



1. Ian Barbour

“God and Evolution”

PROFILE

Ian Barbour is the elder statesman in the science and religion movement. He was awarded the Templeton Prize in 1999 and is the author of *Myths, Models, and Paradigms*; *Religion in an Age of Science*; *When Science Meets Religion*; and *Nature, Human Nature, and God*.

HIGHLIGHTS

Ian Barbour is the “grandfather” of academic and theological study of the ways in which the realm of science and the realm of faith can and do interact. **His 1966 groundbreaking book, *Issues in Science and Religion*, is widely credited as creating the modern science and religion conversation.** Early on he developed what has come to be called the Four Types Model of classifying the ways in which science and religion relate or collide with one another in religious and secular institutions, as well as in the minds of individuals. The basic categories are: **Conflict, Independence, Dialogue, and Integration.**

This episode is the only one in this series that appreciatively looks at how the discoveries in science (especially **primatology**: the study of monkeys and other primates) can help erode the ancient walls of disconnection (independence) between science and religion—that is, Why it is that human cultures everywhere have and value moral codes. Evidence has revealed that **morality (beginning with empathy) was bequeathed to us by our great ape and earlier primate ancestors**; it is not strictly a product of religious teachings. This dialogue is also one of several in this series that asserts that one can no longer point to the Bible for explanations of how **death** came into the world. Modern science clearly shows, as Barbour puts it, that “death was around long before human beings were.”

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This audio was chosen as “Episode 1” for the same reason that we highly recommend all college-level classroom and scholarly discussion groups to designate it as their first listening/reading: This interview is the best and most objective introduction in this conversation series to the major issues in the religion-and-science dialogue. More, it offers a four-types framework for classifying responses and attitudes in this realm—and Barbour’s model is referenced and used by many other speakers in this series. The speaker himself is widely honored as the first academician to introduce religion-and-science as an accepted program for academic research, teaching, and study. Accordingly, Ian Barbour steps into the role of elder statesman of the entire arena, putting his own personal preferences in the background, while striving to educate listeners and to convey the excitement and value of joining the exploration.

Evangelical scholars in this series, as well as the most theologically progressive, highly recommend this particular audio as an introductory lesson. This episode is well within the intellectual grasp of any church “book club” that is accustomed to reading and discussing serious nonfiction.

BLOG COMMENT

Shirley says:

Ian Barbour’s background is fascinating. Having the experience that he has, and hearing about his contributions, makes him an ideal candidate to have started these discussions. There is no question that this conversation needed to take place, and who better than a person well trained in both domains. Hearing about his own journey in trying to consolidate these two areas is a great way to introduce this series. The intention behind this series is commendable and inspiring...The idea that science doesn’t solve everything, and neither does religion, and that neither can answer every question makes it clear that these two areas need and absolutely complement each other. Thank you for making that so very clear. Really enjoyed this conversation!



2. Bruce Sanguin

“Evolutionary Christian Mysticism and Cosmological Midrash”

PROFILE

Bruce Sanguin is pastor of Canadian Memorial United Church, in Vancouver — a congregation that, thanks to his leadership, models openhearted evolutionary Christian spirituality. He is a leading voice in both Progressive and Integral forms of Christianity and is the author of *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos* and *If Darwin Prayed*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is **one of the most heartfelt, yet content-rich, of all the dialogues**. Both guest and host offer their personal stories of “awakening” to a cosmological and evolutionary perspective. Sanguin speaks of **his dark night of the soul**, and Dowd talks about how “deep-time eyes” helped him surmount the challenges of **addictions**. Concepts include: the “**theology of fragility**,” the “**theology of promise**,” the problem of postmodern “progressive” forms of Christianity, evolutionary Christian **mysticism**, the centrality of **compassion**, cosmological reinterpretations of a number of scriptural passages (especially the **Parable of the Prodigal Son**), and exploration of **how God acts in the universe**.

This is one of just several audios that deal forthrightly with a powerful gift offered by an evolutionary understanding of human nature: its role in evoking **compassionate responses to addictions and practical tools for meeting those challenges**. This also is the best audio for exploring what it means to find one’s “**essential vocation**” — that is, life purpose. Finally, this episode concludes with Sanguin reciting two of his **poems** from his 2010 book, *If Darwin Prayed*.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This audio is highly recommended for all audiences except those for whom adherence to scripture in literal ways cannot be questioned. All seminarians and discussion groups for clergy should listen to this audio for two reasons: (1) Sanguin speaks of how his crisis of faith was especially difficult in that he had to keep delivering sermons each Sunday, and (2) he provides examples of how scriptural passages can be re-interpreted cosmologically. Groups exploring meditative spirituality can also benefit by learning how an evolutionary form of “enlightenment” differs from traditional Eastern and Western models. Any individuals experiencing a dark night of the soul or the challenges of “mismatched instincts” (e.g., addictions) will find enormous benefit in this content and its open and vulnerable style of delivery. Groups exploring the work of Thomas Berry or Brian Swimme will benefit from hearing how both speakers attribute their “evolutionary awakenings” to ideas developed and/or furthered by Berry and Swimme.

BLOG COMMENTS

Sarah says:

The way Bruce applied the Parable of the Prodigal Son to the universe and our place in it literally gave me chills. Thank you a hundred times over for this inspiring conversation!

Mary says:

As a secular humanist/atheist/Unitarian Universalist from a Christian background, having degrees in biology and chemistry, I am loving the ideas expressed here. The idea that spirituality is the collection of practices that keep us in right relation with reality; that there is a “theology of fragility” that fosters new life and can connect to the suffering on the cross! (That’s a stretch for me, but I can see the connection!); and so much more! Our UU group is lay led and I will be taking some of these ideas back to our congregation in a future ‘sermon.’



3. Denis Lamoureux

“Beyond the Evolution vs. Creation Debate”

PROFILE

Denis Lamoureux, a leading evangelical contributor to the public understanding of evolution, is a professor of science and religion at the University of Alberta, Canada. He is a council member of the Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation, and author of *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is **one of the most engaging of all conversations** in this series because, more than any of the others, the listener feels like “a fly on the wall”—witnessing two amazing people (who had never before spoken) delight in one another’s life journey and perspective. Dowd and Lamoureux both openly share the stories of their **youthful struggles with addiction** (which eventually led each to **salvific born-again Christian experiences**), as well as adult **temptations with lust**. Lamoureux, as a PhD biologist and university professor specializing in the teaching of science-and-religion, is enthusiastic both about teaching evolution *and* helping students fully **embrace the science without losing their faith**. Here is an in-depth look at how a biologist who identifies himself as **Evangelical** and **Pentecostal**, and who embraces the **Apostles’ Creed**, has dedicated his career to **helping evangelical students**, step-by-step, open to an evolutionary worldview.

It is one of several conversations in this series that **critique in detail the Intelligent Design movement**: Lamoureux criticizes that movement for its “God-of-the-gaps” perspective. This interview is also the most in-depth look at how our evolved human nature (specifically, addictions and lust) can pose challenges that both Christianity and evolutionary science forthrightly

address. “**The Fall**” and “**Original Sin**” are thus discussed as traditional religious ways to grasp the serious challenges of the human condition, which an evolutionary understanding of our evolved nature confirms and expands.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This conversation is highly recommended for all audiences. It provides a vivid in-depth look at the reasoning and passion that contribute to a worldview that, on the one hand, will challenge the most conservative Evangelicals, and on the other will present to the liberal religious and secular a full-bodied and self-consistent picture very different from their own. It is the top-recommended audio for teen and young adult audiences—who may profoundly benefit by learning at an early age that we moderns are challenged by evolved instincts that are “mismatched” for effectively staving off temptation in a culture brimming with “supernormal stimuli” (addictive recreational drugs, internet porn, etc.)

BLOG COMMENTS

Gary Meade says:

What a thought-provoking and inspiring conversation! For quite some time I was lead to believe that my rejection of biblical literalism meant I had no place within Christianity. The only reasonable voices seemed to be that of the militant atheists the likes of Dawkins. I had virtually given up hope that I could find any solace or truth in the faith I had once held dear, and considered much of it delusional.

Yet I now know that *God* never departed, and this journey of discovery is now bringing me back from despair to the experience of delight in all that *God* is. It was funny, at one point as I was listening I asked in my mind, 'ok all this evolutionary stuff is great, but what about all the mythic stuff about sin, damnation, and hell that killed it for me?' Just after I asked this, you moved into exactly this question in the conversation! This recapturing the nature of *God* and humanity through the lens of evolutionary psychology is truly remarkable. I just can't wait to have this conversation with many more people!

Carol Staton says:

This conversation helped me to understand evangelicals (and men! LOL) in a way I never could before. Your “breakthroughs” in understanding evolution were always obvious to me. I appreciate your work to help others see through this false dichotomy.



4. Ross Hostetter

“Integral Christian Spirituality”

PROFILE

Ross Hostetter is an attorney, mediator, executive trainer, corporate consultant, and former General Counsel of the Integral Institute. A leading advocate of Integral Christianity, he is co-founder and director of the Boulder Integral Center, in Colorado.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is an **excellent introduction to Integral philosophy**, and it superbly illustrates how Christianity can be made fresh and enticing for postmodern minds (and beyond) by acquiring both **an evolutionary understanding and a “stages of development” perspective** that is one of the hallmarks of the Integral worldview. Using a developmental perspective in reviewing Christian history, horrific abuses in former eras no longer need stay hidden in the closet.

This episode, as well, uniquely calls forth reflection and discussion about the ways in which any expression of a religious tradition will necessarily manifest as **a syncretic collage of both theological doctrine and the norms and noble ideals of a particular cultural milieu**. “Americanism” is the cultural milieu that syncretically merged with the Protestant faith that shaped Hostetter’s childhood and youth in rural Illinois in the 1950s and ‘60s. He appreciates, greatly, the noble ideals and social fabric that Christian Americanism gave him as a child—but he also missed, what he now calls, **“authentic spiritual experience.”**

Much of the latter half of the interview explores, both in his personal story and generically, why and how he combines his understanding of Integral theory with his faith tradition in his advocacy for Christianity to evolve in ways that would make authentic spiritual experience more available today. His own spiritual experience transformed his understanding and relationship to **God, which he now speaks of as “a field of love.”** So this is an excellent

interview to explore how personal experience can profoundly re-shape our concepts of God.

Hostetter demonstrates how the developmental approach can be used in group discussions for safely exploring participants’ personal **journeys out of scriptural literalism**. An Integral approach to development is ideal for this purpose because it does not judge earlier stages as wrong; rather, it **“transcends and includes”** them all as vital contributors to the present.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Any groups wishing to explore the implications of Integral theory for Christian faith and worship will find this episode exceedingly helpful. Because Hostetter presents a model of “stages of development” — not only in cultural evolution but also within the growth and maturation of individuals — this interview is highly recommended for youth, young adults, and parents and educators of children. Youth and young adults will see new possibilities for interpreting their own life stories in the way that Hostetter frames his own “hero’s journey” from childhood through maturation (which is also the theme of his forthcoming novel). As well, the storytelling mode of instruction along with abundant laughter make this episode very attractive for groups that would otherwise shy away from relentlessly serious modes of presentation.

This particular audio is also highly recommended (as is Ian Lawton’s) for theologically liberal groups or seminarians who are themselves looking for more “authentic spiritual experience” and/or revitalizing the centrality of Jesus in liberal Christian faith. This conversation may be too challenging for conservative Evangelicals, however, because Hostetter expressly claims that some doctrines are “unbelievable” — and because the host, Michael Dowd, launches into a parody of taking otherworldly-sounding language literally (see Questions 8 and 10 below).

BLOG COMMENT

Carol Staton says:

All of the speakers so far have been very good, but this is what I was hoping to hear — someone taking it beyond simple evolution vs. the creation story in the Bible. As a lay person without lots of letters after my name, I would love to be part of an open-minded Christian Evolutionary community, and I’m sure there are others who would as well. I hope Ross will be open to forming such a community, so I can join.



5. Karl Giberson

“The Heart and Soul of the Evolution Controversy”

PROFILE

Karl Giberson is a noted science-and-religion scholar who teaches at Eastern Nazarene College. He was one of the founders of the BioLogos Foundation, a think-tank helping evangelicals integrate faith with science, and the author, with Francis Collins, of *The Language of Science & Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions*. (He left BioLogos six months after this interview was recorded.)

