

# John F. Haught

## “Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life”

Episode 16 (transcript of audio) of The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity  
[EvolutionaryChristianity.com](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com)

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**Michael Dowd (host):** Welcome to Episode 16 of “[The Advent of Evolutionary Christianity: Conversations at the Leading Edge of Faith](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com).” I’m [Michael Dowd](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com), and I’m your host for this series, which can be accessed via [EvolutionaryChristianity.com](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com), where you too can add your voice to the conversation.

Today, [John Haught](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com) is our featured guest. [John](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com) is a leading Catholic evolutionary theologian and [Senior Fellow](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com) in Science and Religion at [Georgetown University](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com). He’s the author of [Making Sense of Evolution; Christianity and Science: Toward a Theology of Nature](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com); and [a number of other important books](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com) in this field. John has been a mentor and an elder brother on the path for a whole bunch of us in this dialogue series. Here, our conversation topic is “Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life.”

**Host:** Hello John Haught, and thank you for joining this conversation on evolutionary Christianity.

**John:** Oh, it’s kind of you to invite me.

**Host:** John, you were one of the ones that I *had* to invite. You’ve been a central figure in this movement. In fact, you were one of my early intellectual mentors and heroes in ecological theology when, in the late 1980s and early ‘90s I was just immersing myself in this field— thanks to being introduced to it by [Thomas Berry](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com) and [Brian Swimme](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com) and [Joanna Macy](http://EvolutionaryChristianity.com). You were one of the people that I found most helpful in really bridging from this deep ecological, deep-time understanding for Christians and for helping to show Christians that not only does an evolutionary worldview not have to threaten their faith—it can positively expand and enhance their faith.

I’ve been asking my guests at the start to share some their own story, their own testimonial, their own trajectory. How did you get to where you are now—both professionally and intellectually—and what were some of the main mileposts along the way?

**John:** Well, in many ways my biographical contribution here is the story of how I discovered that the universe is a story. I have to start way back, when I grew up on the farm in Virginia in a very traditional Catholic family—where there were eleven children and one learns “Darwinian” processes very early in life: the struggle to survive and so forth—eating being a contact sport. So I was in many ways psychologically prepared for the kind of world Darwin delivered to me more explicitly later on.

When I was still a young man, my pastor (a Belgian priest—a very good man) persuaded me to enter the seminary to study for the priesthood. It was one way of getting away from work on the farm, I suppose. I love basketball, and they had indoor basketball rings and so forth. So I allowed myself to be persuaded.

I went, and I soon discovered that I was caught up in the life. It was a deeply religious young life that I led. I grew up in the very pre-evolutionary, pre-scientific worldview of pre-Vatican II Catholicism—and that's where I developed my religious and ethical sensitivities. When I was about two or three years from ordination, I decided that this was not for me. However, by that time, I had become really intellectually and religiously intrigued by some developments in theology. Catholic seminary theology at that time, as I look back on it, was not very good theology. I *did* have a couple teachers who had a profound influence on me. But more than anything else, what influenced me to get into this kind of life was reading—when I was still in my early twenties—some of the writings of the French Jesuit geologist [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#). I was blown away by his synthesis of deep, christologically centered Christianity with science—and especially with evolutionary science.

Teilhard was a really great geologist, one of the top two to three geologists of the Asian continent because he spent so much time in China. But during that period of time, while he was uncontroversial scientifically, he was writing essays on how you might integrate theology with evolutionary thinking. So, when I left the seminary and decided not to pursue the priesthood, I had been drawn in to his way of thinking about reality. To this day, what grabs me most about Teilhard's perspective is that it provides an alternative to the pessimism, the absurdism, and the cosmic stoicism of much of 20<sup>th</sup> century intellectual life. I was ripe for that for another reason, which is that the Second Vatican Council had taken place. I had decided to leave the seminary a little after the end of the council in 1966—the council ended I think in '65.

What's really interesting about these two realities—Teilhard on the one hand, and Second Vatican Council on the other—is that Teilhard's writings had been suppressed by the Catholic Church. He died in 1955 and was buried in Poughkeepsie, New York. His writings had really not been published. Not many people were familiar with him. But after he died in 1955, his lay friends (who didn't have to worry about church censorship) sent his manuscript to publishers. Teilhard's writings began to flood the religious world. In fact, Harper & Row's most popular publication in the world of religious thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I've been told, was Teilhard's [Phenomenon of Man](#).

