you to study biology. I do, however, ask you to take recognized biologists and the generally accepted scientific findings just as seriously as you take the widely accepted ideas and conclusions of many theologians and Bible scholars.

I wish you all great success in your studies but, even more, great joy in knowing the Lord!

## DISCLAIMER

In these pages I am not trying to convince you of anything. Like me, you must make up your own mind about how to blend what we know about God and his work from science and from Scripture. However, you do need some tools to accomplish this important task, and I want to share some of the ones I think are important. So, consider these statements, letters, dramas, comments and musings as a tool box. Take from it whatever you think will help you. Consult widely. Pay particular attention to the Christian writers listed in the bibliography, but don't neglect others. The list grows every year. Do read some of the science references in the



bibliography, even if you are not studying science. They are all quite accessible. And, enjoy the journey - God is patient.

## A THEOLOGICAL POSITION

As a reader, you have the right to know the theological position I am coming from. It is unlikely that you will agree with it completely, but I want you to know what it is, up front. You will see it peeking through, or even standing up and waving at you, in every essay. You certainly don't have to share all of its positions to find important intellectual tools and ways of thinking in these pages. And do remember, we are not called by Christ to have a theological position, we are called to believe in the risen Lord and in the total effectiveness of his voluntary self-sacrifice on our behalf. And we are called to live here on this earth, in and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who the ascended Lord has sent. Our salvation is first for this life. If we truly allow God's Spirit to guide in this life, the after-life can be left in the capable hands of the Father.

Accepting:

- (1) essential kenosis - God gives of himself, essentially (see Oord, 2010),
- (2) the view of material creation from something previously created by God (see Oord, 2010),
- (3) but limited by evil (see Mitchell below),

- (4) that spiritual reality (outside the Trinity) came into existence before material reality, and some agents therein rebelled (Levenson, 1988),
- (5) the spiritual warfare model (see Boyd, 2001) and
- (6) that we should always think of God as Father before we think of him as Creator (see Torrance, 1992),

we could then speculate as follows.

God necessarily loves and necessarily creates such that creation necessarily flows from the Creator, who is first Father. Spiritual reality is one aspect of this creative flow. Material reality is another. God wants these two realities to be so close that they function perfectly together, in holiness. Since our truly loving Creator also creates freedom, the risk of rebellion in both realities is real. Rebellion first occurred in spiritual reality, because it existed before material reality. The chief rebel could not affect God's love, truth, holiness or anything else of God, directly, nor could he ultimately stop the creative flow of matter from God or the ultimate uniting of spiritual and material reality in holiness. But, using his God given authority and freedom, the chief rebel could limit matter, and did so. As with humanity's rejection of God's call and God's will, this spiritual rebellion created great problems, including limiting effects on material reality, which are particularly clear from biology. Nevertheless, starting from *tohu va bohu*, and its implied purposelessness, God began to create - a *creatio ex creatione a natura amoris* complete with *telos*. (creation from creation through love complete with purpose) So "In the beginning of God's creating the skies and the earth - when the earth had

been shapeless and formless, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and God's spirit was hovering over the face of the water..." What a picture - space, matter and time - present and past - and the Holy Spirit, all accounted for in a single sentence. Then, almost like a battle cry, "God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light."

The story continues. The creation that has begun was declared good by God, meaning his fatherly work will be accomplished in the face of resistance from the chief rebel. But, creation is not holy - the union God wants to have between matter and spirit has been broken and delayed. 13.7 billion years later, human life emerges, and God can begin the final stages of his creation, now in co-operation with humanity - and in a special way with those human beings who will accept God's call, yield to God's light and be guided by him.

The ultimate goal of this plan is uniquely revealed in the Incarnation - Spirit (God) is united with matter (human being). Christ lives his life to set an example of what a sinless life is. His willing sacrifice takes care of the rebellion that separated spirit and material realities so long ago. The words, "It is finished" can be seen as the successful end of a long obedience, and as a victory cry. His resurrection is evidence of the completeness of the victory, and the risen Lord is the first human being to become the holy union of matter and spirit that God predicted when he said "Let there be light!"

The Ascension and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit are necessary events for further spiritual development of humans toward holiness, and for the declaration of the Good News of what has been accomplished in Christ. God is still working, by his spirit, through human beings who are called to love God and to love each other. At his return, Christ will complete this creative process of union and matter and spirit. Then, we shall be like him, and, all of creation will become the holy thing that God wants, for he will then recreate it without any opposition. Paul (Romans 8:21) refers to the "hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay (direct result of limited resources) and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God." This will be when spirit and body are one in Christ, as originally intended - if there had been no rebellion.

What are we talking about when we talk about creation?

There is a huge communication problem at or near the centre of all attempts to develop an adequate doctrine of creation for the 21st century.

Despite its solid biblical pedigree, the word "creation" has accumulated so much baggage that it's very cumbersome to the point of opaque. Even when agreed that God is the only Creator, we have confusion over the object(s) created. Just for starters, we should state whether we are referring to material reality, spiritual reality or to both. Then there is the temporal perspective. When many Christians say God created - they are thinking entirely in the past. Even when they add "sustains" they think of

God sustaining a completed work - maintaining something completed in the past. This is, of course, very 19th century - back when typology was still in vogue, in biology and in theology. The idea that creation of the material universe, is ongoing, ever changing, fits modern science well but not so well much of modern creed-affirming theology. I suppose we could also ask, when it comes to creation of spiritual reality, should we think of ongoing, ever changing as well? But who knows? Furthermore, we probably should not limit our thoughts of God's creative activity to things or beings - that is, anything that succeeds against entropy. What about thoughts, ideas, relationships? - and the list could go on.

So, at minimum, we should say God created and creates, matter and energy, mental constructs, spiritual reality and probably a host of realities unknown to us. All this without mentioning the perfect creation represented by the resurrection, and the to-be-perfected new life in Christ of the believer..... Just as we need a much bigger idea of God, we also need a vastly expanded concept of creation.

As a way of circumventing this problem of insufficient specificity, it might be better to say that God makes everything possible - God makes being and becoming possible. This construct implies a creative flow made possible by God, and it fits seamlessly with the flow of matter toward order and increased complexity that science observes and describes so well. This fit is particularly strong for biology. Yes, God began to create earth and sky, and we can specifically talk about that creation in the

context of Scripture, science and theology. But we should realize that this is a specific case of God's much larger creative flow

In any case, some way needs to be found to get completely away from static ideas when speaking of the world of matter, energy and life. It is positively abuzz, constantly changing, adapting, testing..... it's alive, metaphorically (matter and energy) and in reality (living things). All this being and becoming is continuously made possible by the completely effective love of a necessarily loving God.

Getting this complex set of ideas to come to mind when we say "create" is an essential task.

# The Essays

Versions of some of these were originally published on various Christian blogs and is indicated where appropriate. You may find the blog comments helpful. Parts of several essays concerning a theology of creation were used in a paper presented at the 43rd. annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Evangel University, Springfield, MO March 6-8, 2014

## 1. A Letter from Father

To my dear theologically inclined sons and daughters, Greetings.

I have been following your deliberations and must say I'm impressed at the way you are able to apply your mental capacities in the consideration of my nature, purpose and acts. Normally, I don't interfere much in such generally wholesome activity, but I have become concerned that certain clear lessons from my Word seem to be often missed, with unfortunate consequences. Not to put too fine a point on the matter, the consequences can border on the dangerous.

The heart of the matter seems to be the difficulty my creatures have of taking to heart the simple lesson that I gave to Job and his friends in my first revelation, and have repeated frequently enough since - viz., I am the Potter, you are the clay. You are not able to come up with a description of me, my work or my purpose that is sufficient for more than formulating

the most basic understanding. Don't get me wrong, I love you very much and want you to think hard, because you are in a hard place and you do need to be wise as serpents, but also harmless as doves. It's the second part that needs some work.