HIGHLIGHTS

This is a **superb inside look** at the challenges facing scientists and scholars who dedicate their careers to **helping move their fellow Evangelicals** toward a worldview stance that embraces **an ancient universe and evolutionary processes**. It is also one of a half dozen in this series that explores the theological (as well as scientific) arguments **against the “Intelligent Design” movement**. Through personal story, one gains an inside look at the emotional consequences (and release) of **transitioning out of a literalistic view** of biblical faith, and the **importance of trusted mentors** for assistance in moving through this process. The **“two books” approach to embracing both scripture and science** is the foundation of Giberson’s approach. As well, the **“allure of the cosmic narrative”** is shown to be something that offers a strong draw for detaching from scriptural literalism and fully embracing what the sciences have to offer.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for all audiences, especially Evangelicals—and also for theologically liberal or secular groups who could benefit from a more nuanced understanding of where Evangelicalism is open to the fruits of scientific

discovery. It is also highly recommended for those who aspire to build bridges on any topic, and who therefore must find the strength to carry on despite harsh criticism from both ends of a spectrum. Because mentors played very significant roles in the faith transitions of both Karl Giberson and the host, Michael Dowd, three sets of questions in the study guide encourage discussants to review the role of mentors in their own lives, to consider ways in which they might mentor others, and to speak from personal experience and use storytelling when given the opportunity to guide others.

BLOG COMMENT

Dana Coons says:

I found the conversation between Michael Dowd and Karl Giberson thought-provoking, educational and extremely relevant. Listening to this conversation was reassuring; one can take comfort in the fact that there is a large group of Christians between faith-rejecting atheists and science-rejecting creationists who have broken down the barrier between science and religion. As Giberson said, there are people who are Christian and fully embrace science. One can accept evolution without abandoning faith.

Giberson discussed how Christians grow up with a narrow and literal interpretation of the Genesis story of creation that they have to wrestle with as young adults. I could not agree more. This personally resonated with me because I believe that is something I have come to struggle with in my life as a young adult. Growing up in the Catholic school system, it wasn’t until the beginning of my post-secondary education that I began to question how science and religion could be reconciled. Coming to the understanding that evolution can be understood in a God-respecting and theological way truly deepened my faith.

What I found particularly interesting in this conversation was the notion that science and religion do not just simply tolerate each other; rather they are interconnected. Giberson explained how science is one way that God reveals truth, and when we find out something true about the world, that truth is sacred. This leads to revelation and a deeper understanding of science enhanced by God.



6. John Cobb

“Process Christianity in the 21st Century”

PROFILE

John Cobb is a United Methodist theologian instrumental in the development of process theology. Author of 30 books, Cobb is a founder of The Center for Process Studies and was on the faculty of Claremont School of Theology (in California) from 1958 until his retirement in 1990.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is one of two interviews with “process theologians” (the other is with Philip Clayton), and it is thus an **excellent introduction to “process theology”** by one of its main founders and advocates. Although many of the interviews in this series delve into different understandings of God and **God’s action in the world**, this is perhaps the best episode for getting a sense of (a) the spectrum of choices, and (b) perceived **problems with both interventionist and deistic understandings of God**. Cobb deals with **“the problem of evil”** by confronting the notion of an “all-powerful” God, advocating for **God’s “persuasive power” rather than “controlling power.”**

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for audiences curious about, or already favorable toward, process theology. Highly recommended also for seminarians and those comfortable with rigorous theological discussion. Do note that because Cobb challenges the grounding metaphysics of scientific pursuit (see “Editor’s warning” above), this episode may be jolting for the scientifically inclined and for the nonreligious. Because Cobb also strongly challenges “interventionist” notions of God, this episode may also be too harsh for conservative Evangelicals to productively engage with. Even so, because concepts of God are central to this talk, lay people may benefit from learning the menu of

choices around “God concepts” and then reflecting on their own. This dialogue may be especially welcome for those who struggle with the problem of why evil and suffering exist in the world, if God is supposedly all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good. (Cobb’s notion of God’s “persuasive power,” as distinguished from “controlling power,” may offer a solution for some.)

BLOG COMMENT

Richard Powell says:

I was powerfully affected by this talk, particularly the reminder of an “events” view of reality and how strongly a “parts” or mechanistic view has dominated our perspective for over 100 years.

I appreciated the way both Michael and John expanded the idea of God being in the creative, joyful, life-giving, moments and the role of purpose in evolution. I have been wrestling with the strong arguments of new and not-so-new atheists, feeling a conviction that much of what they are saying is accurate and faithful to reality, but also grieving the loss of purpose and transcendence. I loved Neil deGrasse Tyson’s “sermon” at the end of the Beyond Belief series when he talked about the Universe calling him. That talk, and this one, together have given me hope that a larger and more compelling view of God can be grasped by the human mind, even if the simpler and less elegant ones of yesteryear continue to be adequate for many.

I, for one, appreciate being pulled and challenged and encouraged to use my mind to conceive of bigger and hopefully more integrative views that transcend and include mechanistic, mystic, and mythic conceptions. This talk, and this series, really opens windows and I feel the fresh air of open-minded dialogue that I have not felt for quite some time.

Editor’s note: This is the only episode in which a thought-leader mischaracterizes a key aspect of mainstream evolutionary biology. Cobb says that evolutionary theory . . .

. . . has no place in the world for anything like *purpose*. So, the exclusion of purpose from evolutionary theory is one of the mainstays, and any attempt to introduce any notion of purpose is regarded as heretical. But on the other hand, the evidence that animals behave purposefully is pretty strong. The denial that they behave purposefully is a metaphysical denial; it’s not a scientific one. Nevertheless, it is a central part of official neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory.

See full study guide for recommendation on how to introduce a correction.



7. Charles H. Townes

“The Convergence of Science and Religion”

PROFILE

Charles Townes was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1964 for his invention of the laser. He received the Templeton Prize in 2005 for contributions to the understanding of religion, especially his notion (published in 1966) of the “convergence of science and religion.”

HIGHLIGHTS

Of all the audios in this series, this one presents **the most in-depth (yet fully understandable) look into the process of major scientific discovery**—including serendipity, imagination, creative musings, persistence, collaboration, and the courage to carry on despite what others may think. Several listeners have commented on how much they appreciated hearing this distinguished elder tell his story in such an open and engaging way. It is a special delight for anyone under the age of 85—because Townes is 95 and he speaks of **his direct contact with legendary physicists of the World War II era**, such as Robert Oppenheimer. Another highlight is that Townes very clearly and succinctly speaks of why, while remaining completely within the realm of mainstream science, **he believes that “God planned” this universe** and why, in contemplating his own mortality, **he believes that “as our bodies give up, I think there will be something remaining.** And I look forward to that.” Finally, because he regards **questioning one’s beliefs as a “positive” thing**, the Study Guide questions for this interview encourage listeners to probe into their own life experience of questioning and reformulating childhood beliefs.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for all audiences—not only for what the speaker has to say about his understanding of the science-and-religion issue, but especially for the delight of its narrative storytelling, which will help everyone grasp both the rigor and the humanity of scientific pursuit. Because of his forthright statements of belief in God, that God “planned” this universe, and that something of the human individual carries on after death, theological conservatives will enjoy this dialogue, although they may be challenged when Townes is asked, “What would you say to someone who fears that embracing evolution will have negative consequences?” His response:

I don't see why in the world it has negative consequences. I don't see why that would be. Now, of course, if they have certain beliefs that disagree with evolution, then this will change their beliefs. But changing their beliefs can be a *positive* thing. I think understanding more and more is always positive, and understanding evolution is positive.

Editor's note: Instructors in educational institutions or of religious training programs may wish to **supplement this audio** by directing participants to access online the 1966 paper that established Charles Townes as one of the foundational contributors to the understanding of science-and-religion issues.

“The Convergence of Science and Religion” was published in the March-April 1966 issue of IBM's *Think* magazine. You can access it in PDF at <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~jmcbray/happy/documents/THINK.pdf>

BLOG COMMENT

Don Smith says:

You have to love the brevity and directness of Dr. Townes.
Another great conversation.



8. Jim Burklo

“Open Christianity and Progressive Faith”

PROFILE

Jim Burklo is Associate Dean of Religious Life at the University of Southern California. Ordained in the United Church of Christ, he is a leading voice in Progressive Christianity. His books include *Open Christianity: Home by Another Road* and *Birdlike and Barnless: Meditations, Prayers, Poem, and Songs for Progressive Christians*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This dialogue excels in presenting **easily accessible and practical aspects of Progressive Christian faith**. It is one of the most forthright in **denouncing supernatural concepts of God and biblical “miracle” stories**, as Burklo links supernatural beliefs to lingering problems with Christian “exceptionalism” and “exclusivity.” Highlighted, as well, are Progressive Christian emphases on **direct and authentic spiritual experience** (including mystical), **social service as spiritual practice**, and experiencing **God as love** and through social service infused with love. The importance of **interfaith experience and dialogue** is also emphasized, as is the need for Christianity to shed its sense of being the one and only right religion. The **New Atheists** are discussed (pro and con) in this conversation perhaps more than in any other.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for any theologically and socially liberal context. Because theology is not a focus, but the practical aspects of faith and spiritual experience are, this dialogue is well suited for church discussion groups. It is also strongly recommended for groups who want to explore the importance of direct spiritual/mystical experience (including participant recounting of mystical experiences from childhood).

BLOG COMMENTS

Bruce says:

This was a revelatory conversation for me, as it refers to a body of work that thought leaders have been constructing/deconstructing for a long time: New ways to worship, communicate, and connect; the difference between socially progressive and theologically progressive; that the practice and discipline of prayer and meditation are identical to soulful service. I've heard Jim's testimonial before, but hearing this one was the best! Direct experience, direct encounter of divine love.

Earl Arnold says:

I particularly appreciated Jim Burklo's talk, since he didn't have a background in literal interpretation of Scripture. Like me, he grew up in a home and church atmosphere that, while it might not hold together faith and science, didn't see a great antagonism between them. So Jim didn't have a lot of baggage he had to get rid of, to appreciate the insights we've been gaining into evolution. That resonated with my own experience.



9. Brian McLaren

“Naked Spirituality and a New Kind of Christianity”

PROFILE

Brian McLaren was featured by *Time* magazine as one of America’s 25 most influential Evangelicals. He has served on the board of *Sojourners’* Call to Renewal and is a founding member of Red Letter Christians. His book *A Generous Orthodoxy* is widely considered a manifesto of the Emerging Church movement, and *A New Kind of Christianity* explores the intersection of Christian faith with contemporary culture and global crises.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is a good introduction to **the “Emerging Church” movement**, which is the **most progressive edge of evangelical Christianity**. (Note: “Progressive Christianity,” espoused by several speakers in this series, is at the leading edge of moderate-to-liberal *non*-evangelical forms of Christianity.) McLaren has 24 years of pastoral experience, and he speaks in a way that is **easy for lay church people to understand and apply to their lives**. He also regularly draws upon personal and other anecdotes to illustrate his comments. Significant religious concepts include the upside and downside of “**Christian exceptionalism**,” a **critique of “God-as-engineer**,” a celebration of the **creation myths of other cultures**, and an **inclusive understanding of the Kingdom of God**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for all moderate-to-liberal faith groups and especially for Evangelicals who are open to learning about the most progressive edge of Bible-based Christianity.

BLOG COMMENTS

Don Smith says:

Another great dialogue. When I read Brian’s “A New Kind of Christian” I wondered whether this was one rogue evangelical or a sign of something emerging within more conservative Christianity. As a progressive/liberal, I honestly had my doubts. Since then, however, I have been impressed with the depth of ideas and thinking within evangelical Christianity without it trying to become liberal or progressive or ‘like me’! I now see this as a very good thing.

As Brian Swimme suggests, diversity is a gift of the Universe—and our ability to discern the beauty and richness which diversity of culture and ideas brings is an evolutionary challenge. People like Brian McLaren have allowed folks on both sides of the conservative-liberal divide to see more clearly the value of differing approaches to the divine and our shared journey.

Thanks to you, Brian, for your life of discerning and sharing—and to Michael for making this all happen.

Pastor Andy Schottelkorb says:

Another good conversation to tune-in on. Thanks. As a lifelong ELCA Lutheran (a fairly young church with 5 centuries of tradition behind it), I especially appreciate that this discussion covered the static traditional vs. dynamic emerging church, and the wrestling (hopefully peaceful wrestling, as McLaren also hopes for) within those two polar opposites. Adding science to the mix there just adds to the fun!



10. John Shelby Spong

“Celebrating Post-Theistic Christian Faith”

PROFILE

John Shelby (Jack) Spong is a prolific best-selling author and perhaps the best known proponent of a liberal, inclusive, culturally relevant Christian faith. Prior to retirement he was an Episcopal Bishop in the United States, who helped lead his denomination toward the ordination of women and acceptance of openly homosexual clergy.

