

Kevin Kelly

“Faith at the Leading Edge of Technology”

Episode 32 of The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity

EvolutionaryChristianity.com



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.

KEYWORD TOPICS

Golden calf worship (extant in India), **born-again experience**, **Jesus** (as incarnation of God), **death** (as impetus to fully living), **Bible** (fallibility of), **Nature** (as source of revelation), **God** (as evolving), an "**optimal God**", **salvation**, **free will** (as gift of God), **free will** as necessitating harm and suffering, **technology** (passing free will through to), **creativity** (as gift of God), **death of Jesus** (as God making amends for causing suffering), **online/Internet** (beginnings of), **Whole Earth Catalog**, **hackers**, **Larry Brilliant**, **the Well** (the first public access to the Internet), **digital culture**, **Amish**, the **Technium**, **technological evolution** (as organic and democratic), **self-organization** (of all aspects of the universe), **the Great Story**, **technology's**

relationship to God, technology's cosmic role, Joel de Rosnay, artificial intelligence (as pushing humanity into "godhood"), **technology's need for moral guidance, *The Matrix*** (movie), **information** (in the laws of physics), **spirituality of information technologies, evolution of evolutionary processes, trajectory of evolution, sentience, adaptability, Stephen Jay Gould** (critique of), **Simon Conway Morris, convergent evolution** (examples of), **Richard Dawkins** (as advocate of convergent evolution), **emergence, End Times** (critique of), **future of Christianity, future of humanity, Google** (as our exo-brain), **cooking** (humanity's reliance on)

BIOGRAPHY

Kevin Kelly authored the best-selling *New Rules for the New Economy, What Technology Wants* and the classic book on decentralized emergent systems, *Out of Control*. Currently, he is Senior Maverick at *Wired Magazine*, which he helped found in 1999. He is also editor and publisher of the Cool Tools website, which gets half a million unique visitors per month. From 1984 to 1990 Kelly was publisher and editor of the *Whole Earth Review*, a journal of unorthodox technical news. He co-founded the ongoing Hackers' Conference and was involved with the 1985 launch of the WELL, a pioneering online service.

Kelly was an early advocate of cataloging and making available online an inventory of the full diversity of life, species by species. He also is a guiding force in the Long Now Foundation, which fosters long-term responsibility as an antidote to the extremely short-term horizon of most contemporary organizations. Together with Stewart Brand he co-hosts a monthly forum in San Francisco featuring talks on long-term thinking.

Kevin Kelly has an extensive website, with an abundance of free information and essays and several blogs: <http://www.kk.org/>

SUPPLEMENTARY VIDEO

"Kevin Kelly on The Technium":

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eeTEcwmfuu4&feature=related>

Note: there is no video material on Kelly's evolutionary view of Christianity.

SUPPLEMENTARY WEBPAGE

Listener comments to this audio can be found (and more can be added) at the following url:

<http://evolutionarychristianity.com/blog/general/kevin-kelly-technology-and-faith-evolving/>

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. **Becoming a Christian: Easter Sunday in Jerusalem.** In Kevin Kelly's telling of his personal faith journey, we learn that he dropped out of college and spent eight years as a photographer roaming the world. Though he had rejected his Catholic upbringing as a child, he reports that,

I had a religious experience in Jerusalem at Easter. I came to believe the heretical idea that **this historical person called Jesus was not only a kind of enlightened teacher but was, in fact, an incarnation of the very godhead who had created the universe.** Once I believed that, the funny thing was I didn't feel any differently. I thought that I should suddenly be elevating among clouds, but none of that happened.

Instead, **I decided that I needed to live as if I were going to die in six months.** And that was another journey that I set off on. I think the reason was because I needed to have that **born-again experience**, which happened six months later, where actually I didn't die, but I woke up that morning and had the experience of being born again.

In this conversation Kelly directs listeners to a more complete version of his strikingly unusual story of conversion, which is available on the NPR "This American Life" website. Below are several paragraphs drawn from that longer story (full version [here](#)).

. . . I entered Jerusalem on Easter with the simple expectation that I was going to photograph yet another religious ceremony, another religious festival. And then for various reasons **I got locked out of my hostel room.** They had a curfew, and I didn't make it back in time. And I was in quite a fix because I was a stranger in this very strange town. When it happened, I didn't have enough money to stay elsewhere, nor did I even have knowledge of where to go.