You see, it really is harmful when you fall for the idea that your mental abilities and your finely tuned words can come close to describing my nature, my purpose and my acts - the clay should know its place better than this. I am the one who does the revealing around here and I thought I had made it clear to Moses that there is so much to me and my reality that the best I can do for you, in your present condition, is give you a tiny glimpse of myself. This, however, is enough for you to know the precariousness of your situation and to give you some understanding of what I have done to rescue you from this situation. You are in no position to be able to comprehend more than I have revealed.

The harmfulness I refer to really is serious. You see, when your ideas about me have been developed to the full extent of your abilities, you have a strong tendency to think of them as a nearly complete work, certainly something of great value that others should use as a guide. In short, you get quite enamoured of your intellectual work, the same way the Canaanites thought of their little carvings and even my people thought of their golden calf or of their interpretation of the symbolic serpent on the staff that I provided. Your tendency to see yourselves as more able to know things than you actually are often leads you very close to idolizing



the creations of your own mind. Now, with respect to my opinion of idolatry, I am sure that I have made myself perfectly clear.

Please keep your eyes and mind fixed on the centre of my revelation to you. You actually live on a battlefield that you only vaguely comprehend, and you need all the help you can get. The battle which is underway in spiritual reality is the real thing and will overcome you if you don't lean completely on the sufficient suffering and sacrifice of my Son, and depend on the full power of my Spirit's love as He did. Now, as you know, from the perspective of eternity this war has already been won. Your everyday perspective is different however, making the world appear to be completely out of control.

Fortunately, it is fairly easy for you to know if you are understanding my revelations correctly. My Spirit, abiding in the centre of your being, will fill you with joy and cause you to love me more and more. As this happens, you will love other people more and more, even those who say they have a better description of me than the one you have developed. The love that comes from my Spirit, through you to the world, will be combined with a wise and warm humility that will be very attractive to those who know me not. Equally important, the fully available power of my Spirit will allow you to win real victories on the temporary battleground where you live. As a reminder, I close by giving you Job's prayer to me following my corrective comments to him. Job really got the message.

“I know that you can do anything. No one can keep you from doing what you plan to do. You asked me, ‘Who do you think you are to disagree with my plans? You do not know what you are talking about.’ I spoke about things I didn't completely understand. I talked about things that were too wonderful for me to know. You said, ‘Listen now, and I will speak. I will ask you some questions. Then I want you to answer me.’ My ears had heard about you. But now my own eyes have seen you. So I hate myself. I'm really sorry for what I said about you. That's why I'm sitting in dust and ashes.” Job 42:2-6 RNIV

I'm sure you will take these loving, corrective words to heart and continue to faithfully contribute to the Kingdom that I am building among you.

Your Loving Father and Sovereign Lord

## 2. The story of two hows?

There are two kinds of "how?" "How?" is never pious. "How?" can be either innocent or arrogant. True believers should avoid the latter, true non-believers have no use for it.

Imagine two scientists considering a problem by asking themselves "I wonder how that works?" One of the scientists is a non-believer, the other believes in God. In fact, the believing scientist is quite pious and actually

sometimes is tempted to think that her "how?" is different from, even better than her colleague's "how?" In fact, they both should only be asking the perfectly reasonable, scientific and somewhat colloquial "how?" In this case, there should be no difference at all between the "hows?" of the two scientists. The sense of this way of asking how would be captured completely by the less colloquial "I wonder what?" This is the innocent "how?"

Time has now passed. The two colleagues have worked hard and they are a gifted team. They, and their grad students who actually did most of the work, now know the answer to "how?" or to "what?" Science has taken a step forward. Critical reviews and later confirmation from others are awaited, but they are confident enough to turn their attention elsewhere. Typically, elsewhere is usually very close by, almost imperceptibly just below, or just beside, the previous unknown. Another "how?/what?".

A thought then passes through the head of the believing scientist. Her piousness is having a bad day (consult various histories of religion to see how this can be so). In this case, the blowback is mild, even turned to a good end. What they have discovered is really quite important and gaining the attention of the press. That very day it is suggested by some reporter for a TV network that we may be getting closer to understanding "how" God has worked. Justly excited about their discovery, and wanting to give her piousness a workout, the believing scientist agrees, saying something like, "Yes, it is wonderful to catch a glimpse of how God works!"

Immediately her spirit is checked - her piety turns out to be genuine - and she rephrases her exclamation "Isn't it wonderful what God is doing"?! The reporter, puzzled, asks for an explanation to which our scientist replies "In this life we only get to observe and wonder at what God has done and is doing. You see, our team is already working on the next question. It's always like that, in fact, it will always be like that. The deeper down we go in any subject, we never find the bottom, but this makes me joyful rather than sad. I am more than content to discover more and more of what God has done." Then, sensing a teachable moment, she concludes "You see, as a Christian, when it comes to God I can't really expect to know 'how?' and my non-believing colleagues have no reason to ask it."

Judging from his expression, the reporter was still puzzled, but it was time for a commercial, and this network never stays with a topic long enough to do it justice anyway, so the audience was left hanging. Fortunately, many listeners were astute enough to remember the prophet's words (from Isaiah 55)

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the Lord.

As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts."

And some even took the time to look it up and read on an extra sentence or two,

"As the rain and the snow  
come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it  
without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
it will not return to me empty,  
but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purposes for which I sent it.  
You will go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and the hills  
will burst into song before you,  
and all the trees of the field

will clap their hands." NIV 2011

Considering all this, who would dare ask the arrogant, thoroughly impious version of "how?"

### 3. Emerging pianos

(earlier version published at Dr. Scot McKnight's Jesus Creed blog March 7, 2013)

The strangest results often emerge when we combine things. The genes of any two species in the same genus are not all that different, yet we can measure many differences between two "good" species, including the all important inability to mate and give rise to viable offspring. The differences that underlie this seemingly simple fact can include habitat choice, life history characters, behaviour, morphology, biochemistry of reproduction, cellular physiology, genome level discord and many more.

The piano offers a metaphor to illustrate this emergence of a suite of differences based on limited gene differences. In fact, using the piano instead of the genome we can stack the deck and offer the analogue of truly identical genomes. Consider 100 pianos and consider the keys as genes. Each key is different, yielding a different frequency well within the range of human perception. There are other controls on the sound quality, such as pedals, tuning etc., but we will equalize these to the fullest possible extent in our metaphor.

So far, everything is in order, for all intents and purposes the instruments are identical. Now we introduce 100 accomplished pianists, randomly selected from a very large, diverse population. We know nothing of these 100 pianists save that they are all very accomplished. Our task is to predict the sounds and rhythms that will come out of these pianos when the corresponding pianist sits down to play. Preposterous you say, and you would be correct. We have no idea what will emerge when any pair (piano, pianist) fill the air with sound.

This is how it is with genes. They are a database, just as the piano keys may be considered a database. Decisions as to how they are used, combined, expressed, or not used at all depend entirely on another level of organization, above the database. By interviewing the 100 pianists, we could get a reasonable idea of what to expect, because we would have something like direct access to the ones making the decisions about how the keys would be used. With real genes, however, biologists are just beginning to get the first glimpses of these selection mechanisms. Also, instead of 88 keys, there are orders of magnitude more genes in a typical organism.

When the pianists do sit down to play (one by one would be an important part of the experimental design) we will hear a great concert made up of all kinds of music and musical styles. All emerging from essentially identical instruments. Furthermore, we probably could group the recital pieces into a few groups comprising related genres and styles (let's call

these genera). Some presentations may be so unique they cannot be grouped (a genus with a single species). Others will be more common (probably classical, jazz, gospel) and will comprise genera that are more species rich.