HIGHLIGHTS

In this conversation, John Shelby Spong does a magnificent job of sharing his **theologically progressive ideas**, and **the passions underlying them**, while also teaching important points about **the history of Christendom**—and of the Western world more generally. When one steps into such a historically rich perspective, the sense that change *must* occur in the expression of Christianity today and onward into the future transforms into the *least* radical path to follow. He says, “**Christianity has been an ever-changing movement throughout its entire history**. Anybody who doesn’t understand that doesn’t understand history.” Key faith concepts include a “**post-theistic**” **understanding of God**, the power of **love** as a divine principle, **service to others as the “Christ principle”**, and **religious doubt as a good thing**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Many people have experienced substantial faith shifts as a result of exposure to John Spong’s passionate intellect and prophetic words. If your discussion members or students are not completely solid in their faith walk, be advised that this conversation might be a stretch for them—or perhaps it might provide a long-awaited boost to a next stage. Few theologically conservative

church leaders will likely want to expose their membership to this dialogue. But seminarians and students of theology—of whatever Christian denomination—will be well served to gain some sense of what this most popular and provocative liberal Christian thinker has to say. His extraordinary skill in storytelling, evocative language, and rich imagery is well worth studying by all clergy, of whatever faith perspective. In the dialogue itself, Bishop Spong identifies his audience this way:

I see my audience as the people who are still hanging on to their religious convictions but feeling very shaky about them. Or people who have given up religious convictions but still miss them. I call these people ‘**believers in exile**.’ They want to believe; they feel a sense of transcendence and wonder and awe in their lives. But the old symbols simply don’t work.

BLOG COMMENTS

Tim Muench says:

I really enjoyed this conversation. As a member of “the church alumni association” for 30 years, I appreciate what Rev. Spong is trying to do. Perhaps if I had heard him 30 years ago, I would have stayed in the fold. It all seems like such a stretch to me now! As much as I still admire the Christian tradition and love its history, to suggest that it is still a relevant faith makes my brain feel like it’s being twisted into a pretzel.

Carol Staton says:

I am so excited about Spong’s interview with Michael that while listening to it alone I was clapping my hands and exclaiming agreement out loud! Thank “god” for your life, love, and being, Bishop Spong, that you express so well. Your facility with language to clarify is amazing. Thank “you”. How grateful I am to you, Michael Dowd, for bringing this series about! I am looking forward to having friends over to listen, especially to Spong, as I have downloaded the dialogues.



11. Ian Lawton

“An Inclusive Faith for the ‘Spiritual But Not Religious’”

PROFILE

Ian Lawton is executive minister at C3 Exchange in Michigan, a church that made national headlines in 2010 for its controversial decision to remove the cross from their grounds. Ordained as an Anglican Priest, Ian’s work on the inner city streets of Sydney inspired him to take up the mantle of creating a more inclusive and inspirational Christianity. Still evolving in his faith walk, Ian considers himself a “spiritual naturalist.”

HIGHLIGHTS

The unique thread of this interview is Ian Lawton’s “**impatient zeal for authenticity**.” Accordingly, the speaker forthrightly **criticizes “supernatural” religious claims**, preferring fully **naturalized and scientifically aligned ways** of obtaining the same **emotional gifts and community bonding** as Christian faith and worship have traditionally produced—including emotional states of **wonder, gratitude, trust, and compassion**, as well as a **drive to serve humanity and the larger body of life**.

Because the congregation he serves is now intentionally “**inclusive**,” Lawton talks about styles of communication that are essential for bringing together a mix of **liberal Christians, humanists, atheists, Buddhists, and “the spiritual but not religious.”** Notably, “direct spiritual experiences” should be communicated to others in terms of the actual experiences themselves (outer events and inner sensations)—without interweaving interpretations and causal assumptions that fellow listeners may not share.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Because this dialogue relates a minister’s journey that has taken him personally and professionally beyond narrowly defined Christianity (including removal of the cross on the church grounds), this episode is best suited for

discussion or classroom settings that are theologically liberal, spiritually eclectic, secular, or of wide-ranging worldviews. Seminarians and students of the theology of any faith perspective, however, may be well served by exposure to this degree of ‘inclusive’ thinking and practice and Lawton’s sense of why “spiritual” young people are bypassing church altogether. His “impatient zeal for authenticity” makes this dialogue a superb platform for encouraging listeners/readers to risk greater self-expression in the context of your own group’s modes of communication. This is also a bridge-building dialogue for groups that may benefit from Lawton’s own experience in crafting communication styles that permit the universality of depth experiences to be safely conveyed and reflected upon in theologically and philosophically diverse settings.

BLOG COMMENTS

Nicole says:

It was interesting to hear Ian’s perspective on this topic of spirituality after having gone over a similar lesson with my students in a religion class that I teach. It was ironic that even in Grade 10, these children were able to refer to themselves also as “spiritual but not religious,” as Lawton describes. When asking the class to elaborate on this notion of spirituality and religion being separate, I got some responses along the following lines: (1) I don’t need a church to form my relationship with God; (2) Spirituality is more important than religion; (3) I don’t like going to mass; (4) Spirituality is not limited to Catholicism.

It is clear that Ian’s reference to churches “building walls” is similar to the perspective that these adolescents have—likely influenced by the media, their experiences, or their families.

It is great to see that diversity and inclusivity can exist in a church—and especially important to remind our youth this!

Gary Meade says:

Ah, it’s great to hear an Aussie voice on here! And having experienced much of the Australian Christian/spiritual landscape, I can totally understand Ian’s pessimism regarding the number of progressives there within the realm of Christianity. I wrote an email to a local minister yesterday lamenting the fact that I have looked broadly to find a spiritual home and the only options I can find are with Buddhists. Not that there’s anything wrong with that; it’s just that I do not want to ground myself too deeply in a non-progressive tradition. As such, I feel very lonely in my convictions—in fact, very lonely in the world. I am rejoicing over these conversations, which are awakening and inspiring a new vision for my faith.



12. Kenneth R. Miller

“Evolution and the Battle for America’s Soul”

PROFILE

Kenneth R. Miller is professor of biology at Brown University and co-author of some of the foremost textbooks used by high school biology teachers. A Roman Catholic, he is a leading voice in advocating for the teaching of evolution in public schools. His publications include two books for general audiences on overcoming the conflict between religion and evolutionary biology: *Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* and *Only a Theory: Evolution and the Battle for America’s Soul*.

HIGHLIGHTS

Ken Miller was **lead witness** for the plaintiffs (pro teaching of evolution) in the **2005 court case** in Dover, Pennsylvania, challenging school board imposition of “**Intelligent Design**” into biology curricula, so this interview is outstanding for its overview of **how the science-v-religion conflict troubles public schools**. Because Miller is a superb public speaker and has crafted succinct, powerful ways of making his points, even those who have little interest in the public school issue will discover **practical and inspiring perspectives on faith and reason**, compellingly articulated. The take-home point: **rational thought and scientific evidence need not be hostile to religious faith**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This interview is highly recommended for all audiences (from evangelical to the theologically liberal) because it is unsurpassed in the scope and power of its simple-yet-profound arguments of how Christian faith and mainstream science can be integrated. Even though its focus is America’s ongoing

troubles with religious objections to the teaching of evolution in public schools, Miller’s reconciling arguments apply equally to anyone of any age and outlook who struggles with faith and reason. Because Miller chastises churches for failing to integrate science with religion for their youth, this interview is a wake-up call for church leaders, religious educators, and seminarians.

BLOG COMMENT

Ellen S. says:

Ken Miller’s testimony is particularly urgent, which I really appreciate. Thank you, Michael and Ken. Rational thinking is not hostile to faith. This is a great discussion.



13. Michael Morwood

“Evolving Prayer and Ritual Celebrations”

PROFILE

Michael Morwood is one of the leading writers and teachers of the most progressive expressions of Christianity. His first book, *Tomorrow's Catholic*, was banned by the Catholic hierarchy and he was silenced, which led to his leaving the priesthood after nearly 3 decades service.

HIGHLIGHTS

Michael Morwood advocates a centrally important but thoroughly **naturalized** (that is, **non-supernatural**) understanding of **God**, **Jesus**, the **sacraments**, and **prayer**. His first book, *Tomorrow's Catholic: Understanding God and Jesus in a New Millennium*, “brings the religious stories of our tradition in line with what **Thomas Berry** and others call the new story of the Universe.” Here is a key quotation from his interview, which summarizes the core ideas that led to his silencing by the Catholic hierarchy and subsequent **resignation from the priesthood** in 1998:

There are two stories around God and around Jesus: Is God an elsewhere deity? Or is **God an everywhere presence** — that is, beyond our human images? Is Jesus primarily someone who comes down from up above us somewhere and is the unique pathway to a God who lives somewhere else? Or is **Jesus the revealer of this mystery in our midst?**

There are two stories around sacraments. Are sacraments primarily people being dependent on what I call “middle management” to access the sacred and bring them to us? Or are **sacraments about ritualizing an inner disposition**, a readiness to stand up and be counted? That's what I think **Baptism** was in the early church. That's what I think **Eucharist** is.

And then, two stories around prayer: Is prayer primarily about trying to contact an external deity who listens and responds? Or is **prayer more about changing us and deepening our awareness of this mystery** within us, among us — and challenging us to give witness to the way that we live?

This is one of only a handful of interviews in this series that explore in depth ways in which **core Christian doctrines** can be understood not only in a **cosmological** way congruent with what we now know of the universe but also in a **fully naturalized** way. This is also one of only five episodes that include the recitation of **poetry**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

All Catholic audiences, even the most conservative, should be aware of (and thus exposed to) the ideas at the most naturalistic edge of their faith today. They should also be aware of the sometimes dire consequences for Catholic priests who espouse non-supernatural reinterpretations of core concepts and traditional doctrines and attempt to spread those views. Hence this interview is a must for all Catholics. It is also highly recommended for other denominations of Christianity that are open to hearing nonliteralistic interpretations of biblical scripture—notably, a thoroughly naturalistic, but not diminished, understanding of Jesus. Finally, for nontheists and post-Christians, this particular audio is one of the best in the series for opening possibilities for dialogue and shared understandings.

Note: At least 4 interviews in this series explore the consequences for pushing the bounds of theological doctrine too far beyond institutional norms: **Matthew Fox** and **Michael Morwood** were both silenced by their Catholic hierarchies and ultimately left the Catholic priesthood. Sister **Gail Worcelo**'s mission of establishing the first ecologically directed community of women religious within Catholicism was stalled when a more conservative bishop gained power in her district. Rev. **Paul Smith** and his congregation were expelled from the Southern Baptist Convention.

BLOG COMMENT

Mary Pautz says:

I am a great fan of Michael Morwood. He is a gentle giant! The interview was spectacular!

Mike says:

I have recently read Michael Moorwood's book, *Tomorrow's Catholic*, and found this conversation to be an excellent supplement to that book. For me, evolution is a sacred history. Something that many Christians see as purely the creation of science (evolution) should be seen as a sacred history: the revelation of God throughout history and the unfolding of the divine.



14. Tom Thresher

“Reverent Irreverence and Integral Faith”

PROFILE

Tom Thresher is the pastor of a UCC church in western Washington state, USA, with a central focus on exploring how to manifest an Integral approach in all that they do. He is the author of *Reverent Irreverence: Integral Church for the 21st Century, From Cradle to Christ-Consciousness*, where the practical benefits of applying an Integral perspective in Christian settings are explored.

HIGHLIGHTS

“Reverent irreverence” is a central focus of Tom Thresher’s **evolutionary** and **Integral** ministry. He finds that **innovation is easiest to evoke in “safe” environments** — and that a **playful** and humble approach in **church ministry and process** helps participants feel safe enough to risk making mistakes when trying something new. Specific examples of how **the “transcend and include” framework of an Integral stage of Christianity manifests in an actual church** setting are highlights of this dialogue. One such Integral Christian practice is attempting to see **how Jesus saw**—that is, **nondual awareness**. Another Integral practice has made it possible for this liberal congregation to **reinstate the singing of traditional hymns** that other progressive churches typically shun (because of literalistic language or warrior-God imagery). The **Integral** perspective is also explored in **how it can serve individuals in their everyday lives**: fostering **gratitude, hope, and trust**—as well as helping them welcome rather than resist phases of regression to earlier developmental stages when the **challenges of life** call forth those stages.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This episode is especially recommended for audiences in which Integral philosophy and Integral church are central concerns. It is also superb for church leaders in liberal Christian contexts who might be surprised to learn that reincorporating more tradition may actually be a progressive way forward. Because this dialogue steers clear of academic theology and is very conversational (even playful), it could easily be assimilated by moderate-to-liberal Christian youth. Note: For groups unacquainted with Integral theory, it might be best to first use episode 4 in this series, with Ross Hostetter, which is titled “Integral Christian Spirituality.” Because Hostetter was the first guest to focus on Integral forms of Christianity, the host ensured that this new worldview was adequately introduced.

BLOG COMMENTS

Kevin Reid says:

I feel like a kid on Christmas morning anxious to unwrap more of these “conversational gifts” to see what other delightful surprises await. Tom’s dialogue was indeed a “big” one. I especially enjoyed hearing how he and his church now include notations for hymns to honor and embrace their place within the evolutionary development of the Christian tradition.