So I wandered the old town of Jerusalem at night, which had been shuttered up and was like a time machine. It was as if I had been transported back into the 15th century, because all the souvenir vendors were gone, and what was left were the labyrinthine paths of cobbled passageways. And I wandered around for a number of hours, and it was getting colder. Eventually I found myself at the one place that was still open, which was some of the churches. And particularly I finally settled into **the Church of the Holy Sepulchre**, which is called and viewed as the church built over the mound **where Jesus Christ was crucified.**

And I was getting very tired, and there weren't many people around. And so eventually I laid myself out on about the only flat area that was left, which was this marble slab underneath some pendants that had incense on them. And this was presumably the slab that commemorated the exact position of the crosses. So I slept there. **I slept on the crucifixion spot that night** because it was the only place. There was no place in the inn.

I slept there until early morning, when the activities started to increase, and people started coming in. And I went out and followed the crowd where it was going when they were going out to the tombs area in Jerusalem. And I went out, and there were some folding chairs set up in front of this tomb area. And **as the sun was coming up on that Easter morning, I was staring at empty tombs.**

And for a reason that I cannot comprehend, as I sat on that chair contemplating this view of the early morning sun coming into the empty tombs, all that I had been wrestling with for the past

many, many years in thinking about religion sort of became resolved in my mind. And at that very moment, **I believed that Jesus Christ has indeed risen from those tombs.**

. . . there was an idea that came into my mind that just would not go away. And that was that **I should live as if I would die in six months**, that I should really truly live. And that I could not tell for certain whether I would really die, but that either way I should live as if I was going to die. And so that was the assignment.

Question 1: *What most struck you (or surprised you or moved you) in Kevin Kelly's telling of his personal faith journey?*

2. **Science as "one of the ways to get to know God."** Although Kevin's experience in Jerusalem convinced him of the verity of the Christian doctrine that Jesus literally rose from his tomb, he uses the Bible selectively. He says,

I use **the Bible as a guide** rather than something that's infallible. And I think that the power of **Jesus** transcends our understandings and has to be certainly informed by the rest of Creation, which is very visible to us. **I think God speaks to us**, and Jesus as well speaks to us, **through the visible world**. That's why I believe that **science is actually one of the ways that we can get to know God**.

Question 2: *What role does **science** play in your own sense of connecting deeply with realms greater than the human, how to know what is of ultimate importance, and finding guidance for how we should live?*

3. **Free will and creativity as gifts from God.** For Kevin Kelly, who is one of the leading thinkers on the evolution of information technologies, it is not surprising that the concepts of free will and creativity in the universe are central for him. He says,

If you think about an **optimal God**, which is what my quest is, it's not just this planet. The God is not just the God of this planet. It's going to be the God of many planets, so there have to be **many other beings and civilizations throughout the universe**. My understanding is that what this optimal God is doing is in some ways sharing, **bestowing sparks of its own free will into its Creation**. And again, I see a lot of what we're doing right now with technology as a reflection of this. When we make an artificial intelligence or something such as **robots, we are going to want to give them some element of our free will, dispensing them with the same goodness that we have**. And I think the same thing with the God who is taking whatever that substance is, that quality that makes it possible for It to create, and sharing that creative force with its Creation, **bestowing that creative force into its creations**, in a sort of very recursive sense.

Question 3: *What is your own sense of where creativity comes from? What about free will? To what extent is it appropriate for us to invest our technologies with those capacities? And to what extent did Kevin Kelly's explanation affect your own thinking on these topics?*

4. **The paradox of creativity and what it means for understanding the crucifixion.** For Kevin Kelly, the **crucifixion** is not only central to his understanding of the **divinity of Jesus**. It also provides **guidance for how humanity should think about its own creative powers**. He says,

I think that as soon as you put any kind of **free will or creative force** into something that you've created, you have suddenly unleashed a paradox. You have unleashed something that can conceivably **choose to do harm**. And then in this calculus of godhood, **you are in some ways responsible for that harm**. But at the same time, because it's free will, that being is also responsible.

So, there's some kind of relationship to that harm that's now possible and that both the being and the God have to amend. And, I think that is the story of how the **God amends the harm that his creative beings have done with their free will by taking that harm back upon himself**.

