

Questions for individual reflection or group discussion on
Michael Dowd's chapter ["A Story Big Enough to Hold Us All"](#)
in the 2009 book

The Whole World Kin: Darwin and the Spirit of Liberal Religion

1. Dowd asserts that the science-based story of how everything came to be is, "big enough to hold us all." For some religious liberals this may seem to go against our cherished principles of inclusivity and welcoming of spiritual diversity. What do you think?
2. On page 22, Dowd confronts the not-uncommon assumption that if you really understand what science tells us about the history of the universe and our place in it, then you'll be left with a meaningless picture of reality. Has that been your default assumption about the overall scientific perspective? And has Dowd's essay made a difference for you?
3. On page 15 Dowd introduces a distinction between, what he calls, *public revelation* and *private revelation*. He then devotes 4 or 5 pages to offering why this distinction is important. He offers, too, that the biographical stories of how Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace each arrived, independently, at the theory of natural selection, well illustrate this distinction — and how in the sciences, public revelation trumps private revelation. Did you find Dowd's arguments convincing, and do you agree that this distinction is important?
4. On page 19 Dowd introduces a second distinction, between what he calls *day language* and *night language*. Might this become an important distinction for religious liberals? Might it offer not only a middle path but a robust middle path between the intolerant voices of the scriptural literalists on one side and the provocations of the New Atheists on the other?
5. Dowd does not shirk from calling our attention to the same biblical passages regularly recited by the New Atheists. These are the scripture readings that are morally most offensive to the modern ear. For a refresher, turn to page 21 and read the two paragraphs that each begin, "Is it . . ." Then, what comes up for you when you encounter such arguments?
6. Dowd uses the word "God" as a stand-in for reality as a whole. On page 25 he asserts, "Any God that can be believed in or not believed in is a trivialized notion of the divine." What does Dowd mean by this provocative statement, and do you see value in it?