Peggy Dunn says:

Tom Thresher is one of the new voices for me in this series. I have ordered his book, *Irreverent Reverence* and look forward to using it, along with Bruce Sanguin’s *If Darwin Prayed*, as I pastor a small congregation in a small community I think is ready for the insights of an evolutionary theological view—and I am so ready to come out of the closet and preach this stuff, to get it out into the life of the community, rather than just studying it as part of my own journey.



15. Richard Rohr

“Evolving Prayer and Ritual Celebrations”

PROFILE

Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest who founded the Center for Action and Contemplation (in New Mexico, USA). A contributing editor for *Sojourners* magazine and a contributor to *Tikkun* magazine, he is the author of many books and educational programs, including, *The Naked Now: Learning to See As the Mystics See*; *Why Be Catholic?*; and *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is one of the best dialogues for presenting a variety of key Christian concepts (e.g., a **relational view of God** and a sense of **Incarnation as old as the Universe**)—but always as a way of calling forth **positive emotional responses** and for **nurturing bonds with other faith traditions**. As well, Rohr speaks of the central role that **mystical experience** plays in fostering faith—**faith as “trust,” not “beliefs”**—in the face of not-knowing (even doubt), and **science’s role in modeling an openness to change and expanding mystery**. He also discusses how an **evolutionary view of reality** can help us cultivate a **nondualistic mind**, and how viewing **the human life trajectory as entailing two major phases** offers practical guidance. Rohr also speaks of the importance of his **Franciscan** tradition for nurturing **reverence for Creation**—and he does so without troubling over whether and how his views are distinct from pantheism or any other theological tenets that Catholicism has traditionally established firm boundaries against.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This dialogue with Richard Rohr is highly recommended for any person or group who values faith experience, emotional wellbeing, and social harmony over doctrinal rigidity and allegiances. Accordingly, listeners would be advised

to be open to stretching beyond ancient understandings of Christian faith. Nonetheless, Fr. Rohr’s humble, generous way of being, combined with a deep love and thorough knowledge of scripture and tradition, allow him to say some very prophetic and radical things in ways that a diversity of faith perspectives are willing to hear. In fact, many find his bold yet inclusive approach to be refreshingly alluring.

Because Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest, this dialogue is especially recommended for all Roman Catholics who are eager to hear new possibilities for the tradition. This episode is highly recommended, also, for Emerging Church, Integral, and Progressive Christians—as well as for young people and secularists who have little patience for theological and biblical hermeneutics, but who yearn for renewed hope and other emotional and practical benefits.

BLOG COMMENT

Ellen S. says:

I have listened to many of these discussions and have drunk deeply from the well. This particular one needs to be lifted up as a singularly important dialogue. I made notes, was astounded, and many of my preconceptions of Catholic viewpoints were shattered by this insightful discussion.

Richard Rohr underscored how it is true that “being Jesus-like” is so much more important than espousing a Christ-centered doctrine. His truths seem so obvious, but are difficult to bring to fruition in one’s own life. It does speak to the clarity of his vision that we say, “Of course,” yet have so much trouble honing to his principles. Bravo! So much work to be done.

Arek says:

I’m from Poland. When I first read Richard Rohr’s book, *Everything Belongs*, I knew I’d been waiting for such words all my life. Now, when I’ve just finished *The Naked Now* and listened to your conversation, I realized and I’m sure I had to wait for this moment for so long. It seems to me that now it’s the time to begin the second half of my life. I’m 43 and I’m much more interested in ‘the content’ rather than ‘the container,’ as Father Richard put it in the conversation. Thank you, Father Richard, for your great words—and thank you, Michael, for the great idea of the conversations.



16. John F. Haught

“Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life”

PROFILE

John Haught, a Roman Catholic, is Senior Fellow in Science and Religion at Georgetown University (Washington DC). A systematic theologian, helping to enrich Christian faith with the evolutionary sciences is his foremost scholarly contribution. He is the author of many books including, *Making Sense of Evolution: Darwin, God and the Drama of Life*; *God and the New Atheism*; and *Christianity and Science: Toward a Theology of Nature*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This dialogue, by **one of the most influential liberal theologians**, is **unsurpassed for its placement of “the universe as story” at the center of a theology of evolution**. Haught points to the human **psychological need for coherent narratives** as a primary reason to draw forth a meaningful story from scientific facts. Haught’s theology of evolution builds, in part, upon the work of **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** and integrates a **mainstream evolutionary** perspective with what Haught points to as the core biblical concepts of God: **God as “promise-keeper,” as “self-emptying,” as the source of novelty, as “absolute relationality.”** He challenges both extremes of the science and religion debate to recognize that an ideal notion of God or the universe would not be one of perfect design. Rather, **imperfection and a future that is open-ended** would not only be the most evolutionary; it would be what one would expect of a God who valued “relationality.” This understanding of the universe and God is also, Haught maintains, superb for generating a sense of **hope and possibility**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

All groups that resonate with the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin (and Thomas Berry) will find much to appreciate in this dialogue. Because Haught’s “theology of evolution” is something he has been developing and fine-tuning for decades, all aspiring theologians and clergy (except those who demand scriptural literalism) will be well served to study and discuss this internally consistent, clearly stated, and emotionally evocative way to systematize Christian theology and integrate it with a modern understanding of an evolving cosmos. Secularists may be challenged by Haught’s portrayal of the New Atheists as sharing with creationists an over-emphasis on perfection/imperfection in design in, respectively, arguing against or for the existence of a Creator. But secularists may also find that Haught’s attention to meaningful story impels them to give more attention to crafting scientifically accurate and meaningful ways of telling “the story of the universe” from a nontheistic point of view.

BLOG COMMENTS

Judith Elgin says:

More than any of the other speakers so far, John Haught has spoken of Evolutionary Christianity in a very insightful, realistic, and meaningful way. Teilhard de Chardin was also one of the authors who has the ability to make creation reality divine, and John has taken this idea even further. It makes such sense to me. I’m so grateful that you have chosen him as one of the speakers on this subject.

Don Smith says:

Wow! What a great conversation! The ideas which resonated most for me were elevating “The Universe Story” (a great title from a great book) to “The Cosmic Drama”—I love that. As well, the beauty and mystery of an emergent and unfinished Creation: although I’ve contemplated this, John expressed it in a subtle and evocative manner. This is one audiocast which I need to listen to again and savor the richness of the ideas shared.



17. Mary Southard

“Deep-Time Art and the Language of the Heart”

PROFILE

Mary Southard, a Sister of St. Joseph, is one of the best known visual artists depicting the inner human experience of a meaningful and broadly sacred understanding of an evolving universe and planet. For several decades she has been producing paintings and sculptures beloved by secularists, Christians, and adherents of other faith traditions who resonate with scientifically accurate and ecologically sensitive portrayals of this ancient and evolving cosmos — from the scale of galaxies to creatures and inward to the human response.

HIGHLIGHTS

This episode is **unsurpassed for its exploration of human despair and depression** — as evoked by life’s challenges, “**the suffering of the planet**,” and **crises of faith** that may ensue when one opens to the **discoveries of a scientific and evolutionary world picture**. Yet at each turn, Mary Southard offers, by way of her personal story and that of the universe, poignant examples of **overcoming the darkness and emerging into a brighter future**. As a **Catholic nun**, the brighter future for Mary comes in part by revitalized and this-world relevant **reinterpretations of biblical stories and passages**.

As **the sole visual artist in this series**, she explores how her paintings and sculpture have given her (and others) gifts of healing, and how any form of **creativity** can be pursued in ways that **express the very dynamics of the Universe itself**. Though not a professional theologian, Mary offers **theological interpretations that are profoundly practical** and deeply felt — as they evoke **gratitude, wonder**, and other positive emotions. Another highlight is her sharing of **her own awakening to the evolutionary wonders**

of the universe and its congruence with the Divine — and to a sense that **she herself is an expression of the Universe** (as we all are) and that she is **provisioned with the same creative dynamics** (and challenges) — all the while held within **God’s unconditional love**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This is one of the top-recommended episodes for all audiences. Because Mary Southard brings into the conversation only those Christian doctrines that are enriched by an evolutionary worldview (rather than those that may be challenged by it), even theologically moderate Christians and many Evangelicals will resonate deeply with this dialogue. Because she is an artist, not a theological scholar, there is nothing here that lay Christians will find difficult to understand. More, her clarity and wisdom is expressed with humility and a gentleness of soul — and by one who readily admits to suffering episodes of despair and confusion in the many decades she has served her community as a devout Sister of St. Joseph. Overall, she is an ideal partner to accompany anyone or any group (and across the full spectrum of Christian denominations) who may be experiencing a “dark night of the soul” or who find themselves on the cusp of a stressful transition in their own Christian faith journey.

This episode is also unsurpassed for its emotional reach. It will serve as an especially helpful beacon for those afflicted by sadness for the plight of Earth and its creatures and the difficulties of the human condition. It is also the top recommendation for any audience interested in exploring the role of the arts and storytelling in opening minds and hearts to an evolutionary and ecological worldview.

BLOG COMMENTS

Karen Wade says:

Mary’s unique gift is the voice of the mystic and the direct encounter with God. During many of these conversations I find myself on Amazon perusing a particular speaker’s books. This time, I was on Mary’s website perusing such a vast portfolio of paintings and sculpture.

‘A picture paints a thousand words’: How truly beautiful to see through her art into the great beyond of experience. And how powerful! I was also heartened by the reminder that out of darkness and chaos the new is born. Thank you, Mary and Michael, for a rich conversation that was also a delightful change of pace.



18. Matthew Fox

“Evolution and Creation Spirituality”

PROFILE

Matthew Fox is founder of the Creation Spirituality movement. Formerly a Catholic priest, now Episcopal, he was expelled from Catholicism in 1993 by then-Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI). A best-selling author (he has written 30 books), Fox is one of the most recognized and revered leaders in evolving the Christian faith in ways that honor both the tradition and the need for change.

HIGHLIGHTS

This conversation between Matthew Fox and Michael Dowd is **one of the most wide-ranging and thought provoking of all the dialogues in this series**. It is jam-packed with ideas and brief stories of their experiences that ground and exemplify those ideas. For this reason, it is highly recommended that students or participants in discussion groups be given an opportunity to not only listen to the audio but also to refer back to the actual transcript. The suggested questions offered for reflection or discussion on these study pages highlight **several vital faith issues that no other dialogue calls forth**. One such topic is the need for religious education to **provision children (and adults) with a “big picture”** that can help individuals face the challenges of living while maintaining hope and faith in this postmodern culture. Fox also directly labels as **“religious abuse” teachings of Hell** and other means of evoking fear. Because Fox is **the leading advocate of “Creation Spirituality,”** this dialogue explores ways in which the Christian faith can become a help, rather than a hindrance, to **solving the ecological crises of our time**. This is also the best dialogue for **hearing Dowd** expound on one of his own religious propositions: that continued focus on ancient biblical scripture as our best source of guidance and map of *what’s real* (how things

are) and *what’s important* (which things matter) is actually a form of idolatry: **“idolatry of the written word.”**

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This episode is essential listening for any Christian, secular, or interfaith group that is not wedded to literal interpretations of the Bible. This is a powerful interview for learning about this former Catholic priest’s doctrinal collision with the Catholic hierarchy that led to his expulsion. And yet, Fox remains grateful for his Catholic upbringing, his training in the monastery, the continuing relevance of biblical scripture, and the long history of outspoken leaders in the faith. A popular teacher and writer, Fox focuses not on theology but on the practical and personal aspects of an evolving Christian faith. Accordingly, the suggested questions for reflection and discussion encourage participants to delve deeply into their faith and institutional religious experiences, with the aim of remembering, evaluating, interpreting, and perhaps even transforming their faith/worldview journey.

BLOG COMMENTS

Glenda says:

The idea presented today—that one story, one thought, one idea, one way, does not need to drive out others—is so in need of being heard in the Catholic tradition and in our culture today, be it politics, religion or scientific theories.

Pastor Andy Schottlekorb says:

I appreciated the discussion with Matthew Fox a lot. The connection with Thomas Aquinas and his focus on Natural Law was a good reminder.

Don Smith says:

Thank you, Brother Matthew, for your lifetime of work and for being “ahead of the curve” with your ideas and your patience, as we try and catch up!



19. Sally Morgenthaler

“When the Inside Is the New Outside”

PROFILE

Sally Morgenthaler is an innovator in religious practices, catalyzing new trends in worship, congregational systems, gender relations, and leadership. Known best for her work in *The Emergent Manifesto of Hope*, Morgenthaler’s “Leadership in a Flattened World” called for a major shift in how clergy lead congregations: from command-and-control paradigms to radical collaboration.