On our planet, with the bodies that we have—that are run on blood, that are mortal, that have this biological thing—the way that we understand that sacrifice is with this being of Jesus. And I call Him **the Cosmic Jesus** because I believe that **every civilization [in the universe] will have its own version of how this free will harm has been redeemed by the God**.

Question 4A: *Almost certainly, this interpretation of the spiritual significance of the **crucifixion** of Jesus is something that you have never before encountered. What is your overall response to this novel idea?*

Question 4B: In a way, Kevin Kelly offers a robust answer to one of the most vexing questions facing anyone wrestling with **the paradox of why a good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God** would have created a world in which **suffering** is so prevalent — not just within humanity but also in other sentient life forms. *To what extent does Kelly's solution to (what is called in academic circles) **the problem of "theodicy," of suffering and evil**, ease your own religious or secular concerns about this issue?*

Question 4C: Eleven other speakers in this series have, likewise, offered solutions to the theodicy problem. These **eleven are excerpted below**. *Read each quotation and then offer your own best solution to the problem of suffering — and discuss whether your solution adequately eases your concerns.*

Ian Barbour: I think that we need to stress God's love more than God's power. This ages-old problem of how you fit together an omnipotent God and the evil in the world and a loving God—and I would rather give ground on the omnipotence than the love.

Bruce Sanguin: We contemplate the suffering of Christ as an embodiment of all the suffering that has ever gone on cosmologically in the human species and the other-than-human species. And it evokes in us an empathic response, an evolutionary impulse to evolve along the empathic line of intelligence.

John Cobb: If you start out with the assumption that the only kind of power that you want to talk about is the power of controlling things, then of course you hate to say, "Oh, but God only has a little bit of it." That makes it sound like God is weak. But if you understand that God's power is the

power of love, not the power of force, then you can marvel at how great that power is.

Tom Thresher: Looking through the eyes of the Christ, there is no evil. It is seen in wholeness in a way that is dramatically different. But everything prior to that is partial. And within our partial seeing, we encounter evil. It is part of living in the world of duality. This is a hard comment to make, but evil is to a great extent in the eye of the beholder. If we enter it as understood as evil, we engage it as evil and live within that world. If we see it from the mind of Christ, we love that which we would formerly call evil, and only within that context of unconditional love is it transformed.

Michael Dowd (in dialogue with Tom Thresher): The way I think of *evil* is within the frame of a nested, emergent understanding of the universe—that is, we see greater complexity consistently emerging out of less complexity. I see *evil* as that which is pursuing its own self-interest—whether an individual or corporation, whatever—at the expense of the larger or smaller holons of its existence. One of the fundamental patterns we learn from the history of the universe is that chaos, destruction, breakdowns, violence—extinctions, even—are the primary things that have catalyzed creativity for billions of years. From that largest perspective, what is evil if the divine uses that, if reality is able to use that, for new creative emergence?

John Haught: Picture in our imperfect language a God who, in a sense, retracts any coercive exercise of power and opens up a space within which something other than God can come into being. In other words, creation is not divine pyrotechnics so much as what happens when omnipotence becomes *humble* (I say this in very human and inadequate language) and opens up a space for something to come into that space—namely, a world.

Mary Southard: To use Jesus' words, which were what I was with at the time, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it's just a grain of wheat. But if it dies, and is broken open, it brings forth much fruit." So that was my dominant image and it kind of still is. It's at the heart of the dynamics of the universe.

Diarmuid O'Murchu: There is a certain quality and a quantity of suffering that seems innate to the movements of creation and is therefore part of God's creativity. So our task as human beings is not to rid the world totally of suffering, but to help us to understand *what* suffering is necessary at times, how do we engage more constructively and creatively with suffering, and how do we learn to befriend it rather than trying to conquer and control it? I think that's where a lot of unnecessary suffering is caused: by our excessive felt need to conquer and control it, as if it's some kind of an object we can bring into the bar of our own reasoning.

John Polkinghorne: Evolutionary theory tells us we start with bacteria and end up with human beings. On the other hand, there is a tremendous tale of extinctions and wastefulness and suffering on the way. . . the anguishing fact of cancer in the world is not gratuitous. It's a necessary result of the process by which creatures make themselves. Now, I don't suggest that removes all our anger and anguish we feel about the way the world is. But it is, I think, helpful in that respect.