At the end of our experiment, we will have a little musical zoo populated by quite distinct presentations. The truly amazing thing is that this great variety emerged by choosing the sounds available from a relatively tiny database – in this case identical databases. The rhythms (timing) were not present in the database, but brought to the database. Yes, the structure of the instrument cried out to have timing and rhythm added, but it is nowhere present in the machine.

The real thing always outruns the metaphor. Imagine the possibilities with thousands of genes (keys) and gene variants and probably hundreds of mechanisms (pianists) for choosing which genes to play and how to play them. Try to imagine what it is that directs these mechanisms so that the appropriate organism emerges. Imagine time and circumstance operating on this combination of genes and mechanisms to yield variety through adaptation and selection cycles.

But there is more. Let's return to the pianists. Some are really "in the zone" when they play and little can distract them. Others are on edge, they are accomplished but unaccustomed to being part of experiments (for example). The way the keys are played, and the resulting experience, can be dramatically altered by messing with the pianist while he or she plays -



or whispering something to them beforehand that makes them even more nervous than usual. Can this metaphor compare with anything in real gene control? It used to be thought that everything in development worked in one direction - from gene to organism. Now we have a growing body of evidence revealing that information flows both ways. The environment of the gene, or the cell in which it resides, or the tissue/organ in which the cells reside, or the organism in which the tissue or organ reside can seriously influence how the database is used, or how the piece is played, to return to our metaphor.

This illustrates the rapidly growing field of epigenetics (over-genetics, meta-genetics). Gene expression can be affected by what is going on or what is happening to the organism in which they reside. There is even good evidence from extensive long-term studies that these effects can extend across generations, how many is understandably unknown. Chemical mechanisms underlying such effects can be as straightforward as removing or adding methyl groups to regulatory parts of genes.

Just imagine what God hath wrought. But don't look for God's fingerprints in this unimaginable complexity. He is outside of it all, but still lovingly responsible for its existence and sustenance - he has made and is making it all possible. No matter how detailed, no matter what level of organization we consider, these are all only one thing to a Christian - they are examples of what God has done (is doing). They should not be considered in the sense of explaining how God does things. This is the great error of Intelligent Design theory, and the earlier God of the gaps kind of thinking.

God is at work. We are privileged, through the dedicated work of very imaginative and talented people, to be able to see more and more of the 'what'. But, no matter how many layers we peel from the onion, we will never directly see God at work. He has ways of working that we can understand only through his self-revelation. Scriptures, the Church, the Holy Spirit and the cosmos (at all levels) work together to provide this revelation. The answer to 'how?' will have to wait. But hey, isn't what we can know truly wonderful?

#### 4. Faith or Doubt?

"We have an anchor that keeps the soul  
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,  
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,  
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love."

It's easy to think of this anchor as faith, but faith is not our anchor. Consider the last line. If our faith is our hope we are lost, but because our hope is the love of Christ, we are surely saved.

Think of this metaphor a little more. We often admire people grounded in their faith, and in a sense this is appropriate. But an anchored ship is much safer in a storm than a grounded one. With the kind of anchor the hymn

speaks of, we can even weigh anchor and sail the wide seas, never being separated from Christ's love.

Let's apply this to reading today's scholarly works on biblical interpretation and Christian theology. We often raise a number of what-ifs regarding the godliness of scholarly conclusions, though the outcomes we most fear are very unlikely to ever represent a consensus. The reason for this is that many biblical scholars have a real relationship with Christ. Popular opinion seems to have difficulty with this concept, as if practicing scholarship is somehow like skating close to the edge of the abyss. It is not - in fact, it is essential. It is like any other obedient and disciplined part of the Christian walk. The fact that some scholars reach "unholy" conclusions is in the same category as the fact that there are hypocrites in church - we can lament it but we have to get beyond it.

A useful challenge, thought experiment really, for testing our faith is to contemplate where our faith would be should the little green men finally arrive from some distant shore. If our faith is in our faith, we would probably be in trouble. If Christ is our faith, we would just be terribly interested to find out what the heck is going on.

Speaking of faith (and doubt), it is possible to give faith and doubt too high a billing. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Both faith and doubt are results of a complex of things, some external, some internal. Doubt is not overcome by increasing our faith in our faith. Our faith in our faith can even be idolatrous.

The parable of the sower tells us something about faith as a product of something more fundamental - in that case the environment in which we are immersed. The prodigal son in the pig pen showed more faith than the stay at home son who didn't recognize that he had everything - this was the result of experience. But an even better example is from the sermon on the mount - "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" KJV and Is. 55.1, 2 "Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters.." NIV

We are all seekers - atheists, agnostics, believers or the honestly confused. The Holy Spirit is prepared to meet us where we are, as the Psalm says "...if I descend to Sheol. You are there too." Tanakh JPS Ps. 139. Our faith is not a static thing, it grows in true seekers. It is a gift from God, so it is also a limitless gift. The not-yet believer, the new believer and the old tree all need to see their faith grow from the same source and through the same obedience, experience and environment. It comes from a relationship as well as a discipline. And, we should never forget that the one whose love makes faith possible is also patient "The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you..." 2 Peter 3:9 NRSV

James says "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." KJV In Genesis 15, to which James alludes Abraham says "Sovereign Lord, how can I know....?" and the answer was "Bring me a heifer.....etc." Abraham did not start with faith, he started with obedience. The fact that Jesus did not rebuke Thomas for wanting proof, and the fact

that Jesus had earlier shown the other disciples the proof Thomas demanded, should nuance our interpretation of "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." NIV. Our faith is a product of our obedience. Of course it comes from God, where else would reliable faith come from? But it results from our turning from ourselves toward God, and it grows and flourishes in obedience. Our obedience is evidence that we are seekers.

## 5. Love trumps Power

(earlier version published at Dr. Scot McKnight's Jesus Creed blog August 11, 2012)

In the beginning of God's creating the skies and the earth – when the earth had been shapeless and formless, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and God's spirit was hovering on the face of the water – God said, "Let there be light." And there was light. (R.E. Friedman, Commentary on the Torah)

Yet, in Matthew's gospel we read (NIV):

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

(the tempter then said) “If you are the Son of God .... throw yourself down. For it is written: ...”

(Then, showing him everything than might be controlled by power, he said) “All this I will give you.....if you will bow down and worship me.”

What is going on here? We believe that the same Holy Spirit is involved in both accounts – Jesus went into the desert “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4) and “God’s spirit was hovering”. In one account it appears that God is acting by using his indescribable power. In firmly rejecting the three temptations, Jesus is apparently turning his back on the use of power. Yet, the same Spirit presides in both situations. The very thing that the Spirit of God created seems to be offered to Jesus to control, yet he declines saying “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.”

On another occasion Jesus says: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord:”... (KJV) before going on to say that the two greatest commandments are to love God and love other people. There is a very large clue here. Yes God is powerful enough to create the universe, and Jesus could have used this power to rule the universe – but what about the greatest commandments? How can we get by this apparent contradiction? Was the tempter correct? Did Jesus miss his big chance?

We are dealing here, just as Jesus was, with the choice of doing things God’s way or the deceiver’s way. God’s way is love. Or as John puts it in

1 John “God is love”. In case we think this essential attribute of God lets us off the hook in any way, we should read from the beginning of the sentence – “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (NIV)

So, what is the relationship between power and love? Why does God appear to use power at creation and eschew power later on – even going to the point of telling us we can only know him through love? Are we missing something? Is a popular way of interpreting this correct? What was God doing when he said “Let there be light”? Was he exercising unfathomable power or unfathomable love? Is power even anything like love? If it is not, how does that change our thinking about God, his attributes, his sovereignty? Does God’s love derive from his power, or does his power derive from his love?