HIGHLIGHTS

This episode is the ideal platform for learning about and discussing the implications (especially for **children**) of, what has come to be called, “**nature deficit disorder**.” The allure of **digital technology** is not, however, scorned as entirely malevolent; indeed, Sally Morgenthaler pinpoints several important benefits. Why **the arts are absolutely vital for worship** experience is another theme, as is the title topic: “Why the Inside Is the New Outside.” Here “inside” refers to **our inner experience of thoughts and feelings**. The deeply subjective realm is now regarded as “outside” because, thanks to **brain imaging technologies**, it is now available for **objective scientific exploration**. An additional highlight of this episode is the telling of **her personal faith journey**, in which she **struggled for authentic spiritual experience in church settings** and to express her evolving faith identity.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Because this is one of a half dozen episodes that focus, at least in part, on challenges and opportunities for evolving Christian worship styles, this episode is recommended for church leader discussion contexts and seminarians. Lay religious or secular groups will probably want to focus on the first three discussion questions, which deal with “nature deficit” emanating from the rise in digital technologies.

BLOG COMMENTS

Richard Powell says:

I appreciated this conversation on a few levels. First there was the recurring theme of humility (loved the term and concept of a “Hermeneutics of Humility”), which I think is so important; and it is just so encouraging to hear it talked about. Secondly, the idea of stages of faith tied to the wider canvas of evolution. Wow! Thirdly, the sense of a mysticism based in an examination of wonder. That term Sally used, “Mystical Existentialism,” really resonated for me and I would like to know more about that.

Sally described her shift to evangelicalism, which I think is common for those of us seeking a more authentic spirituality. I have commented to friends that my time in evangelicalism was long because it was the closest thing to a living mysticism I could find. Her description of growing out of the mythic tradition, her passion for the outdoors, and her new sense of God as a becoming rather than a being was very relevant to me.



20. Gloria Schaab

“Dwelling in the Word: Divine Revelation in the Cosmos”

PROFILE

Gloria Schaab is an assistant professor of systematic theology at Barry University in Florida. She is also a Sister of St. Joseph in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Scholarly interests in the mystery of God and suffering led her into the study of evolutionary theology and especially the work of the late Arthur Peacocke. Her 2007 monograph is titled, *The Creative Suffering of the Triune God: An Evolutionary Theology*.

HIGHLIGHTS

Gloria Schaab presents a system of theology that **maintains the Catholic doctrinal distinction between God and God’s Creation**, while suggesting that the presence of the Divine can indeed be experienced as *dwelling within the natural world*. Hers is thus a theology that promotes **intimacy with and understanding of the Creator via enhanced intimacy with and study of the Creation**. Particular topics dealt with in depth include concepts of **God**, concepts of **Jesus**, the **Trinity**, **ecological values** and **Earth jurisprudence**, the **role of a systematic theologian**, and the importance of **recognizing one’s interpretive lenses**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for theologians and students of theology, especially those within the tradition of Roman Catholicism. It is also well recommended for any Christian group eager to discuss ways to foster ecological values by recognizing God’s presence *in* the Creation — but without identifying God as Creation (e.g., the Oxford University Press description of Schaab’s 2007 book

characterizes her perspective as, “grounded within a panentheistic paradigm of the God–world relationship”). Because Gloria Schaab is both a systematic theologian and a scholar, some of the concepts and language may be somewhat technical for lay or secular discussion groups. Nonetheless, the Study Guide questions for this episode focus on the most widely relevant concepts. As well, questions are tailored to encourage discussion of ideas in quoted extracts from a stance of personal life experience and emotional depth, while practicing the skill of perceiving a concept through “interpretive lenses” other than one’s own.

BLOG COMMENTS

Sheila Conner says:

Oh my gosh, these have been the most incredible conversations! I so love the science talk, but what I love about it most is that it moves me into a deeper contemplation of the Holy. And thank you, Gloria. I do think it’s time for the contemplative to ponder what God is saying through the Cosmos—what is the Divine’s fresh word for today.



21. William D. Phillips

“Ordinary Science, Ordinary Faith”

PROFILE

Bill Phillips was co-recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1997 for development of methods to cool and trap atoms with laser light. An evangelical Christian, he is a United Methodist layperson and a founding member of the International Society for Science and Religion.

HIGHLIGHTS

William (Bill) Phillips, **an evangelical Christian**, is one of two **Nobel laureate scientists** included in this series. Phillips is a powerful **advocate for the scientific way of discovering and testing truth claims**. His personal story of discovery that led to his Nobel Prize in physics is more than instructive. It is a **fascinating inside look** at the ups and downs of **high-level research and the curiosity and persistence required to carry it out**.

Phillips is equally clear and open about why **he accepts a literal interpretation of the resurrection story of Jesus**. (He speaks about **religious doubt** in a gentle and accepting way — which he suggests is actually the norm for most people, himself included. He calls this kind of faith, “**ordinary faith**.” Phillips explains, “**It is not inconsistent to be a person of faith and also to have doubts**.” Overall, he builds a **welcoming and sturdy bridge between the findings of science and moderate-to-conservative approaches of interpreting the Bible**. “I just have to insist that people of faith not see science as being threatening to faith,” he concludes, “but rather being celebrative of faith. And that people of science not see people of faith as being morons — because we’re not!” (Note: This is one of five episodes that include recitations of **poetry**.)

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This is a superb interview for all audiences. Moderate and conservative Evangelicals will be able to relax into Phillips’ embrace of biblical scripture — specifically, his literal understanding of the Resurrection — while being offered an insider’s tour of the methods and excitement of the scientific endeavor. Theologically liberal or secular listeners will have an opportunity to learn how a brilliant scientist doing mainstream research (which he calls “ordinary,” as distinct from “fringe” or “revolutionary”) fully accepts the findings of “repeatable” science, while also accepting scriptural accounts of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. This interview demonstrates that respect and even friendship can develop between a top-ranking evangelical scientist (Phillips) and a celebrated atheist in the same field (Lawrence Krauss).

BLOG COMMENTS

Gary Meade says:

I was richly blessed by the humble and gracious nature by which this conversation was conducted. Here we had what was probably the most conservative voice so far, with Bill espousing a more literalistic view than the other guests; and yet Michael’s diplomatic approach was to constantly come back to agreement.

The other thing I found fascinating, as has been for the other dialogues, is hearing how the biography of the guest has shaped their understanding of the intersection of faith and science. In Bill’s case, I suspect that his grounding in faith from childhood has led to a perspective that sees the Bible as more than metaphorical in nature.

Ed Gibeau says:

Thank you, Bill, for sharing your thoughts as an “ordinary” scientist and “ordinary” believer in Christ. You are (of course) not “ordinary” in either regard. And of course (as a scientist) you know creation is not ordinary; it is extraordinary. The most extraordinary part is that we have been given the opportunity to be part of it—that we exist and that anything exists at all is extraordinary.



22. Owen Gingerich

“Evolutionary Creationism”

PROFILE

Owen Gingerich is professor emeritus of astronomy and the history of science at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. A former vice president of the American Philosophical Society and a trustee of the John Templeton Foundation, his books include *God’s Universe* and *The Eye of Heaven: Ptolemy, Copernicus, Kepler*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This is the best audio in the series for **learning scientifically why it is true that “We are made of stardust”**—and why many people (especially children) are excited to learn of their deep-time, intimate, and personal **relationship with ancient stars**. This is also one of a half-dozen interviews in this series that offer explicit arguments **against the so-called “Intelligent Design” movement**. Owen Gingerich (who is both a **scientist** and an **evangelical Christian**) uniquely employs **the distinction between *final cause* and *efficient cause*** to lay a mid-ground course.

This is possibly the best interview for learning that **scientific discoveries sometimes profoundly depart from commonsense assumptions**. Using the **Copernican revolution** in astronomy as the example, Gingerich dips into **the history of science** to demonstrate that when a new discovery *does* contradict commonsense—and especially when that discovery also contradicts traditional authority (such as the Bible)—not only will religious authorities oppose it, but even scientists themselves may refuse to make **the shift in paradigms**.

Another highlight is Gingerich’s explanation for **why it is important for God to have a human face** (for Christians, that of **Jesus Christ**). Finally, this audio is where the host, Michael **Dowd**, does his most thorough job in presenting one of the tenets of evolutionary Christianity that he is best known for: the distinction between, what he calls, **“public revelation” and “private revelation.”**

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Because Owen Gingerich is both a scientist and an evangelical Christian, this audio is highly recommended for all evangelical audiences. It is also recommended for Roman Catholics, as Gingerich talks about the role of Church authorities in holding back the progress of astronomical science by their silencing of Galileo. Science majors and college teachers of science will find this episode helpful, as well, because Gingerich tells the story of his own teaching experience at Harvard, where he pioneered the introduction of science-and-religion topics within standard science classes. Because Gingerich clearly presents the logic underlying various aspects of his scientific and religious views, and because Dowd’s own exposition of the private v. public revelation distinction is well stated, this audio is also highly recommended for seminarians and theologians.



23. Ilia Delio

“The Emergent Christ and Evolutionary Catholicism”

PROFILE

Ilia Delio is one of the premier Catholic theologians bringing a scientific, evolutionary understanding fully into her interpretation of Christian doctrines (notably, God, the Christ, salvation, and care for Creation). A Franciscan sister with a doctorate in historical theology, she is a fellow at the Science and Religion program at Georgetown University. Her books include *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe*.

HIGHLIGHTS

Even though Ilia Delio is a theologian and academic, in this dialogue she focuses on the **personal and practical meaning of Christian theological doctrines translated anew through a cosmic and evolutionary lens**. Topics covered in depth include the experience of **prayer** and entirely new ways to conceive of the **Christ**, the **cross**, and **salvation** that transcend the constraints of literalism while bypassing liberal ways of modernizing doctrines that reduce their power and appeal.

This is also a superb episode for generating discussion on **new religious metaphors for God**; for probing **whether our concept of ‘faith’ withers when it is equated with ‘belief’ rather than ‘trust’**; for considering whether **spirituality is less about otherworldly concerns and more about fostering ‘right relationships’ in *this* world**. Because different ways of knowing (**intuitive and rational**) are points of discussion in the dialogue, this episode affords an excellent opportunity for participants to assess and perhaps improve how those sometimes-conflicting modes play out in society and in

their lives. Because the role of **technology** in human evolution is a central concern for Ilia Delio, this episode is a superb platform for encouraging participants to reflect on and share their own experiences (for good or ill) with **Internet modes of communicating and relating**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This episode is highly recommended for all audiences who are eager (or at least curious) to explore cosmic and evolutionary understandings of core doctrines of Christian faith and practice. Clergy, seminarians, and students of religion will surely discover new ideas and interpretations worth reflecting on. Protestants as well as Catholics will find the topics pertinent to their concerns. Lay people will be pleased to discover that concepts are explained in ways that are both accessible and applicable to how we interpret and live our lives.

BLOG COMMENTS

Timothy says:

Wow!!! Sr. Delio is amazing. The best balance of the scientific knowledge and well grounded Christian spirituality I've heard yet. She had all kinds of bells ringing in my soul, like a hot pinball flying through the Cosmos. Encore!

Brian says:

You're right about the rich content. I'll certainly need to listen to this many times. Fascinated by the clear logic laced with wisdom ("knowledge deepened by love" I think was the definition). It is so refreshing to hear Christians talking like this. I'd begun to think I shouldn't label myself a Christian because I'm so far gone as far as my evangelical background is concerned. Now I'm not so sure.



24. Diarmuid O'Murchu

“Meeting God in Our Evolutionary Story”

PROFILE

Diarmuid O'Murchu, an Irish Catholic priest and member of the Sacred Heart Missionary Order, is one of the most effective and beloved popularizers of the Great Story, or Epic of Evolution — especially in Roman Catholic circles. He is able to convey fairly radical ideas because of his depth knowledge of contemporary sciences and his decades of work as a social psychologist. Among his books are *Quantum Theology*; *Evolutionary Faith*; and *Ancestral Grace*.