Joan Roughgarden: The notion that evolution must lead to selfishness and brutality and a lack of empathy, and to relentless individual competition, is simply not accurate. That's not the way animals actually are, and it's not the way evolutionary theory actually works. . . If people are concerned that evolution necessarily flies in the face of a Christian doctrine of love and mutual care and regard, *stop worrying*. It doesn't necessarily fly in the face of those important spiritual and

Christian values. It's a mischaracterization of our science that so many of the New Atheists portray evolutionary inevitability as one of selfishness and relentless brutality.

Joan Chittister: In evolutionary theology, this whole notion of perfectionism simply disintegrates into dust and sand and fragments. Perfectionism is not of the essence of evolution. Nature doesn't work that way. We evolve through trial and error, through mistake, after mistake, after mistake—through adjusting to circumstances as they have developed in our lives—sin, error, mistakes. In evolutionary theology, these become the patterns of growth in life: that we can evolve into more tomorrow than we are today; we can learn today from today's errors; and we can adapt and adjust to that.

5. **A God that is changing.** Kevin Kelly does far more than merely reconcile the Christian notion of God with the science of evolution. Rather, he speaks of **how evolution compelled him to think of God in even grander ways**. He says,

My experience with science has sent me on a quest to constantly question or investigate or shape my concept of God. By definition, my definition, God is *the* greatest being that one could imagine, so I'm constantly saying, can I imagine a more powerful being than I have been? And very early on, it was obvious to me that **a God capable of creating a world through evolution was a much greater God**. Recently, I've concluded that a God that is itself changing is a greater God than a God that is fixed. And so this idea of **persistent change that science preaches** has forced me to constantly try to upgrade or improve my concept of who God is. And once I began doing that, it certainly **influenced my conceptions of Christ**.

Question 5: *Did you find helpful Kevin Kelly's portrayal of how evolution evokes grander concepts of God? Overall, in your effort to integrate science with your worldview (or faith), do you find yourself more on the side of merely accepting evolution or fully celebrating it?*

6. **The evolution of evolutionary processes.** Unique to this series, Kevin Kelly emphasizes that the processes of evolution, themselves, have evolved through time. He says,

When we talk about the evolution of life, **evolution itself has evolved over time**. We forget that in the very **primitive life**, in the beginning of its evolution, the kinds of processes that were running it were very primitive compared to, say, the way evolution now works. As more and more structure was added, and more and more complicated organisms, **evolution itself became more and more complicated** and involved. As it started to make **social groups**, there were further kinds of evolution. When we came to making technology in our societies, our own **technologies** have affected our own biological evolution. Evolution right now, even in our own lives, is very, very complicated. It is not at all the same thing that was happening with prokaryotes and bacteria.

Question 6: *Did you find meaningful Kevin Kelly's description of how evolutionary processes, themselves, have evolved? Why or why not?*

7. **The trajectory of evolution.** Both Kevin Kelly and Michael Dowd **criticize one part of the legacy of Stephen Jay Gould**. Gould was one of the most well known evolutionary biologists of the late 20th century, and he was widely regarded as a leading popularizer of mainstream evolutionary theory. Here is Kevin Kelly's critique:

Kelly: The orthodoxy in evolutionary biology today is best stated by the late **Stephen Jay Gould**, who said that there is absolutely **no direction to evolution over time**, that it's contingency based, meaning that if you rewind or if you redo, if you start from the same starting point in the same world and initial conditions, that in fact as things evolve over time you'll get something completely absolutely different—and that there are no inherent biases or directions in evolution. That is the orthodoxy.

When I stand back and look at the largescale movement from nothing to very complicated somethings, from the billions of years of increasing order and self-organization, I think it's very clear that there are these **trends, these directions, these constraints, these convergences**. What we need to do, over time, is to actually make them clear, to make them more evident.

Here is Dowd's critique:

Dowd: Convergent evolution is where something emerges time and again, independently—**eyesight**, for example, emerging over two dozen different times in different lineages, independently. No matter how many times you run the tape back and run it out again, the way **Stephen Jay Gould** wanted to, **you're always going to have eyesight**, you're always going to have **flying creatures**, you're going to have **the tree form**, you're going to probably have some creature that comes to know that it knows.