To show that this is much more than a chicken and egg question, we should consider the nature of power (as we know it) and the nature of love (as we know it). The chicken and the egg are morally neutral. Power and love, certainly in our hands, are not. The following comparison may help answer the questions listed above. You can decide for yourself which way to go.

Power and love are often like water and oil, like darkness and light. “When God began to create heaven and earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water – God said ‘Let there be light’; and there was

light.” (Tanakh, JPS 1985). Power looks to violence, love looks to healing and restoration:

power destroys - love creates

power enslaves - love gives freedom

power brings darkness - love brings light

power engenders fear - love engenders hope

power coerces - love persuades

power controls - love co-operates

power closes - love opens

power hoards - love shares

power spreads falsehood - love reveals truth

power brings sadness - love brings joy

power is ultimately ineffective - love is ultimately effective

power is Satan’s way - love is God’s way

power is well understood - love is poorly understood

power is in a hurry - love is patient

power is prideful - love is humble

power is heavy - love is light

power is discordant - love is harmonious



power screeches - love whispers

power kills - love resurrects.

And even better from 1 Cor 13 in the contemporary language of “The Message”:

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always “me first”,

Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the following of truth,

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,  
But keeps going to the end.  
Love never dies.

And yet, one might still counter, but what about the end? Will not every knee bow to Christ? What about this verse? “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” Romans 14:11, or as the Isaiah 45 passage puts it “every tongue shall swear allegiance.” (Both quotes from ESV). Just as in thinking about God’s ability to create we can think about his ability to ‘get’ all to bow down – all that is required is the love of God. Love, even in our hands, can do wondrous things. Just try to imagine how effective such love can be through the one who is love itself! Yes, there will be a Judgement Day, and the first just accusation we all will face will be “But you did not love enough.”

## 6. The Creator-servant’s Universe: The Biblical Story of God and Us in Brief

(earlier version published at Roger E. Olson blog August 5, 2012, with a very lively discussion)

*Homo sapiens* (Naturalis)

*Homo sapiens*, the ones who know, the conscious ones, the self-conscious ones. We sense that we are on a journey, that we have a story and are in a

story, that we are part of that story. We know in our conscious selves that we have come from somewhere and are going somewhere. We resist the thought that our conscious self will one day end. We refuse to really believe this. Self consciousness, self awareness act like powerful lenses that focus us on . . . . well, ourselves. We are not only self conscious, we are naturally, unavoidably, self-centered. This is perfectly natural, even essential in a material setting.

We, the conscious ones, are aware of life. An amazing thing, life. Think about it. Consider the energy required to make life possible – start with the energy of the sun. Those energized packets (photons) arriving in waves from the sun, specifically those in a narrow energy band called visible light, make life possible. Photosynthesis organizes carbon, present in the air as carbon dioxide, into carbon-based life. All life, as we know it, is carbon based. Consider the word ‘organize’. The only way to organize anything is to put in energy, continuously. It is fundamentally a battle against entropy (disorder), relentless entropy. To win against entropy requires a continuous flow of energy and efficient management of that energy. As far as we know, this battle has been going on from the time something was first organized – from the first moment that chaos was challenged, and it will continue as long as entropy makes disorder a possibility.

Our consciousness also makes us aware of the other - others like us, others not like us, others not at all like us. Beings. Living things, with an existence, beneficiaries of those sunny photons and photosynthesis and

efficient energy management, but apparently not self-conscious. At least not in a way that allows the kind of communication we would like to have. But part of the family of living things nevertheless. It's really quite amazing when you stop to think about it.

Our awareness of a journey, of a story there somewhere, also moves our minds beyond life, to before life, to afterlife. A bit of a scary thought that last one. But just try not thinking about it for very long, I dare you. While we are naturally self-centred, we have a strong sense that ..... well, I won't presume to say what your strong sense is, but I am prepared to bet that you have one.

So, here we sit, conscious, amazed, self-centred, unsatisfied. Maybe if we just get busy we can ignore that last bit. After all, there is so much to do, so much to learn. It's even a full-time job just keeping entropy at bay in our own little corner. What keeps us very busy should satisfy us, right? And then there is this self-centredness, kind of cozy really, maybe it's even all about me. That would be satisfying, wouldn't it? If only I could get everyone, everything, else to agree. Damn!

Meanwhile, the universe continues to spin, to evolve. Much stays the same but, if we pay attention, much is changing. We can't conclude or pretend, like our recent ancestors did, that things are essentially wrapped up. The story is moving. We are conscious of this movement, we are conscious of the passage of time, we are conscious of a direction in the movement, we want to know what the movement is about, what is behind it, what is its

purpose, where are we going? Enter religious thoughts, theories, speculations, disagreements, battles.....

Religious awareness first comes from our self-centredness and may never move beyond ourselves, may remain entirely on the human plane, and may be thought of in material or spiritual terms, or both. This kind of religious thought and activity is essentially like all other complex thinking and activity, it's entirely self-centred. It's probably even adaptive, in the Darwinian sense. Such is the state of *Homo sapiens* before some revelation from God. Some revelation from the One who makes all this highly organized universe possible, a reality, brings it into existence and sustains it. To continue with the story, some revelation from God is absolutely essential.

## The Revelation - The Creator/Servant's Universe

This universe came into existence in the face of a spiritual rebellion against God's will. Our creator is waging a cosmic battle against rebellion, chaos, disorder and confusion – a physicist would say a battle against entropy. Maximum entropy equals maximum disorder. There is a spiritual battle, a rebellion against God that comes from a great deceiver who wants only chaos and darkness (Rev 12:7-9). In the first verses of the Bible we see God's response to chaos, darkness and emptiness – he simply and lovingly says “Let there be light.” This is the first bit of evidence that our Creator, through divine love, will win because he is the one God, YHWH, and in response to his first command we are told “there was light.” This

work will be completed as our Creator's perfect masterpiece when rebellion is no more and the Son of God, the resurrected Man-God, reigns supreme in perfect love.

Our Creator is neither a God of the gaps nor a God of the zaps nor the grand tweeker. The vast majority of the gaps left by current scientific work will be filled in, so these are ultimately embarrassing places to shelter our understanding of God's mighty acts. As for imagining a God who 'zaps' things into existence (or out of existence) this only reveals our sad desire for magic. At least, we should expect our Creator to behave in a more interesting manner. More recent proposals that God deems evolution a reasonable way to get to our present world, but reserves the right to tweak things along the way, don't really capture the big picture of an immensely great God either.

According to the growing mountain of scientific evidence, God does indeed work in far more interesting ways. The observable universe studied by physicists and cosmologists is unfolding, and has been unfolding for 13.7 billion years. The living world that biologists explore is constantly changing, and it has been changing for more than 3.5 billion years, with no end in sight. Furthermore, all living things are related; none have been found that don't belong to the same big family. Now that is the work of a very interesting Creator. No zaps, no gaps, except those due to our lack of knowledge, and tweaks unnecessary.

The evolving cosmos and the evolving bios to which we belong are clearly works in progress; not independently either, but part of a huge, long-term, unfolding masterpiece. And amazingly, all of the participants are part of the process. All are unfolding in relation to everything else in an unimaginable, magnificent symphony. If, on our own, we tried to imagine how a Creator might operate, we would never come up with this – it's way beyond us. We would probably imagine something more like a grand zapper who controls everything. It's a good thing we weren't asked for advice on the method to use! We were just given the opportunity to participate and ended up with the blessed ability to appreciate the results, the ongoing results.