HIGHLIGHTS

More than any other speaker in this series, **O'Murchu not only presents “evolution” and “story” as foundational to his spiritual worldview; he makes the two inseparable.** Thus this is an ideal episode for appreciating both **the exploratory nature of the process of evolution** and the role of **story for interpreting meaning at all scales of existence** — from the cosmic to the personal. As well, O'Murchu searches for ways to understand and experience **God as cosmic in grandeur, but also personally available.** He does so, in part, by urging us all to identify *with* the Cosmos, to **experience ourselves fully with and within Cosmos/God.** His cosmic perspective includes a naturalistic view of **the creative role of destruction and the suffering that cannot be avoided.**

Because few theologically progressive contributors in this series speak directly about Jesus and the “Incarnation” central to Christianity, the seventh question offered in this guide is devoted to O'Murchu's **reappraisal of the role of Jesus — in light of humanity's seven million year saga of evolutionary growth.** Finally, O'Murchu and the host, Michael Dowd, together weigh in with a description of **four positive trends for the Church and for**

humanity: (1) more emphasis on **small Christian groups** and cell groups, (2) religious faith and language that moves **from a childlike developmental stage toward adulthood**, (3) shedding religion's attachment to ancient beliefs and instead preferencing **evidence-based knowledge**, and (4) **maturation of our species out of self-centeredness** into a contributing presence.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This dialogue is highly recommended for Roman Catholic contexts and for those curious to see how the spiritual evolutionary contributions of Teilard de Chardin and Thomas Berry (both of whom were Roman Catholic priests) are being carried forward in ways inspiring to lay persons. Because core Christian concepts are a central focus of this dialogue, groups (and seminaries) eager to explore evolutionary Christianity within the traditional conceptual framework will find much of value in this conversation — provided they are open to hearing quite radical interpretations.

BLOG COMMENTS

Rosaline says:

What a gift Diarmuid is to the world! For me, having read *Quantum Theology*, it was a blessing to hear him explain in such a lucid and convincing way what so many of us sense in our bones. There is a certain frustration, too, that we are so slow as a church in embracing what Diarmuid and others are teaching. The “pyramid” is alive and well and “all creation is groaning.....”

Thank you so much for this outstanding and inspiring dialog.

Carol Staton says:

Wow, I thought this was the most comprehensive of all the dialogues I have listened to thus far! Thrilling!

Editor's Note: *Because of an international phone connection and the speaker's Irish accent, the hearing impaired and listeners for whom English is a second language will wish to listen to the audio while following along on the transcript.*



25. Gail Worcelo

“Sisters of Earth and the Legacy of Thomas Berry”

PROFILE

Gail Worcelo is a Catholic nun who co-founded Green Mountain Monastery (with the late Thomas Berry) — a new monastic community dedicated to the healing and protection of Earth and its life systems. A leader in the “Sisters of Earth” movement, Sr. Gail is working toward grounding religious life within the context of the Universe Story.

HIGHLIGHTS

Gail Worcelo, a Catholic nun of the Passionist order, is a clear, impassioned, and **leading voice** in helping Christianity remain relevant in this time of **amplified ecological crises**. This is our **top-recommended episode** for learning about the ideas and impact of Catholic “geologian” (theologian of the Earth) and cultural historian **Thomas Berry**, and it is our **strongest session for examining Christianity in light of our human impact on the planet**. It is also a superb introduction to the work and importance of **Catholic religious communities**, especially those of **women**, throughout the Christian era—including their **ecological activism** during the past three decades, culminating in the “**Sisters of Earth**” movement and **Green Mountain Monastery**. Sister Gail is also a **premier storyteller** in this series, so this audio abounds in **rich metaphor** and **poignant narrative**—including her own story of **three sequential awakenings**: of the heart, head, and body.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for discussion groups of any religious or secular orientation because of its dynamic storytelling and focus on making

Christianity and Christian communities a powerful force in restoring ecological balance. Also, because Sister Gail talks about her forthcoming book about the emergence and growth of women religious communities within the Catholic tradition (including that of her own ecologically focused community today), this interview is especially recommended for Catholic audiences and women’s groups—as well as all other Christian or secular viewpoints. It may, however, be too radical for listeners who look upon much (or all) of the Bible as literal truth. Seminaries and other teaching institutions will find this episode ideally suited for introducing students to the key ideas of Thomas Berry—and in exceedingly inspiring and memorable ways. Note: Thomas Berry (1914–2009) is buried onsite at Green Mountain Monastery, Vermont.

BLOG COMMENTS

Mark Laxer says:

This is a beautiful journey and soul deep. It brings to mind the first time I visited Sisters Gail and Bernadette at the Green Mountain Monastery. In many ways I felt as though I found a home in these two remarkable women's vision, heart, and deeds. Thank you, Michael, for this interview, and thank you Michael and Gail and others in this movement for sharing Thomas Berry's insight and wisdom.

Helen Hunter says:

I was inspired and moved by Gail's conversation with you, Michael. I am gradually listening to all the conversations when I have the chance. But with this conversation I particularly realized that my spiritual understanding of how I relate to the whole created world needed to be readjusted.



26. Doug Pagitt

“Universe-Honoring Christianity”

PROFILE

Doug Pagitt is the founding pastor of Solomon’s Porch, a holistic Christian community in Minneapolis, and founder of *Emergent Village*, a global Christian social network. He hosts a weekly radio show, where he interviews thought-leaders on contemporary issues and leading-edge ideas in Christianity. Pagitt’s books include *A Christianity Worth Believing*; *Church Re-Imagined*; and *Preaching Re-Imagined*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This dialogue is a **superb introduction to the Emerging Church movement**, which began as a networking of **progressive Evangelicals** in the late 1990s who craved the doctrinal openness of the liberal stream in Protestant Christianity but who wanted to **carry forward the passion and invitational energy of Evangelicalism**. A highlight is the attention given to one of the main tenets of the Emerging Church: **encouragement of diversity, including diversity of belief**. It is one of two episodes (the other being Gretta Vosper’s) that centers on **practical issues and ideas for worship and structure in progressive Christian congregations**. It is perhaps the best episode for deep reflection on **the importance of selective valuing of scriptural truth — and yet the perils that arise when that course is taken**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This dialogue is highly recommended for virtually all Christian orientations (other than fundamentalist). Theologically liberal congregations that are struggling to maintain vitality and membership will benefit from learning about the passion and attention to newcomers that the Emerging Church movement carries forward from its Evangelical roots — but with openness to diversity of belief that is more familiar to the liberals of mainstream denominations. By the same token, Evangelicals curious about just how far doctrines might be flexed will find food for thought in this conversation, too. Any group where diversity of belief or concern about a possible “slippery slope” when the Bible’s authority is selectively questioned will find the study guide questions for this episode especially on target.

BLOG COMMENTS

Richard R. Powell says:

I loved this interview. Warm giddy emotion. The way Doug is open to ideas, to creative thought, and to a shared development (open source) collaborative kind of theology. Boom, like doors being thrown wide open. All that fresh air, wow. a great big 'amen!' from me.



27. Edward B. (Ted) Davis

“A History of the Creation–Evolution Conflict”

PROFILE

Ted Davis is a historian of science at Messiah College in Pennsylvania. Past-president of the American Scientific Affiliation, he is an evangelical Christian who subscribes to the Apostle’s Creed. He has edited and contributed to technical books in the history of science, and he is currently writing a book about the religious beliefs of prominent American scientists.

HIGHLIGHTS

Ted Davis presents a clear introduction to a **mid-ground approach between complete biblical literalism (fundamentalism) and largely metaphorical scriptural interpretations** preferred by theological liberals. Notably, the **Book of Genesis** cannot be taken literally as the history of creation, but Davis asserts that it is very important for Christians to accept as **factually true the miracle stories of Jesus**, especially **the bodily resurrection**. This conversation excels in generating theological engagement. For theological liberals who value an inside look at **why evangelicals are reluctant to extend the moniker “Christian” to those who disbelieve in the bodily resurrection of Jesus**, this is an eye-opening interview. Note: A substantial part of the opening dialogue concerns the work of this historian of science in **refuting the “warfare” model of the history of science and religion**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This episode is highly recommended for clergy, seminarians, and religious studies majors and graduate students (for whom the *supplemental* questions 8 and 9) are intended. Any Evangelicals who might be interested in this series

will almost certainly find great support for their views and religious convictions in the words spoken by Ted Davis. Even so, this episode (in addition to the Bill Phillips episode) is also highly recommended for nontheists and the theologically liberal who value an opportunity to experience a clear and logically consistent exposition of why the core literalism of the Jesus story (e.g., “the empty tomb”) and belief in God’s transcendence are central to evangelical faith. The academically inclined may be best served by the Davis interview in this regard; laypeople may find the Phillips interview more accessible. Both are well spoken and clear in their reasoning.

Following his personal story at the beginning of the interview, Davis offers a technical academic history of science and theology. This continues for the first third of the program. Then, on p. 11 of the transcript, Davis begins presenting topics and views in language well within a layperson’s grasp.

BLOG COMMENTS

Richard R. Powell:

Ted, thank you for your detailed and thoughtful responses. It is so important to me that you are taking the time to dialogue on this subject. I haven’t had as warm an experience with other evangelicals. Some, like their counterparts in the atheistic camp, essentially just want to convince me, sometimes at almost any cost, including bullying and scare tactics. I’m not getting a sense that you are doing that, nor did I get a sense that you were doing it in the interview, only that you are energized by the subject and dedicated to understanding. This is so refreshing and affirming.

Jim Zikos says:

Ted, during your interview with Michael I found it interesting when you suggested that his reading of the New Atheists was a partial one. Perhaps everyone has their own constructive role to play in this whole process. I am pleased that part of your own role is to expose the New Atheists’ own fundamentalist tendencies.



28. Gretta Vosper

“Beyond God: Becoming What We Believe In”

PROFILE

Gretta Vosper is the author of *With or Without God: Why the Way We Live Is More Important than What We Believe*. The book is informed and inspired by her pastoral ministry at West Hill United Church (Toronto, Canada). Founder of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, she was listed as one of “the most compelling women in Canada” by *More Magazine* in 2009.

HIGHLIGHTS

This episode is an inside look at **the challenges and opportunities for a religious congregation refashioning its shared commitment**—moving away from any statement of **shared belief** to a commitment to strive toward **shared values** in how members interact as a community. This episode thus joins that of Ian Lawton’s (episode 11) in reporting on **actual experience in how clergy and churchgoers** can continue to grow in their faith journey and stay together as a community **while leaving behind supernatural beliefs and dogmas**. Topics explored include why **church community** will continue to be important, how and when “**God**” language continues to be used, and **why even atheists would want to attend**. Also discussed at length are **nonsupernatural forms of prayer** and how an evolutionary perspective opens the way for relating to **death as natural and sacred**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Any secular or theologically moderate-to-liberal classroom or congregation in which “religious” is not equated with allegiance to supernatural beliefs and doctrines will find much to consider and discuss in this episode. Because most of the conversation centers on the challenges and opportunities of moving congregational life and worship experience in new directions, this episode will be very attractive to theologically progressive clergy groups and seminarians. Church congregations exploring paths for loosening the reins of creeds and belief-based doctrines will also find this episode enormously helpful.

BLOG COMMENTS

Richard R. Powell says:

I enjoyed this talk immensely. Fun to imagine what it would be like to grow up with a Sunday School experience in which you were taught a way of viewing your important texts as literature and story, rather than holy writ.



29. Philip Clayton

“The Emergence of Culture, Mind, and Religion”

PROFILE

Philip Clayton is a process theist and one of the most respected theologians and philosophers at the intersection of science and religion. He teaches at Claremont School of Theology in California. His books include *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*; *Evolution and Ethics*; *Science and Beyond*; and *The Problem of God in Modern Thought*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This interview with Philip Clayton joins that of John Cobb (episode 6) in featuring in-depth treatment of how **process theology** (launched in the early 20th century by Alfred North Whitehead) is actually **an early form of evolutionary Christianity** — with dynamic and ongoing **process replacing the Bible’s portrayal of a static Creation**. Unique to this interview is that Clayton and host Michael Dowd engage in a full and enthusiastic discussion of a leading-edge evolutionary philosophy: **emergentism**. Evolutionary emergence replaces long-standing forms of reductionist thought, which, ever since Darwin, have stifled attempts to integrate mainstream science into Christianity. Other topics include **Christian naturalism**, **panentheism**, **interfaith dialogue**, the **emergence of purpose (telos) in biology** and extended in humanity, the **evolutionary fitness of religions** (and whether *beliefs* need to be true or simply life-enhancing), why fossil evidence of **species extinctions** posed a severe challenge to Christian/Western thought in the early 1800s, recent discoveries that **cultural innovation is not unique to our species**, and whether we should consider **pre-scientific beliefs as pre-natural** (rather than *supernatural*).

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This episode is highly recommended for any secular or moderate-to-liberal religious discussion group or classroom setting. Because high-level concepts in philosophy, theology, science, and history pervade the dialogue, this episode is ideal for clergy, seminarians, and advanced students. Even so, the conversational format, colloquial sentence structure, and enthusiastic tone and personal reflection make it engaging for church discussion groups, as well. Because of its focus on *emergent evolution*, it is one of the best episodes in this series for bridging the tension between those who preference spiritual-religious ways of knowing and those who look first and foremost to science.

BLOG COMMENTS

Nic Paton:

Philip: You are a specialist generalist, having sufficient depth in science, theology and philosophy to address these often separate domains with authority and depth. In addition to this, which I appreciate a lot, you have a strong sensibility for the poetic and the artistic elements in culture. And further, your enthusiasm, generosity, openness, and appreciation for the questions that our world is asking. As a fellow “emergentist” I really appreciate the hold you have on current thought in the sciences, to keep on grounding us in the underlying meanings of emergence without getting lost in the cliché or hubris surrounding that term.