**Host:** I'm not surprised.

**John:** Starting in 1955 and later, people who had heard that his writings were not approved by [the Vatican](#)—for that very reason they started reading them! *[laughter]* And not just non-Catholics but also Catholics. Teilhard had a tremendous influence on their thinking. By the time the [Second Vatican Council](#) started (ten years after his death), his thought had been appropriated by some of the experts at the council—either directly or indirectly. Henri de Lubac, one of the great Catholic theologians, ended up writing three books on Teilhard—trying to show that his thought is completely consistent with Catholic thought. He and others had influenced experts at the council, so that you can see (if you read carefully) that some of the main documents, especially the document on the Church in the modern world—you can see the imprint of Teilhard there. So in a way, he got his revenge by helping to shape the really revolutionary ideas that started to develop at that council, but which today have often been themselves suppressed.

**Host:** I so appreciate you for offering that historical perspective on Teilhard, because there have been four or five other speakers in this series who have mentioned him simply by name or by the title of his book, and then that was about it. Many of us who do what we call evolutionary theology or evolutionary Christianity are deeply indebted (whether we know it or not) to his thinking and his contributions.

John, please continue in terms of your own story of coming into this.

**John:** After I decided I wanted to study theology, I went to [Catholic University](#), which at that time was a very open-minded atmosphere in which to study theology, and I got my doctorate there. Since I lived near Washington D.C. during this period, I happened to know [Monika Hellwig](#), who's a famous Catholic theologian who died about five years ago and who put me in touch with [Georgetown University](#). I got my foot in the door, and I stayed there for the next, well, till today—forty-some years, I guess.

While I was there, starting in my second year of teaching undergraduates, I decided that we needed to develop a course in science and religion—in science and theology. Because the students, who were very good students, would go to their science class or their pre-med courses and study chemistry, organic chemistry, biology, and so forth—and then they come to theology class and it was like passing over to a completely different world. I thought then that I wanted to make a career in a way of trying to bridge those two worlds. It was hard work, especially in the beginning, because I needed to find a really solid intellectual backbone for the course on science and religion. I had some smattering of Teilhard, but I immersed myself more fully in his thought.

There were other thinkers who, I guess on a higher intellectual plane, have had just as much influence on me. One of them is, of course, [Alfred North Whitehead](#), whose thought is still very germane to our discussion. Then, the [Jesuit](#) philosopher [Bernard Lonergan](#), who already in the '50s was formulating a philosophy around the notion of what he called the "[emergent probability](#)"—showing that, actually, you can make much better sense of Darwin's worldview if you place it in the context of a particular metaphysics, a particular philosophy,

where you have already shown that the universe has to have elements of contingency, or accident, or probability that had not been part of the classical way of thinking.

So Lonergan actually prepared my mind, and that of many other Catholics, to just embrace Darwin's notion of evolution. His recipe for evolution consists of lots of accidents or contingent events, plus natural selection, plus lots of time. Not too many people today read Lonergan, but his worldview is so much more compatible with Darwinian thinking—except for this one point: he is able to show that Darwin's evolutionary theory makes much more sense in a non-materialist framework than in a materialist one. Materialism leads ultimately toward unintelligibility, he thought—and that's my own thinking, too. So he's another very important person in shaping my mind.

A third, in addition to [Teilhard](#), was [Michael Polanyi](#), in his book [Personal Knowledge](#). He also had an emergent view of the universe—which could be understood better, he thought (and I still think), in a non-materialist framework, which will allow for the theological framework to make sense of evolution. And so that's what I've been doing for much of my life: trying to make theological sense of evolution by falling back on the philosophies that I just mentioned as a kind of framework for my theology.

As I developed my theology of evolution, I also brought into play my work and study of biblical thought. I found that (and this is pretty much where I stand today) that the biblical framework is much more flexible than people have thought it to be—that you can think about it in terms of a biblical theology where not only is evolution compatible with faith and theology; it's really the most fitting framework, you might say, within which to articulate what I call the Christian vision of God and of Christ.