It turns out that our Creator doesn't stop creating. It's also obvious that he is not in a hurry. At 13.7 billion years and counting, we probably have a while to go. Diversity and change also seem to be high on the Creator's list of good things. It seems, as well, that our Creator is more than a little interested in us. We can't reach him, but he reaches us in self-revelation. His works in the natural world certainly get our attention, but he actually comes to us, first through Israel, the chosen nation, then in person, the new Adam. The creator actually becomes a creature.

We have noticed, all of us, that we have serious problems with what Scriptures call the 'knowledge of good and evil'. Having this knowledge, like Israel having the law, makes us acutely aware that knowing the difference between good and evil is of little help in actually doing good. We are born failures at doing good, far too often. We expect points for

trying, but basically we lack something fundamental when it comes to being good the way we know we should – in ways that will please a holy God.

Enter the Creator become Creature. Since he is making everything in perfect love, he knows a thing or two about always doing the right thing. The Creator's physical presence among us is a unique, once-in-a-creation event – what scientists refer to as a singularity. In fact, from a Christian perspective, the singularity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, the God-man, is the very heart of creation as well as the essential beginning of the gospel. He is the apex of creation while also being the one through whom creation flows. This Creator we worship is truly interesting beyond our imagining!

Then, because of our inborn inability to deal with the temptation to not do the right thing, and the resulting dysfunction and horror this brings to our world, our Creator as Servant voluntarily suffers with us. In fact, suffers maximally and ultimately, participating even in death for us. But our Creator/Servant did nothing that should lead to his death, he accepted it on our behalf – a willing sacrifice. Then, our Creator/Servant, in a glorious continuance of his very interesting creative work, rose from the dead in a glorified body – a victorious King. Scriptures call him the 'first-born' from among the dead because he is indeed a new creation – the Creator/Servant/Perfect Sacrifice/King, our Lord.



This resurrected Lord now takes up residence with the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and looses the Spirit, the very Spirit of Creation, upon the earth for our edification, guidance and empowerment. As we have been through all of our time, we are called to continue with our own role in creation, now under the guidance of this Spirit of Creation. The Creator is not done yet. He keeps making moves that are more and more interesting. Now we are called to get on with the good over evil thing, but with the Spirit of Creation within us, because, in Christ, we too are new creations. Not completed yet, but, as with all of creation, works in progress.

This great, ongoing and ever more interesting creation story needs to be told. The Spirit of Creation within us moves us to tell the story, with boldness. The treasure we have within is a treasure to tell people about. It's all connected. It has been going on for 13.7 billion years. We are a part of it simply by being born, and as Christian believers we are a part of it with a wonderful new rebirth and a new role. We have been given Good News to tell to the whole world. The Creator, Emmanuel, has come to us. The Creator, Jesus the Savior, has redeemed humanity. By repenting from our self-centredness and acknowledging the work and centrality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we can live and grow in him as he lives and grows in us. Ultimately, we shall behold him and we shall be like him. We will then know him as he is. His love will have won!

## 7. Creation Under Limiting Conditions

(earlier version published at Jeff K. Clarke's blog August 17, 2012)

## Material and spiritual reality

We are material and spiritual beings inhabiting a material reality with which we mostly interact. We have only weak abilities to interact with spiritual reality where live the Trinity and other beings including evil agents. The Holy Spirit is our only sure connection with that other reality and we are called to do battle in that reality by agreeing with Him and thereby availing ourselves of his power. According to Scripture, God has chosen to work with us in this battle. We need to experience his power while still inhabiting material reality – we are ‘in training’ as it were. God wants us to use his love to help overcome the disorder caused by evil. In this way we can co-operate with God as he creates his Kingdom.

Death is a consequence of material limitations probably caused by rebellion in heaven. This material reality that we inhabit has some real limitations. The big one is that there is only a certain amount of it – only a limited, though vast, amount of matter. Imagine that to end up with one planet on which could evolve one sentient, material species who could be given real free will, required an investment of the vast majority of this matter as non-living stuff. The remainder was available for living things and they subsequently evolved, leading to human beings. Now, with matter being severely limited, and given that all living things share the same atoms with all other living and non-living things, biological life must be recycled – death must occur. Put another way, the limitations on matter mean that living things cannot go on reproducing and consuming forever.

Living things must individually die or stop reproducing and consuming. It's an unyielding equation.

In a world of limited resources death is the necessary corollary of birth. Only death can make way for more birth in a limited resource reality. So, the conflict in spiritual reality over what material reality should be like (e.g. should it be limited?) may go back to the original creation of matter. Imagine that evil, rejecting love, retained the power to limit the amount of matter available. In one stroke, birth became hostage to death. God, being all-together loving, just and faithful, could not fail to stick to his decision to give Satan his allotted share of freewill.

Expressing the same ideas in biological terms, consider photosynthesis. Five thousand (5000) times more organic material (molecules containing carbon) comes from photosynthesis than from all geological sources combined (e.g. volcanos, hot-springs, etc.). Photosynthesis uses the energy of photons from the sun to split water thus providing chemical energy through electron transfer chains and hydrogen ion gradients. This energy is used to fix carbon, obtained from carbon dioxide, thus making sugars, the primary fuel of living things. All living things that burn oxygen gain at least some of their energy by oxidizing these sugars and emitting carbon dioxide. This is especially true of animals since they rely entirely on plants, directly (herbivores) or indirectly (carnivores) for their sugars (energy). Removing all the interesting biochemistry in between, carbon dioxide from the air (present at about five percent) is returned to the air by respiring organisms as long as they are alive. The carbon is recycled.

From another perspective, plant material is produced, consumed, produced, consumed, all powered by photons from the sun and completely dependent on abundant water. No new carbon is added – it is all recycled. Recycling on this scale among living things requires a cycle of life and death as well – unless there is no reproduction. Thus birth requires death and so on.

Should we want to have birth without death, given the present arrangement of living things, and their limited resources, the amount of carbon would have to increase markedly and living things would soon cover the earth. Plants would have less and less space to grow, water would soon become limiting and a total collapse of the system would ensue. Recycling, with its cousin death, is the way of life on this planet.

Why arrange things in this way? Our God is a God of abundance, he hates poverty and want. If we agree with Athenagoras (“A Plea for Christians”, from Boyd pg. 294) and others, Satan was given authority over matter before life appeared on earth, then he rebelled. In addition to being a miser with the matter he supervised, Satan loves disorder, and probably didn’t want life of any kind. He wants matter in as disorganized a state as possible.

God then began to rescue the matter he had created, operating within the limits set by the free will of his rebellious prince of this earth. He first said

“Yes!” to order and life – in biblical words “Let there be light!” God set out to redeem matter (creation) and to show that his love (light) was sufficient to bring beautiful order in the face of Satan’s worst efforts. This was accomplished in spite of the fact that death and violence had to be allowed – for a time – and in spite of limited resources. In essence, the evil limitation placed on matter/energy was overcome by a recycling solution to yield some of the abundance and beauty that God wanted to display. Disorder was overcome by God’s continuous loving attention to his world. Death was finally defeated at the Resurrection by recreating the body of Jesus using matter the way God originally intended. The same victory will be displayed at the restoration of all matter/energy. Even now, humans can participate in a spiritual restoration.

The disorder and hatefulness of Satan extended beyond the material into the spiritual. God has declared that evil’s time is up on that front, if we choose to co-operate with the Holy Spirit as Jesus did in his physical life. Satan’s authority over the material world is still allowed and we humans live in a situation in which they can exercise our free will and choose to become children of God through Christ – or not.

The defeat of evil and death

God’s solution to the dilemma posed by Satan’s rebellion was to work with and through creation and, ultimately, the first sentient beings that came along. First, we are given free will because God sees this as the only loving thing to do – and it is consistent with the way he relates to created

spiritual beings. He then reveals himself to us, standing by us as we work out why it's really important to yield to his way of doing things. Finally, God steps in to show, in Christ, that human beings really can follow God in complete faith. This ultimately brings evil's claim on us to an end, in both material and spiritual reality. This is the victory of God's love in Christ. Whether fallen spiritual beings are also offered an opportunity to repent is an interesting question – though they may have already let their opportunity lapse.