Steve Maynard says:

As with the rest of this series, I enjoyed your dialogue (Philip and Michael) immensely — provocateurs of the highest order! Your brief discussion around the idea that spiritual diversity is like a healthy ecosystem was very useful and powerful imagery.



30. John Polkinghorne

“Science and Faith in Understanding Reality”

PROFILE

John Polkinghorne is both a theoretical physicist and an Anglican priest. He is internationally recognized for his contributions to the study of theology and science. He is the author of five books on physics and 26 on issues in science and religion and was awarded the Templeton Prize for contributions in science and religion.

HIGHLIGHTS

John Polkinghorne excels in **succinct statements and explanations of deep philosophical issues**, including **materialism v. theism**, the inescapability of foundational beliefs (**metaphysics**), and the presence of “**motivated belief**” in both science and religion. There is no better episode in this series for examining **the key distinctions between science and religion**, problems of **incommensurability in worldviews**, and the role of both **rationality and emotion** in how we choose our beliefs/worldviews. Polkinghorne also forthrightly presents and supports **his belief in a personal God who intervenes in the world**. He also speaks of **Jesus as “the human expression of God”** and **Eucharistic worship** as accessing “the presence of **the risen Christ**.” Polkinghorne and the host (Michael Dowd) candidly present differing views on **the role of death and the possibility of an afterlife**, making this the best episode to propel classroom or group discussion of those topics.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Highly recommended for seminarians and college or graduate students in philosophy or religion. Note: Because of Polkinghorne’s elder British speaking

style and less-than-ideal audio quality, this is one of the more difficult episodes to listen to — although the transcript is easy to read. Indeed, some segments of his responses (especially his technical science explanations) were eliminated because our audio editor could not discern the words.

BLOG COMMENTS

Ellen S. says:

Sir John's faith is nuanced and informed by his deep understanding of the physical world. I love how you both highlighted the Eucharistic Table as a source of inspiration and a continued resource for faith and spiritual practice.”

Connie says:

It has been a joy to hear several of the speakers speak so forthrightly about the 'fears' (or 'concerns') that their sense of what a wholly naturalistic perspective on the universe would call forth. John Polkinghorne graciously spoke of his. As I heard Sir John's, they are fundamentally concern that an exclusively naturalistic view of the death of individuals, of the ultimate death of life on this planet (when our sun becomes a red giant several billion years from now), and of the 'heat death' fate of this universe (trillions of years from now) seem to confront one with an unacceptable picture. Hence the biblical Christian solutions to these discomforts is a crucial grounding for his personal worldview.

Pastor Andy Schottelkorb says:

Another good conversation. I had heard the 'Science asks how, Religion asks why' explanation before, and appreciated hearing it afresh from John. It may be a bit reductionist, but still is a fruitful way to address the kinship, and perhaps the possible friction, between science and religion.

Editor's Note: *Because of an international phone connection and the speaker's very soft voice, the hearing impaired and listeners accustomed to Standard American English will wish to listen to the audio while following along on the transcript.*



31. Joan Roughgarden

“Deconstructing Darwinian Selfishness”

PROFILE

Joan Roughgarden is professor of biology and geophysics at Stanford University. Her specialty is the evolution of social and sexual behaviors and mutualistic interactions, emphasizing the role of cooperation. Her two scholarly books on these themes are *The Genial Gene* and *Evolution's Rainbow*. Her popular book, *Evolution and Christian Faith*, is the topic of this conversation.

HIGHLIGHTS

One of the highlights of this conversation is **the way in which Joan Roughgarden responds to questions**—less from her own personal views as a Christian and more as **a biologist seeking to help religious people** find ways to responsibly **bring the findings of science into their faith**. Consequently, although a religious liberal herself, she has probed the Bible to find scriptural passages that can demonstrate—to even the theologically conservative—**why scientific findings are not in conflict with the sacred texts**. Some of the resolutions that she gently offers to fellow Christians are quite **innovative**. Accordingly, very few of the ideas and perspectives contained in this conversation are dealt with in any of the other dialogues of this series. For example, Roughgarden **portrays “Intelligent Design” advocates as being “spin doctors,”** and she will have nothing to do with them. But she enjoys reaching out in friendly ways to Christians who are authentically and openly literalistic about their faith, and she does this by recommending to them **particular Bible passages that are most congruent with modern scientific understandings**.

Another highlight of this dialogue is that it offers **an inside look at the challenges of ideological assumptions within the scientific endeavor** itself. It is also one of the best episodes for considering both **the importance and the risks in using metaphors in science and in religion**—specifically,

the tendency for a metaphor to later become concretized as real. Other topics substantially dealt with in this dialogue: discovery of **cooperative behaviors as driving forces in evolution**; whether the **New Atheists** are a help or a hindrance for evolving Christianity; the role of **pleasure** in supporting sociality; **religion as an evolved support for human cooperation** at wider scale than instincts alone could provide.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This conversation may be of exceptional benefit for anyone who thinks that mainstream science outright conflicts with the Bible—and who is troubled by such apparent conflict. It is also an eye-opener for religious liberals who do not personally require concordance between science and scripture, but who would appreciate learning novel approaches for explaining evolution in ways that can bridge to theologically conservative views. As well, any religious or secular audience who assumes that science is supremely an objective enterprise, free of ideological leanings and turmoil, will benefit from this inside look at a present-day debate within evolutionary biology: whether cooperation is possibly an even more significant driver of evolutionary change and success than is competition.

BLOG COMMENTS

Nic Paton says:

Joan gives good advice to steer clear of science with those rejecting it, and to approach the problem via scripture. Excellent insight (I must read her 2006 book) that the basic ingredients for the evolutionary hypothesis are already in the bible: e.g., selection (breeding) and randomness. I also like the fundamental alternative hypothesis of “the genial gene” and Joan’s short history of natural selection (1860s) → genetics (1920s) → good of species (1970s) → selfish gene (1976) and beyond. Overall: a 5 star discussion.

Richard Powell says:

I’ve been waiting with real anticipation for this conversation after noting Joan’s presence and courage as a speaker at the “Beyond Belief” conference. I was not disappointed. Her calm confidence and dutiful persistence in holding fellow scientists to the tenets of science is appreciated; and her faithful adherence to the same tenets inspires confidence in her assertions.



32. Kevin Kelly

“Faith at the Leading Edge of Technology”

PROFILE

Kevin Kelly is one of the most respected thinkers and writers on the leading edge of technology. Past editor of *Whole Earth Review* and *Wired Magazine*, and the author of three acclaimed books (most recently, *What Technology Wants*), Kelly interprets his Christian faith through personal spiritual experience, an evolutionary worldview, and a hope-filled regard for information systems and technology as extensions of biological evolution.

HIGHLIGHTS

In addition to its title subject, “Faith at the Leading Edge of **Technology**,” this interview offers superb opportunities to consider **the trajectory of evolution** (past and future), the **discoveries of science as a form of revelation**, the link between **free will and creativity**, and how **a fully evolutionary worldview can enrich one’s concept of God**. Two additional themes are covered with extraordinary novelty and impact, and both center on Kelly’s perhaps **unique (and inter-related) interpretations of two core Christian concepts**: (1) the cosmic significance of **Jesus** and (2) the problem of **theodicy** — why a good and powerful God would have created a universe in which suffering abounds. Regarding the latter, Question 4C of this study guide invites participants to consider not only Kelly’s resolution of the conundrum of suffering but also the solutions offered by eleven other speakers in this series, whose ideas are presented as brief quotations from their transcribed interviews.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

On the one hand, because of Kelly’s adherence to mainstream (if bold) understandings of the evolutionary and informational sciences, this interview will appeal to secularists and the liberal religious. However, because Kelly

recounts at the outset a mystical experience as a young adult that moved him to accept a literal understanding of the Resurrection and Jesus as the Incarnation of God (which he still does), this interview will also appeal to moderate and conservative Evangelicals. Because of Kelly’s focus on the cosmic significance of Jesus (and the crucifixion), and because of the inclusion of ten speakers’ quotations on theodicy (in addition to Kelly’s), this interview is also highly recommended for use in seminaries and graduate and undergraduate courses or seminars in religion.

BLOG COMMENTS

Richard Powell says:

I appreciated Kevin Kelly’s statement that he is on a quest to constantly question his concept of God and to find “the optimal God.” Looking for the greatest concept of God and adjusting or improving the concept over time is a wonderfully unselfconscious endeavor. The freedom of this position allows people like Kevin to appreciate a God that changes, more than a God that is fixed. . . . Best quote from this conversation: ‘Information is, as far as we can tell, the most intangible spiritual thing that we know. What is it? It is yes-and-no bits — it is I am, I am not’.

Cathy Russell says:

Great interview! Among so many favorite parts was the suggestion that Christianity move from focusing on End Times to focusing on our direction for the next 1,000 years.

Connie says:

I see Kelly’s perspective being a sound response to the age-old theodicy fears and thus the widespread willingness to let go of a concept of an all-powerful God in order to retain a sense of a loving, or at least caring, God. . . . My sense of what Kelly means is that any creator that creates something from which new levels and creations can then emerge on their own is, in a sense, “out of control” (which is the title of one of his books). A benign human collective may create technologies with the best of intentions, but evil may result. Similarly, “God” cannot be held responsible for the evils of the world — at least to the degree that we humans are grateful for our own degrees of independence, creativity, and free will.



33. Linda Gibler

“An Evolutionary View of Sacraments”

PROFILE

Linda Gibler is a Dominican Sister and associate academic dean at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. She is also adjunct professor for the Loyola Institute for Ministry. She is co-editor and contributing author of *The Evolutionary Epic: Science's Story and Humanity's Response*. Her book *From the Beginning to Baptism: Scientific and Sacred Stories of Water, Oil, and Fire* is the subject of this interview.

HIGHLIGHTS

Linda Gibler, a **theologian**, is one of six **Roman Catholic** sisters interviewed in this series. She is deeply grounded in the **cosmological sciences**, as well as in her own religious tradition. She is one of several speakers who tell the stories of their **sudden and profound awakenings to the Universe itself in a religious way**. Because Gibler undertook a great deal of scientific study while working on her doctorate in philosophy and religion, this interview is exceptional in demonstrating that one can fully **embrace science in ways that actually enrich one's experience of the divine, while maintaining congruence with traditional Christian doctrines**. This dialogue is also very strong in examining whether religious doctrines contributed to the **ecological crisis**, and how they might now contribute toward solutions. As well, the **distinction between theism and pantheism**, and what that distinction means for Christians today, is a highlight of this dialogue.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Any Catholic or other Christian audience for whom the sacraments are of great concern would benefit from this particular dialogue. Anyone keen on exploring differences in various religious “isms” (especially pantheism v. theism) will appreciate the in-depth colloquy prompted by the host's challenging queries in this regard. If the role of religions in motivating beneficial responses to the ecological crisis are important for an audience, then this interview is a must. Because Gibler draws upon systematic theology in her responses, this dialogue is highly recommended for all seminarians and theology students. Finally, Gibler is a very clear speaker, so audiences for whom English is a second language will be grateful for how easy she is to understand.

BLOG COMMENTS

Desmond Howard says:

I am so grateful for the technology that allows me to purchase an e-copy of Linda's book even before I finished listening to the conversation! I am searching it to further elucidate Linda's concept of the human intuition/memory derived from the time when we were stardust.

Recently, in a First Nations Sweat Lodge, I was encouraged to breathe so deeply that this life-giving air might find my umbilical cord and hence the umbilical cords of my ancestors. I can work with that, even if it is a stretch. But to look for a DNA trace from my days in space? WOW, indeed.

I have already been in conversation with my grandchildren comparing the burning of a candle and the glowing in our lives as being essentially the same process. It certainly gives new meaning to singing the chorus, “This little light of mine, I'm goin' to let it shine.” Thank you, Linda and Michael.



34. Spencer Burke

“The Emerging Church: A Heretical Guide”

PROFILE

Spencer Burke is at the forefront of the Emerging Church movement. He founded one of the largest online gathering places for people exploring new paths emanating from evangelical Christianity (TheOoze.com). Author of *A Heretic's Guide to Eternity*, he pastored churches and beyond-church religious communities for 22 years.

HIGHLIGHTS

This episode is “evolutionary” not because of attention given to the epic story of an evolving universe but because of its exploration of **how Christianity (especially evangelical Christianity) can evolve**. The perspective and way of doing church that Burke (and several others in this series) explore has come to be called the **Emerging Church movement**. Emerging Church expressions **maintain the passion of evangelicalism**, but the **values are transformed in accordance with postmodernism**. Notably, theological **diversity** is viewed as a good thing — despite the challenges of trying to bond people together who represent **different stages of faith development**.