Question 7A: *To what extent have you become aware of these **disagreements of interpretation** within evolutionary biology — that is, whether evolution is seen to have a direction? What assumptions about **directionality** in evolution did you enter this series with? And what do you think about that subject now?*

Question 7B: *In your view, should scientists who speak to or write for the general public make an effort to distinguish where commonly held scientific facts and theories end and where, in their writings, they move into **their own interpretations** — about which there may be legitimate disagreement in the sciences? If yes, say more.*

Question 7C: *Michael Dowd lists several examples of "**convergent evolution**" — that is, features of biological life that one could expect to emerge time and again. As you begin to grasp this degree of **nonrandomness**, what difference does it make for your regard for evolution? Does evolution, perhaps, seem less cold and harsh than it did before?*

Question 7D (Supplemental): *In talking about convergent evolution, Michael Dowd points to an online list of **biological examples of convergence** that his wife, Connie Barlow, prepared and posted online (at the link below). Peruse that list and **choose one example** of convergence that you were unaware of before, but that you find exciting or comforting to learn about. Discuss what attracts you to that example.*

“Let There Be Sight!” - <http://thegreatstory.org/convergence.pdf>

8. **Why evolution is “good.”** Kevin Kelly unhesitatingly labels evolution as “good.” Here is why:

When I say [that the evolution of evolutionary processes] is a reflection of the divine, what I mean is that **this long process creates what we would call good**. When we look around the world and we identify things that are good, all those things were created through this process. And that’s how they got here. So in that sense, good has come from those processes. I’d say that **that process is a reflection of the godhead**.

Question 8: *Is Kevin Kelly’s assessment of evolution, the good, and God helpful for you? How so, or why not?*

9. **Technology as an extension of biological evolution.** Kevin Kelly describes the core of his newest book, *What Technology Wants*. He says:

The best way to think about technology is that it’s an extension and acceleration of the very same forces that work through evolution. Now, we can elevate it even further and say that the best way to understand those forces of evolution is in fact that they’re an extension and acceleration of exotropic **self-organization** that runs through the entire universe. And so, in a certain sense, the world of all the stuff that we’re making, and all this consumer stuff, is actually part of a long arc that goes back to the beginning of the universe—this long arc of increasing self-organization, increasing order, at least in certain little pockets. Increasing self-organization happens over time: it connects how galaxies stay together and how stars maintain their constant state of manufacturing elements, and planets with atmospheres, and our planet, at least, that has life, that is **increasing in its complexity over time and makes a mind, and this mind makes increasing technology**. This is all one long, great story. . . . The story continues *through* us into technology and will continue beyond us.

Question 9: *Do you find hope and excitement in thinking about technology the way Kevin Kelly does: as a further evolution of biology? How or how not?*

10. **The human necessity to choose which technologies to embrace.** Kevin Kelly, as one of the leading participants and thinkers in online communication, education, and creativity, recounts his story of going online in 1984. But he also is very careful about personally keeping many technologies at a distance: He says, “I’m a big believer in **minimizing the amount of technology in your personal life, while trying to maximize the amount of technology in the world at large**. This part of ‘minimizing the amount of technologies’ is done by selecting just the right thing.” Indeed, he includes a chapter in his book on the **Amish** (highlighting their preferences for simple technologies).

Question 10: *Does Kevin Kelly’s assessment of the importance of **actively choosing which***

*new technologies to bring into the home, and which not to, inspire you to see our technological future in a new way? That is, while our species is encouraged to invent new technologies, **individuals and families must exercise greater responsibility** in selecting which ones to bring into their lives. And do you think this distinction between liberal invention and conservative acquisition is important and useful? As well, to what extent do you feel that the technologies you (or your family members) have brought into the home are, on balance, beneficial?*

11. **What is the relationship between us and technology and God?** This is a question posed by Kevin Kelly. Said another way, he is interested in “the cosmic role of technology.” He explains:

As we begin to **invent artificial intelligences** and robots, we are going to need, in a certain sense, these theological frameworks. People who have no belief at all are going to be dragged into discussions where these concepts and this thinking are going to be necessary because we’re going to create things, and we’re going to try very hard to, and eventually we will succeed in giving them some kind of **free will**. And, at that point, they may stand up and say, “I’m a child of God.” And what do we say to them? Or they may do things that are **harmful**, and then we have to wrestle with our godhood.