Where we find ourselves now

We are now in the already-not yet time, still material and under all the limitations of that reality, but by accepting Christ's forgiveness we are able to grow spiritually as we learn to yield to the gentle urgings of the Holy Spirit. When God will say 'enough' is his concern. But the stage is set, the necessary suffering and sacrifice has already been completed. His love has won, in Christ, but our battle with evil is still in progress in order to build the Kingdom and to offer more people an opportunity to repent. Since, in our disobedience, we appear to be rapidly changing the planet, environmentally, economically and politically, into a place that is increasingly unfriendly to life, it may be that Christ will need to come to our rescue just before we make some irreversible errors. Until that time, there is still only so much matter to go around which, quite practically, leads to recycling. This includes the birth-death cycle for all living things. But love is made perfect in weakness.

## 8. Toward a Creation Theology of Love

(earlier version published at Jeff K. Clarke's blog August 13, 2012)

We can rationally accept the abundant evidence for common descent of life on earth, including humans. An entire lifetime can be spent working with, fine tuning and adding to the evidence for the essentially chemical relationship of all living things, from viruses to humans. To be sure, 'chemical' means relatively big to really big molecules; but it also means the small molecules and the elements. When we include these, we see how living things are truly one with the 'dust of the earth'. It is humbling to realize that all of the atoms making up our molecules right now were, not long ago, part of some other entity, living or non-living. This is especially true of carbon, the basis of our bodily being. In God's economy, the atoms represented in the beautifully symmetric periodic table are all that is necessary for the material universe, non-living and living, to exist. This reality is breathtaking and most of the evidence for it has been developed in the last 200 years.

Genesis 1:2-3 begins with these words, "The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light", "and there was light." It is interesting to read so early in God's revelation of himself to us clear references to both physical energy (light) and the power of God (this light of creation has other interpretations as well). The material world is held together (sub-atomically, atomically, molecularly, and on up the levels of organization) by the energy common to the physical universe. God reveals in this passage that his is the authority that makes possible light and

physical energy in all its forms. The Spirit of God is part of a separate reality that is, nevertheless, very close to and very effective upon our better understood physical/material reality. This is even more amazing if we consider love to be God's essence. With this view, the cosmos is a fundamental, overwhelming expression of God's love.

The powerful love of God made possible the laws of physics and chemistry. What came into being from this is immense, complex, ever changing, and diverse. It may be, given the limitations imposed by natural laws, that an entire universe was required in order to arrive at one material being (species) upon whom God could confer free will and have hope for real fellowship. This free will is necessary if a sentient being is to be able to accept God's authority freely. Thus, we were created 'in the image of God' – free will, body, mind, spirit and all.

Made in the 'image of God' means many things, and this includes a God-given authority to make our own decisions (God can say no, we can too). But we still have to confront the question of power. Though made in his image we clearly do not have power like the power of God. Given the authority to make up our own minds, and the reality of evil, which existed before creation, our human power now comes into play. The power we have is wholly insufficient for the challenge of dealing with evil – it wasn't sufficient in the 'garden' and it is not sufficient for any one of us at any time in history.



A main reason this is so is our misunderstanding and misapplication of power. We see power as more potent than love, we clearly worship it and have faith in it – this is also the view that Satan subscribes to. In fact, we get the idea from him. Power is used to combat power (or violence is used to combat violence) and the result is always destruction – the greater the violence, the greater the destruction. This sinful concept of power does not come from God – what flows from God, all the time, is love. We could say God uses love to redeem and sanctify power, and His love is powerful enough to utterly defeat raw, coercive power.

Power and love are like water and oil, darkness and light. “When God began to create heaven and earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water – God said ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Tanakh, JPS 1985). Power looks to control, love looks to free and restore. We can see this by juxtaposing some ideas that speak of power and love respectively.

Power destroys – love creates; power enslaves – love gives freedom; power brings darkness – love brings light; power engenders fear -love engenders hope; power coerces – love persuades; power controls – love co-operates; power closes – love opens; power hoards – love shares; power spreads falsehood – love reveals truth; power brings sadness – love brings joy; power is ultimately ineffective – love is ultimately effective; power is Satan’s way – love is God’s way; power is well understood – love is poorly understood; power is in a hurry – love is patient; power is

prideful – love is humble; power is heavy – love is light; power is discordant – love is harmonious; power screeches – love whispers; power kills – love resurrects.

Jesus, as a man, relied entirely on God's love (through the Holy Spirit) for the necessary power to complete his work on earth. Once humanity reached the stage where we could be given authority over our decisions, we became easy prey for evil and made, and continue to make, decisions that seriously separate us from God. We don't have the love to resist. Only God has this kind of love.

The loving power that we lack is the Holy Spirit (God's spiritual agent in our material reality, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus). He appears all over the Bible, beginning in Genesis 1:2-3. He is the link between the two realities of material and spiritual. He is the mighty part of the Triune God, a might achieved through love. God gives us authority to make our own decisions, but to fully appropriate the Holy Spirit we must recognize God's overall authority. We must repent from our evil idea of selfish power and accept the power of love. Without this loving power of God, we cannot resist evil which is real and active in this world.

In our weak state we always sin and need forgiveness; and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit – the same loving power that raised Jesus from the dead. Our repentance is therefore absolutely necessary – we must turn from our own way to God's way, accepting Christ's sacrifice. Then, by the power of the Holy Spirit we are redeemed, made righteous in

Christ. The Spirit takes up residence within our spirit so that we become part of God's new temple. Evil is still present in this new Kingdom of already-but-not-yet, but now, if we willingly appropriate it, the powerful love of God dwells in us to "work every good work." Life wins!

## 9. A Conversation with Father

Opening Scene: Christian or Christina is seated in a comfortable chair reading the Bible which is on his/her lap. She mouths softly words from Genesis. It's late, quiet and she is beginning to nod off. From the shadows emerges the lovely figure of the Father (or an indistinct shadow behind a curtain, depending on the audience). The conversation begins with the kind voice of the Father.

The Father: "You know my child, through my Spirit I made possible everything that you can see and know, now or in the future. Furthermore, all that you know and don't yet know only exists because of the sustaining power of my Spirit. I did and continue to do all this because of love."

Christian: "Yes, I know and I can't thank you enough. It is truly wonderful and the more our science uncovers about the reality you have made possible, the more I understand how great you are. But tell me, exactly how did I come to be?"

The Father: "Well, I knitted you together in your mother's womb."

Christian: "Yes, I realize that, but you must know what I'm getting at! Am I like the other creatures that seem so much like me, or am I completely different from them?"

The Father: "Both."

Christian: "Well, yes, I think. But did my ancestors get here the same way theirs did? Did I ..... evolve?"

The Father: "Well, as I said, I made everything possible, including the possibility of great changes in the organization of matter. Remember, when I decided to do this, everything was chaotic, formless, void of any purpose, not going anywhere. In love I made order, light, matter, energy, purposefulness possible: try saying that quickly three times." :-)

Christian: "Yes, but exactly how. Where, when, in what manner, upon what and whom did you act, set your decree?"

The Father: "Well, on everything and everyone, my child."

Christian: (A little agitated) "Yes, I realize that, but can't you be more specific?" Isn't there supposed to be something about a talking snake and forbidden fruit in here somewhere?"

The Father: "Well, in the same sense as the knitting needles that made you."

Christian: "Oh. But aren't we now talking about sin? How can we have sin without talking snakes and forbidden fruit?" (Aside, to himself) "Maybe I should rephrase that."

