

A CALL TO DEEP INTEGRITY  
4 Reasons Why *Nothing* Matters More Than What We Think About Evolution

Michael Dowd / 8-15-08 / <http://ThankGodforEvolution.com>

1. *A shared sacred story that honors both objective truth and subjective meaning*

For the first time in human history we have a creation story that not only addresses life's biggest questions—Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here? How are we to live?—but helps us answer those questions in ways that are both religiously inspiring *and* scientifically accurate. No longer are *subjective* meaning and *objective* truth isolated from one another in separate domains. Both are conveyed through the same story.

Let me explain why this is important: Today, religious peoples throughout the world are still inspired by creation stories that arose thousands of years ago, each specific to a people and its local ecologies. In one story, a snake and a forbidden fruit are featured; in another a turtle and a clump of mud play important roles, or a lotus blossom. These ancient stories are still important, but what unites us as a species today is the deeper, underlying story that could not have been discovered/revealed before the invention of telescopes and microscopes and the worldwide scientific enterprise by which objective truth is discerned from real and measurable data.

Looking inward, the scientific enterprise also helps us value far more than barebones science. Our evolved brains absolutely demand that scientific facts be interpreted in meaningful ways—ways that offer solace for life's disappointments and guidance for living and shaping a better future. Thus, we see that the language of *reason* and the language of *reverence* are as complementary as day and night. Day, or factual, language is measurable. It aims to be objectively true. Night, or interpretive, language is metaphorical. It inspires when it is subjectively meaningful. Both ways of speaking are necessary. A sacred evolutionary worldview helps us celebrate both realms: the day realm of objective truth and the night realm of subjective meaning. (TGFE, chapters 1-7, 16)

2. *REALizes religion, sanctifies science, and reveals the true magnitude of both*

Many religious and non-religious people alike assume that religion is mostly concerned with otherworldly claims, and that science is devoid of meaning. But when we look at cultural evolution and appreciate the necessity of both day language and night language, we see that science is revelatory—it reveals truth—and that many of religion's seemingly unnatural or miraculous stories actually have a measurably real, this-world referent.

For example, the biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve and the concept of Original Sin superbly reveal a deep truth that has only recently been understood in a factual way, thanks to evolutionary brain science and evolutionary psychology. Yes, we all have powerful instincts: instincts that served the survival and reproductive needs of our ancestors in early human and pre-human times, but that are now sometimes very much out of sync with the demands of civilized life.

The ancients sensed this truth and their story conveyed it in powerful, night-language ways: notably, a talking snake and an otherworldly God who punished not only the disobedient couple but all their descendents, and for all time. Today, there is no need to argue whether the supernatural claims in that story trump the data revealed by science today. Rather, the biblical story is a brilliant night-language way to communicate the day-language truths born of science: the suffering we experience as fallible individuals in a challenging world has very, very deep roots. Our ancient instincts are not matched for the conditions of today's world and today's societies.

Thus, one of the greatest gifts afforded by religiously nourishing interpretations of the science-based history of the universe is that it becomes obvious how unnatural-sounding ("supernatural") language can be interpreted in undeniably real, and utterly experiential, ways.

I predict that within the first half of this century, the vast majority of people and throughout the entire world will come to appreciate that *evolution is a gift to religion* and that *meaning-making is a gift to science*.

As the religions come to embrace the science-based history of the cosmos, each tradition's core insights will be accessed in larger, more realistic ways than ever before. Cultures in conflict will find common ground that today seems inconceivable.

The science and religion war ends when we *get* that science is revelatory and facts are God's native tongue. (TGFE, chapters 4-10, Appendix A, Appendix B)

### *3. Unmasks the powers of manipulation and clarifies our way forward*

When we understand our brain's creation story and its deep structure we can easily see how the media and advertising industry manipulate us by appealing to instincts related to sex, safety, sustenance, and status. An evolutionary worldview is essential for unmasking the powers of manipulation and for inspiring and empowering us to channel our instinctual energies in ways that serve our higher purpose and the common good.

Only by knowing how we *really* got here and the trajectory we're undeniably on can we possibly respond to global issues like climate change and terrorism without making things worse. Indeed, trying to solve any large-scale problem without an evolutionary worldview is like trying to understand disease without microscopes or the structure of the universe without telescopes. It's not merely difficult; it's impossible. To use religious language: only by understanding the major breakthroughs in evolution—how God actually created everything, how it measurably occurred—can we possibly know what God is up to today or what God's will is for humanity and for the body of life as a whole.

Without realistic answers to life's biggest questions, religious and non-religious people alike will think poorly and vote short-sightedly and self-destructively on issues as diverse as the economy, health care, global warming, terrorism, and so forth. (TGFE, chapters 9-10, 14-17)

#### 4. Key to alleviating suffering, living life fully, and loving the life you live

So much suffering in the world today can be traced to people and groups being out of integrity—that is, living day by day in ways that just don't square with Reality, with the way the world actually is. Individuals and families suffer, communities and organizations suffer, and nations and ecosystems suffer when we're out of integrity. But here's the catch: without understanding our place in the universe and the major breakthroughs in evolution, we won't *know* what integrity *is*, much less know how to live in it.

A deep-time worldview is essential for abiding in deepest integrity. More, integrity is where we find common ground. Whatever else religions are, they are a call to integrity. Whatever else ecology is, it is a call to integrity. And whatever else evolution is, it is a call to integrity.

Here are four things that we know about human nature: (1) we'll always need answers to life's biggest questions, (2) we'll always interpret our experience using metaphors, (3) we'll always be challenged by our evolved instincts, and (4) integrity will always be our way home.

From a personal standpoint, this last point—that integrity is our way home—is really great news. Compost happens. Life is not fair. Yet when we see all that has been revealed in recent centuries through the full range of sciences, we find unmistakably clear guidance for how to live a really great life and have thriving relationships, and how to leave a positive legacy, no matter what hand life deals us. The key is choosing integrity and incorporating deep integrity *practices* into one's life until they become habitual. (TGFE, chapters 11-15, 18)

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Rev. Michael Dowd is America's evolutionary evangelist. He is the author of *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World* (Viking/Plume, 2008), which has been endorsed by 5 Nobel laureates and dozens of other scientific and religious luminaries across the theological spectrum. You can download the Table of Contents, Author's Promises, Prologue, Introduction, and Chapter 1 for free here: <http://thankgodforevolution.com/pdfdownloadform>

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