Spencer Burke speaks on **the value of within-church heretics** (e.g., his own Emerging Church movement within evangelical Christianity), and Dowd celebrates the outsider role played by the **New Atheists** in compelling Christianity to evolve. Dowd suggests that “evidence is the gift of science; interpretation is the gift of religion.” Burke devotes special attention to the

importance of holding **beliefs** robustly enough to serve one's life and action in the world, but lightly enough to **maintain openness to further development**.

As well, Spencer Burke **critiques the “standard model” of doing church**, which he concludes is ill-suited to these times because it operates like a “one-room-schoolhouse.” As well, he advocates churches **divesting themselves of volunteer programs** and instead launching church members into established volunteerism available in the community at large. A leader in **creating online community and dialogue**, Burke even suggests that churches of the future will be less and less tied to actual buildings and worship-style “events.”

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Anyone interested in the Emerging Church movement and/or fostering and thriving with theological diversity within church congregations will find much of value in this conversation. Church leaders of any denomination will find provocative Spencer Burke's suggestions for encouraging diversity and celebrating openness to changing beliefs and vastly different ways of “doing church.”



35. Ursula King

“Evolutionary Spirituality and the Power of Love”

PROFILE

Ursula King is an internationally renowned scholar on spirituality, interfaith dialogue, women and religion, and evolutionary mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. She is professor emerita of religious studies at the University of Bristol. Her books include *Spirit of Fire: The Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin* and *Religion and Gender*.

HIGHLIGHTS

For Ursula King, **“evolution” is not just one aspect of her Christian faith; it is central.** The grand story of a 13.7-billion-year-old cosmos pervades her sense of the sacred and the possibilities she envisions for humanity and for religions. She **interprets the evolutionary journey** in a way that celebrates the roles played by both diversifying and unifying processes toward the **emergence of greater complexity**, **“interiority,”** and **self-reflexivity**. Within the human realm, she points to **“the power of love”** as the unifying force that enables ever-greater levels of **human cooperation**. Strong in its **interfaith and planetary focus**, this interview portrays the **evolution of consciousness** more as a species-wide emergent than as an individual human quest. The opportunity for science to enhance our **reverence for nature** and guide the development of a viable **environmental ethic** are also key.

This is **the premier interview for sampling the profound influence of two of the leading lights** in promoting a deeply meaningful embrace of the full sweep of evolution and its implications for religion in general and Christianity in particular. These two major influences are **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** (1881–1955) and **Thomas Berry** (1914–2009). Note: Three additional

interviews present Teilhard’s ideas, but in less detail (John Haught, Ilia Delio, and Diarmuid O’Murchu.) The dialogue with Gail Worcelo also explores the ideas and influence of Thomas Berry in great depth.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Any group eager to sample some of the most important ideas of Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry will want to experience this interview. Christian terminology and doctrines are sparse, as the epic of evolution is explored primarily for its capacities to transform all faiths and all of humanity. Even though some of the concepts are scholarly, the excitement and celebration of a hopeful view of humanity’s future imbues this episode with an energy and accessibility that makes it engaging for all. Highly recommended for women’s study groups, as well.

BLOG COMMENTS

Jerald Robertson says:

Wow! Ursula King is brilliant, such a range of understanding. This one I will be replaying a few times.

Cindy says:

Thank you, Ursula, for leading us into some deeper truths. Wisdom is surely speaking through your insights. God bless you and all those who have helped to form you into the person that you are today!

Editor’s Note: Because of an international phone connection and the speaker’s Austrian accent, the hearing impaired and listeners accustomed to Standard American English will wish to listen to the audio while following along on the transcript.



36. Joan Chittister

“God and the Evolutionary World”

PROFILE

Joan Chittister is a Benedictine sister who co-chairs the Global Peace Initiative of Women. She is a columnist for *National Catholic Reporter* and *Huffington Post* and a prolific author. A *Publishers Weekly* review characterizes her as “well known in Catholic circles for her willingness to take on anybody—even the Pope—in defense of women's rights.

HIGHLIGHTS

Joan Chittister offers **the most complete menu of traditional and possible concepts of (and metaphors for) God** of anyone in this series, while advocating for her own God image that celebrates “**evolutionary theology**.” She **boldly critiques not only male- and power-dominant images of God but also, what she calls, “merit theology.”** Thus she favors a view of human freedom and fallibility wherein, as with the evolution of life, **mistakes unleash the potential for future growth**. Humanity both emerges from natural evolutionary processes and is called to **participate in co-creating (with God) a vibrant and socially just future**. In telling her life story, Chittister puts a positive spin on a heartbreaking misfortune of her childhood, thereby encouraging her audience to **re-intepret their own life stories in ways that evoke gratitude**.

This episode joins the conversation with Gail Worcelo (episode 25) in demonstrating the **activism of faith-driven Catholic nuns who courageously defy institutional constraints** in their quest for a faith congruent with science and supportive of a better world. It is also a superb platform for exploring **developmental stages of faith**, especially as evident in the menu of past and new God concepts, formulations of human purpose, and interpretations of **the two origin stories in the book of Genesis**.

Although atheism is not dealt with per se, Joan's insistence on **morality being a natural emergent of biological and cultural evolution** can help the faithful overcome a widespread prejudice against individuals for whom scripture and religious belief are no longer relevant. Overall, this interview is **unsurpassed for demonstrating how the discoveries of science add value to religious perspectives, while urging religions (and religious interpretations) to evolve**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This conversation is highly recommended for all religious and secular groups for whom liberal theology and liberal values are worthy topics for thought and discussion. Conservative (as well as moderate and liberal) Catholics would benefit from exposure to this highly visible feminist and social activist nun. While Chittister's concrete and pointed style of speaking makes this interview riveting and fully accessible to lay audiences, seminarians and the academically inclined will find this episode packed with well formulated and precisely stated responses to some of the thorniest theological conundrums, e.g., theodicy, free will, God's power, human purpose, and how to interpret the origin stories of Genesis. *Note:* Chittister's insistence that seemingly “radical” nuns are actually honoring long Catholic tradition can best be understood if this episode is paired with that of Sr. Gail Worcelo.

BLOG COMMENTS

Patricia Paz says:

I just had such a wonderful time listening to Joan. No wonder: She has a PhD in communication. She worded the evolutionary God in such a clear and beautiful way! Her conversation was full of light and insight, and she helped me put into words my own intuitions about God and the ongoing creation, which fully involves me in it.

Richard Powell says:

This talk was another bright spot in the series for me. Joan clearly articulated just how radically different the evolution story is from the orthodox view, and yet paradoxically how we can reconcile this difference with the truths embedded in Christianity. Here Joan helped ease my mind when she talked about evolution being the outcome of uncountable mistakes over the course of millions of years of evolution.

The second significant point was about free will. I also really liked the idea of “growth vs perfectionism.”



37. Paul Smith

“Expanding the Trinity: God in 3D”

PROFILE

Paul Smith and the congregation he pastors (in Missouri) have been on the evolving edge of Christianity for nearly 50 years. Bringing himself and his church into congruence with shifting cultural attitudes in women’s equality and gay rights, Paul and his congregation were expelled from the Southern Baptist Convention in 2003. His current focus of spiritual development infuses Progressive Christianity with Integral theory. He is the author of *Integral Christianity*.

HIGHLIGHTS

This episode centers on Paul Smith’s **biblically congruent** celebration of, what he calls, “the Infinite God,” “the Intimate God,” and “the Inner God.” These “**three faces of God**” (or “God in 3D”) is one of the foundations of **Integral theory**, generally associated with philosopher Ken Wilber. As well, the “**stages of development**” aspect of **Integral theory** is explored in a Progressive Christian context, helping participants to grasp that life conditions tend to unfold an evolving consciousness at both the individual and societal levels. Because Paul Smith is “**Jesus-centered**, not religion-centered,” the primary example he uses of “God in 3D” is his interpretation of **the three ways that Jesus related to God** — and which he then offers as a model for religious seekers of all faiths. Similarly, he explains **the six stages of faith development** by way of how the same personal **experience of the presence of Jesus** would be interpreted differently at each level.

Overcoming inherited **prejudices** (e.g. of **homosexuality** and **women’s equality**) is explored by way of Paul’s telling of his own life journey. Study guide questions are designed to promote **critical reflection on one’s own**

worldview and a willingness and ability to temporarily step into the perspective of someone else. This episode is also an opportunity for participants to reflect on their own faith journeys and “stages of development.” Finally, here is a superb platform for exploring different (and sometimes incommensurable) **standards of evidence** — notably, the standards of **science** v. those of “**nonordinary**” **states of consciousness**.

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

This episode is highly recommended for learners keenly interested in Christian applications of Integral theory, about nonordinary (and mystical) states of consciousness, possibilities for cultivating a personal relationship to Jesus / the divine, and the implications of all these developments for progressive forms of Christianity.

BLOG COMMENTS

Ellen S says:

This was one of the best conversations. Paul Smith reiterates many of the points made by other panelists but in a way that I found particularly meaningful. He really spoke about how this faith journey of his was shared in a corporate, church setting. How it did affect church life — many left, many others came — and I think that speaks to the value of a minister leading a congregation on a journey that is challenging, risky, truth-seeking. I was very moved.

Mary says:

I have been surprised and delighted by each of the people who have talked about their faith. After listening to Paul who is so direct about sharing his transcendent experience and inspirational and helpful views about a 3-D God, I wanted to say, “At Last, at last, at long last!”

Richard R. Powell says:

Amazing summary of Integral thought. Paul, you have really taken this stuff to heart and lived and breathed it. It was encouraging to hear someone so versed in this view who is making sense of their experience with new epiphanies along the way. It was inspiring for me because, while I have read Wilber and listened to the 1,2,3, of God, I have mostly done so in a vacuum. I will be listening to this audio again for sure—if nothing else, to hear your passion for the subject, and be encouraged.



38. Michael Dowd

“Evidence As Divine Communication: REALizing Faith”

PROFILE

Michael Dowd is an itinerant evolutionary evangelist and religious naturalist. He is the author of *Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World*, which was endorsed by six Nobel laureates and other science luminaries, including noted skeptics, and by religious leaders across the spectrum.

HIGHLIGHTS

As Dowd explains at the outset, **“REALizing” one’s faith means reinterpreting core religious doctrines in fully this-world realistic ways.** His approach contrasts with traditional supernatural explanations, or (what Dowd calls) **“pre-natural” interpretations** — meaning, interpretations that arose before science could offer **natural explanations for the powers and calamities of nature** and before skeptical inquiry could safely **question the miracle stories** passed down through generations.

Half of the core concepts in this episode are presented as **five sequential transitions Dowd himself worked through in his own journey** of REALizing Christian faith. The five transitions are: (1) the recognition that **“evidence is divine communication”** (evidence being that which comes from scientific, historic, and cross-cultural sources); (2) **“the collapse of the two-story universe”** and the recognition that **“God is not a person** but a personification of reality”; (3) an **“expanded sense of self”** as an “expression of the universe” and thus fully related to all that is; (4) appreciating **“death as natural and generative at all levels of reality”**; and (5) “understanding that the promises of religion can’t possibly be fulfilled in this life if we don’t have **our best evidential understanding of human nature**, which is that we have **mismatched instincts** and we live in a world of **supernormal stimuli.**”

Other core concepts include: **Religions as “mythic maps of reality,” prayer** and intimacy with God (when God is understood as reality personified), a religious naturalist view of “the **problem of evil**,” and how **compassion** for self and others is effortlessly evoked when we grasp how ill-equipped human instincts are for **navigating our modern world brimming with “supernormal” temptations.**

SUGGESTED AUDIENCES

Because Dowd serves as host of all 37 of the prior episodes, this interview is recommended for nearly all discussion-group or classroom situations, as participants will surely become curious about what this host believes and values. The only exception would be institutional settings in which scriptural literalism is a core and unquestioned component of faith, and in which course leaders wish to protect participants from exposure to unorthodox perspectives.

Because Dowd uplifts the role of science and the value of skeptical inquiry in his depiction of himself as a “mythic naturalist” form of evolutionary Christian, secular and humanist/atheist participants will feel that their own worldviews are valued. Importantly, because Dowd takes his host role seriously in the previous episodes (and thus downplays any differences he has with the thought-leaders being interviewed), our recommendation would be to use this episode at or near the end of whatever mixture and sequencing of episodes that are ultimately chosen for your particular group.

BLOG COMMENTS

Paul Snell says:

The final interview was just extraordinary, astonishing. I commend you so very highly for your sharing. I wish that what you had to say could be put to music, dance, poetry, children’s stories, and/or other kinds of stories. But, in fact, this has already happened many times over for many centuries and with more to come. One just has to look for the artistic offerings and to keep ones ears, eyes, and nose open for more.