The Father: "I heard that my child. Please do remember the knitting needles. But, you do raise a crucial point. The order that I make possible through my Spirit has not turned out exactly as I would like. Just like the people of Israel did not turn out to be as faithful as I wanted them to be. You are right, human beings do have a mind of their own. I made that possible too - in fact I knew this freedom would happen, I wanted it to happen, it is part of my plan, an expression of my love."

Christian: "I'm not sure I understand. You mean you didn't control how we turned out? You let us develop any old which way until now?"

The Father: "In a sense. Of course I knew that there must be light instead of darkness, order instead of chaos, hope instead of fear, freedom instead

of bondage. But, since I chose to make possible all the things that exist, you can be assured that these good things would be part of my creation. This is an expression of my will. That a species of beings would arrive on the scene with whom I could have a relationship, who would be in my own image, has been known to me from the beginning.

Christian: (Now considerably agitated) "You mean to say that you didn't know human beings would be created!"

The Father: "Emerge would be a better word my child. You see, as I said at the beginning, through my Spirit I am making everything possible. I knew that this would all work out such that a being with whom I could have a direct relationship would emerge. Of that there was no doubt.

Furthermore, all the steps along the way were freely taken, because my love demands freedom. And, the beings in my image, those with whom I can relate, includes you. Doesn't that thrill you?"

Christian: "Yes, of course. But, I sort of expected that God would do it more along the lines that I would if I were God (To himself: I really should rephrase that!). I suppose you 'heard' that too, sorry. What I really mean is, I wanted to understand in more detail how you did all this. Well frankly, I wanted to see more evidence of your power, your ability to push things around, to have it your way, to direct, to control, to ..... ordain."

The Father: "But, my child, my power is shown through love, not coercion. Freedom is an essential part of all this too. You are free. Does not that make you happy?"

Christian: "Very much, but there are all these other people who are doing bad things, sinning. Well, to be fair, I do a little sinning myself from time to time. Is that part of your plan too?"

The Father: "The sin, no. The possibility of sin, or rebellion, yes. I am making everything possible that you see and experience, remember. You and your friends have choices. In a general way, I have revealed myself to them just like I have to you. It's up to people whether to acknowledge me or not."

Christian: (Getting agitated again) "But I'm a Christian. I don't believe in the possibility of your revelation outside of Christ. And, furthermore, how can they (we) know of sin without talking snakes, forbidden fruit and that ..... woman?"

The Father: "Now, now, let's take this a step at a time. I already explained the imagery my chosen writers used in Genesis. They spoke in the context of their time, and did a very good job of conveying the point I was making in a way that has been useful right through the ages. Not an easy thing to do, by the way. Now, as for sin being unrecognizable without a talking snake and all the rest, to that I must say hogwash. Look around you, study

history, read the Scriptures. Isn't it clear that all fall short of my glory? They have used their freedom to turn away from me, just as the story of Adam and Eve illustrates."

Christian: (Scrambling a bit) "But what about the talking snake?"

The Father: "That refers to the worst bit of rebellion in one of my free creatures I have ever seen. If I was once sorry to have created humans or to have brought stubborn Israel out of Egypt, can you imagine what I think about one of my chief angels gone bad? But, a deal's a deal. This spiritual rebellion is not forever. Do you know that fellow didn't even want me to make order out of chaos? He is so far gone that he prefers total darkness, complete entropy! My decision to make something out of chaos and darkness, to make possible everything in this universe was partly in response to this fellow's sad rebellion. It is here, in opposing such rebellion that you can see my power.

Christian: (Beginning to calm down) "Well, I sort of see what you mean. And, by extension, I guess what you did through Christ, the victory he won on the Cross, and the resurrection evidence of his victory are part of this display of power too?"

The Father : "Yes, of course. In fact, as Jesus said, 'It is Finished'. There is now in the universe a human being who chose to do it my way. Who followed my Spirit perfectly. Who sent our Spirit so that anyone who



wants to can claim the free gift of sins forgiven and begin living under the guidance of the Spirit. But, as from the beginning, the choice is yours. All provision has been made, Jesus is prepared and able to take centre stage in your being. But you have to invite him to do so by relinquishing centre stage.

Christian: (Now on familiar ground again) "OK, now we are getting somewhere. But I still wonder about these heathen scientists who keep coming out with conclusions that question what you say in Scripture. Can't you do something about that? I really annoys me and confuses a lot of people."

The Father: "I am doing something about that. Their ability to understand more and more of my universe is a gift from me - I am making all of that possible too. I want humans to understand as much as they can about my universe. They're not doing too bad a job either, if I do say so myself."

Christian: (Annoyed again) "But, but, you mean to say that you are helping a bunch of.....atheists?!"

The Father: "Well, I have made it possible for them to discover what they discover. This was part of the plan, remember. A being would emerge who was enough in my image that they could understand something of what I have made possible. This makes me very happy."

Christian: (Not mollified) "But, they don't even believe that you exist!"

The Father: "It's a free universe. I explained how I am not into coercion. I am also not into saying who will have the smarts to figure out something of my universe. I am delighted to see that many are so intelligent that great progress along these lines has been made. Did you hear the one about the bacteria that took up residence in a bigger cell and then the two cells, over time of course, became so interdependent that the little one and its offspring became the way plant cells trap the energy of the sun? And that this harnessing of the sun's energy is the basis for practically all of life on earth? Including you, by the way. Now that is putting freedom to good use, don't you think?"

Christian: (Beginning to realize that he may have some rethinking to do) "But they are atheists, aren't they?"

The Father: "Unfortunately, many of them are. Fortunately, a good number are not. But your question is missing the point. Part of what I am making possible, sustaining, is the ability of human beings to understand something of the universe I am making possible. Do you not see that ability to figure things out is not contingent on belief in my existence? In fact, great ability to figure things out sometimes seems to blind people to my existence. But this is no different from any other kind of rebellion. It has all been defeated by the work of Christ. All will eventually bow down

to him, and not because he uses his power to make them bow down. Rather he will use his love to convince them. Of course, there is no need to wait until Christ returns to be convinced by his love.”

Christian: (Finally pensive) "Well, I have a lot to think about here. I hope we can talk again sometime. If I understand you correctly, among other things, I have to think harder about the questions I am asking the Bible to answer. I also have to be more patient when I don't understand something and, most of all, I have to give up the idea of being certain about everything. I now know I can't expect to understand your ways, but must be satisfied that you have revealed your purpose. In fact, this is already making me feel freer, somehow.

Production note: Finale: Imagine Christian or Christina awaking from a dream, Bible still in hand. She rises, looking pensive but with a faint smile, then slowly walks off, stage left. As she goes, she is repeating: "Emerging not zapped, but still a child of the King."

## 10. Truth is a person

For a Christian, truth should be a person not a proposition. When we underestimate the Incarnation, turn Christ into a proposition and downplay the Holy Spirit, we tend to overemphasize and overestimate propositions, look for proofs, depend too much on confessional statements, use Scripture as a mine for proof texts and generally act religiously.

Christianity is more of a journey than a religion. It acknowledges way, truth and life as a person, the Son of God - God himself. It also acknowledges a human lostness that can only be overcome by life in the Spirit. It's not a matter of finding the truth and hanging on against all opposition. Rather it's a matter of releasing ourselves to be in truth, in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The propositions we often hold so dear are only as good as our minds, only as permanent as the relentless march of knowledge. Scripture is not a written in stone collection of words but a story of people who were being taught by God to be in him not about him. We are to enter into Scripture with the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who instructed all those who had something to do with its development in the first place. Spirit was before the written word; the living word is eternal. It's the Spirit of the Word that is our goal not the letter. And the Word, like truth and life and way is a person. This is also the way to freedom.