We’re going to realize that **we are made in the image of God and so therefore we’re going to create things just like God did**. We’re going to make these other beings and we’re going to have the same problem that God had. So for me, I think that by thinking about these things we can begin to rehearse them and get ahead. It’s not just frivolous theologizing; it’s actually going to become very instrumental and practical. . . I think the recursive nature of the universe will reveal itself, and we’ll see that **the reason why we wanted to talk about God is because we are going to be gods**. That’s my interest in this. It’s not philosophical; I think it’s actually going to be practical.

Question 11A: *What is your overall reaction to Kelly’s perspective on this issue? What do you find helpful in it, and what (if anything) do you find troubling?*

Question 11B: *Should **religions** and religious communities and classrooms be discussing this issue of the future of technology and how we determine and apply **moral guidance** for safely and beneficially adding new technologies into the world and into our lives? If yes, how do you think this can best be done? If no, why not?*

12. **The “End Times” futurism of Christianity: wrong for 2,000 years.** Kevin Kelly is highly critical of End Times belief in Christianity. He says,

I’ve been very concerned about the organized religion of Christianity, because for the past 2,000 years it’s had a singular, mono-scenario for its future—that the End Times were near, that the end was near, that there was no future. So for 2,000 years, Christianity has believed that it was near the End Times, the end was over. And for 2,000 years, it has been wrong. The same scenario has been

wrong for 2,000 years. **It's now time to have an alternative scenario.**

Question 12: *What is your sense of the End Times beliefs that still loom large in some Christian contexts, especially in the United States? If you know of someone who believes that the end is near, what difference does it seem to make in how they live their life, how they view deteriorating ecological and cultural conditions, and how they navigate their personal challenges?*

13. **The future of Christianity.** Kevin Kelly muses on the future of Christianity, saying,

I looked at the **geographical center of Christianity** and concluded that, from its origins in Jerusalem, it's been drifting westward at almost a constant rate—first heading up towards Armenia, and then going over to Constantinople, and then over into Rome, and then kind of over into Britain and Northern Europe. And now it's sort of **centered in the U.S., and it's going to keep drifting westward into Asia**. The rise of Christianity in Asia (and in the South, too) is phenomenal and is going to shift the geographical center of it to Asia.

There are some people who can imagine the thing keeping drifting and returning, in a certain sense, **back to the Middle East in a thousand years**—sort of circumnavigating the globe. That's one imagining, one scenario: that Christianity becomes an Eastern religion again. But what I'm really suggesting about the point of this is that **I think that everybody and every Christian should begin to think about the next thousand years to contemplate alternative scenarios—other than the single one that's been wrong for two thousand years**. What would Christianity look like a thousand years from now?

Question 13: In this series, **John Shelby Spong** represents the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of speculating about the future of Christianity. Spong says, "I don't want to contemplate what a thousand years is going to be like. You take the moment and you live in faithfulness and in dialogue with the realities of that moment, and then you build a pathway into the future—a future that you cannot see. . . What form it's going to take, I don't even want to speculate, because I'm too busy trying to be faithful in *my* moment, which is always a transition moment." SO THE QUESTION IS THIS: *On **the spectrum running between John Shelby Spong and Kevin Kelly**, where do you tend to reside as to the importance of thinking about the future of Christianity? What value, if any, do you see in the Church collectively engaging in this inquiry? Finally, if you have arrived at your own sense of where Christianity is heading, briefly describe it.*

14. **The future of humanity.** Kevin Kelly speculates on the future of humanity, beginning with a reminder of how much we have already become dependent on our technologies. He says,

Culture has actually accelerated our biological evolution—and that's even before we've done the genetic engineering that we're going to do. We'll certainly become much **more dependent on our technologies**. We've done it already. **We're already dependent on cooking** and other

technologies like that. So I don't have a good sense of what that will look like, other than I think it'll become invisible, like it has so far. I mean, the fact that we're dependent on cooking is invisible to us. I don't think we're going to become aware of it. It won't look or feel very different. It's just like **we're dependent on writing**; we're dependent on lots of other things. We'll become dependent on this exo-brain of **Google**—and as long as it's on, we'll use it. We'll offload all kinds of things to this constantly always-on brain that we're swimming in.

That seems inevitable to me. **Human cloning is inevitable**, partly because we already have it; it's called twins. And, so I think **increasing sentience, increasing complexity, increasing diversity, increasing structure** in all the things that we do: that's where our bodies are going in the same direction.

Question 14: *What is your overall reaction to Kelly's perspective on the future of humanity? And, if he is right, would the future he outlines be one you would wish upon your descendants?*

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