## 11. Embracing Creation – A Question of Faith

(earlier version published at Roger E. Olson blog February 19, 2014)

There are many kinds of faith: faith in human ability; faith in our beliefs; faith in our faith (fideism); faith in our interpretation of Scripture; faith that our faith and reason combined will uncover purely human reasons to believe – and this by no means exhausts the possibilities.

Christianity has a different take on faith. It sees faith as a dynamic gift from God that comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As such, none of the above, or others that could be listed, is true Christian faith. Some may think that fideism comes close but it does not. The important insight of “Faith not works” does not negate the fact that faith works; it is dynamic. A tested faith, a faith that trusts the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, encourage etc. provides its own assurance, through continual use and the results it yields. This approach to faith contrasts sharply with the suggestion that human reason can somehow convince one to have faith. Contrary to expectations, such presuppositional or propositional approaches to faith have greater and greater difficulty as science continues its advance.

For example, many Christian denials of the materialist interpretation of the findings of the life sciences are founded on the idea that somewhere in creation there must be something materially tangible (the human eye, the first stages of the origins of life, some unexpected mutation) that science cannot ever explain. If we could just prove that such a thing exists, we could prove the existence of God. We would have captured faith and brought it under human management. For this reason, these apologetic approaches get very uneasy with the seemingly endless advance of scientific knowledge.

The kinds of faith listed in the first paragraph are often combined in various ways. Practitioners of some of these approaches are upset when science explains something that was thought inexplicable, as if God has been somehow lessened. The thinking behind this seems identical to that of the atheist believer in the ultimate triumph of science – this new fact will (finally) explain away the Creator. Yet, seen through the eyes of a

living, Spirit-gifted faith, all of the facts of the life sciences are simply further expressions of what God is doing or making possible. They bring us no closer to understanding exactly “how” God accomplishes all of this or, how he uses the freedom inherent in creation to do so. That is a question of exactly how Spirit interacts with and works with matter – the causal joint. We would love to know, but we don’t. Faith is required, and trusting faith can observe the results. Approaches based on other formulations of faith seem too quick to want concrete explanations where none are on offer. If our faith is in at least the ultimate possibility of such explanations in the material domain, it will be continually challenged by the advance of science. We will restrict ourselves by a continual search for certainty, when Christian life in the Spirit is based more on confidence and trust in the finished and ongoing work of Christ.

Related to this, perhaps just saying it differently, it sometimes seems that, for many, the gift of faith that comes solely from the Holy Spirit is too vague, too spiritual, too subjective – surely we can do better. A fierce attachment to our particular interpretation of Scripture must be an improvement we can offer. An unyielding defence of a particular theological system is surely another. And, it must be true that human expressions of faith combined with human reason will indeed uncover reasons enough for true faith that, for all intents and purposes, constitute proof.

Our role as members of the kingdom of God and Spirit-led followers of Christ is not to put the Holy Spirit out of a job. Apologetics, however well intentioned, will never come close to accomplishing the work of the Spirit. When our faith has its sole source in the Holy Spirit, the relentless advances of biology are a cause for celebration, not fear and defensive

resistance. God's fingerprints on his great works will not be erased, they are not even there in a way that science can see, remove or explain away – or that apologists can discover.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the following people who helped with this book in various ways, some of whom I have yet to meet in person but whose grace shines through even in their e-mails.

Dr. Greg Boyd for his encouragement and for his wonderful insights into the reality of spiritual warfare. His thesis that we will never have a defensible theodicy until we recognize the overwhelming biblical witness that we indeed are in a spiritual battleground and therefore must act and think accordingly was essential to this study.

Jeff Clarke for publishing “Toward a Creation Theology of Love” and “Creation Under Limiting Conditions” on his blog in August 2012.

Dr. Denis Lamoureux, whom I have known since he was a Ph.D. student at the University of Alberta, for his encouragement and for his critical reading of much of this material.

Dr. Scot McKnight and his science writer RJS for publishing “Love trumps Power” under the title “Love vs. Power” on the Jesus Creed blog in



August 2012, and the diverse and tough group of regular commentators on that blog who on numerous occasions provided inspiration and much appreciated challenges to my ideas. And to RJS, science editor at Jesus Creed for publishing "Emerging Pianos"

Dr. Roger Olson for numerous encouragements and for publishing "The Creator-Servant's Universe" on his blog. And to the numerous people there who provided a lively discussion of its contents. Dr. Olson also published "Embracing creation - A Question of Faith"

Dr. Thomas Jay Oord who had encouraging words about my first efforts in this area and for continuous encouragement since then. His little book "The Nature of Love: A Theology" was as instrumental as any book in inspiring the general structure of these essays and was a major voice in alerting this layperson to the outstanding advances that are being made in post-conservative theological circles (sensu Olson, "Reformed and Always Reforming").

Dr. Amos Yong, who only got to read the ms. in its later stages, and who introduced me to the excellent work going on in the Society for Pentecostal Studies. His ongoing encouragement is a great blessing. His own work, which I came to a little later than the others, already has confirmed and broadened my theological underpinning that is so essential to any serious thinking about creation and what it all means spiritually.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The annotations comprise my brief views of a collection of theological and scientific works important to developing an understanding of increasingly realizable good and fruitful relations between science and faith. The comments were written with university-level students in mind, but should serve a wide audience. Pastors who minister to the increasing number of Christian students studying the sciences will hopefully find them useful as well. Almost any of the books could be studied with great profit in young adult classes. The essays were often at least partly inspired by reading one or other of these books.

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Bell, Bob (2010) *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, Harper Collins, Harper One. Controversial and outstanding piece of poetry in prose that encourages us to think of

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Wright, N.T. (1992). *The New Testament and the People of God*, Fortress Press. This is the first of Wright's increasingly well-known trilogy. NTW is the New Testament scholar and Anglican Bishop who has done as much as anyone to encourage many of today's excellent young theologians to think

boldly and sometimes go where no one has gone before (or at least not for a very long time). For a list of his works see the more than 100 results you will get on Amazon's N.T. Wright page.

Yong, Amos (2011) *Reading Scripture and Nature: Pentecostal Hermeneutics and Their Implications for the Contemporary Evangelical Theology and Science Conversation* Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith 63 (1): 3-13. This is the only reference to the primary literature in this bibliography, and you will find it a bit more challenging to read than the cited books which generally are written for a wider audience. I included it as a good illustration of how some evangelical theologians are thinking along much the same lines as these essays take. I'll let Dr. Yong tempt you to look up and read his fine paper. ".....evangelicals should mine their 'this-is-that' view of the Bible as God's living Word so that the goal is not merely an intellectual understanding of what happened (which is illuminated by historiographical and scientific inquiry) but a practical and saving knowing of how we can inhabit the eschatological world of God in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Yong, Amos (2012) *Spirit of Love: A Trinitarian Theology of Grace* Baylor University Press. In the preface Yong says "The biblical witness unambiguously declares both that 'God is Spirit' (John 4:24) and 'God is Love' (1John 4:8,16)." He goes from there to build his case that the Holy Spirit and love (godly love - perfect love) are essentially one in the same. I read this book after these essays were in late draft stage, and was delighted to see a such firm theological foundation placed under what, after all, are

just the musings of a Christian biologist. If you are up for some well grounded, very helpful and inspiring Pentecostal theology, read this!

Yong, Amos (2012) *The Spirit of Creation*, Wm. B. Eerdmans. For more on the ever elusive 'causal joint' between the Spirit's action and our material world, see this relatively new volume by Amos Yong. This book is probably not yet widely known and is admittedly a challenging read covering a variety of closely related subjects. But, on the big theme of knowing/observing exactly how the Spirit affects material reality, it may well be the best currently available. I've put a short review of the book up on Amazon.