There are two concepts that arise when you reflect on the biblical tradition. The first is—I don't know why this is often forgotten—that one of the fundamental motifs of biblical faith is the idea that ultimate reality, or God, is a promise maker and a promise keeper. Fidelity is the very essence of deity. But what is a promise, if not something that opens up the future? And so I came to think more and more that the God of Abraham who calls Abraham into the future, the God of Israel who always goes before Israel with a new future, the God of Jesus and the prophets who is always a God of the future, is really a very fitting way to contextualize the evolutionary picture that science has been giving us. So instead of thinking of God simply as the one who opens up a future for Abraham, for Israel, for the Church, or even for humanity—I came to think of God primarily as one who opens up a future for the whole of the universe, the whole of creation. I think that's a wide enough setting with which to give a status and intelligibility to evolution that it might not otherwise have.

The second theological theme, and this is more specifically Christian, is the theme of God who empties himself—a *kenotic* God (from the Greek word *kenosis*, which means emptying). If you read St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the second chapter, you'll see that he brought into that letter an early Christian hymn that speaks of Jesus as being in the form of God but yet not clinging to that status; he emptied himself and took on the form of a slave. This emptying became, for me, the Christian God—the self-emptying deity. Christians are people who are

instructed, I've always been taught, not to think about God at all without thinking about the man Jesus. Jesus is thought of in the New Testament as the fullness of the revelation of God. Subsequent theological reflection on this Pauline theme (and it's also the Synoptic Gospels' theme) of a self-emptying Christ has led—not always, but increasingly, I think, especially in the last two centuries—to thoughts about God as a self-emptying reality. So, you 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. And if that's your vision of God and Creation, then it's not too much of a jump to see that Creation has to somehow, therefore, become itself. It's not fashioned fully, instantaneously, with complete perfection at the creative beginning of the cosmos. It's been an unfinished universe from the very start. The idea of an unfinished universe is, to me, the most important idea that goes along with the idea of evolution.

Evolution implies that the universe is still coming into being. That gives our own lives a significance that they would not have if we thought of creation as being perfectly and fully and instantaneously complete in the beginning—and then everything else becomes a kind of falling away from that, and time becomes, basically, pointless, not getting anywhere. Whereas, an unfinished universe gives significance to each moment. In each moment the universe is—as Teilhard puts it—rising a little bit further out of nothingness. That's really the biblical and theological framework within which I try to make sense theologically of evolution.

There's no question that evolution makes good sense scientifically. The question that I have to wrestle with—especially in an age when many people think evolution implies atheism (both Christians and many biologists think that, maybe as many as 40%, according to some polls)—is that evolution and theology really go together very nicely. I'm not sure how many people I've convinced, but that's what I'm trying to do.

**Host:** Well, and you've been doing it very effectively, John. Three people who are part of this series have mentioned the formative role that you played—your thinking, your writing—in their own articulation of the faith and on thinking of the faith. Just the other day, I talked with Bill Phillips, who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in the late '90s, and he was saying that you were one of his intellectual groundings—as was Ian Barbour. So, you certainly have made a difference with a lot of us. Part of what this series is about is helping to bring all these different voices together who are doing evolutionary theology, doing ecological theology.

What you just shared reminded me of the second conversation that we aired, which was with [Bruce Sanguin](#). Bruce talked about “the theology of promise” and brought up some of the same points that you did. I found myself being reignited with a sense of enthusiasm for that way of thinking.

**John:** Yes, and just to comment on that: One of the ways in which I like to think about the notion of our being created in the image and likeness of God is that we have the responsibility to mirror forth the nature of God—with respect to other people, of course, but with the rest of creation, as well.

But I want to go a little bit further into what I think is implied in *kenosis*. The self-emptying of God is not done for masochistic purposes. I think it's all in the service of deeper relationality; that if God is to relate to the Creation, there's a self-humbling that is necessary. This also is something that I think is implied in the notion of the *Imago Dei*, the idea that we're created in the image and likeness of God. What is implied is that we mirror or we reflect our createdness, our creatureliness, by trying to enhance relationships. This, of course, is fundamental to an ecological theology, as ecology is essentially about relationships. It leads to some very interesting theological ideas. For example, if freedom means the capacity to form relationship, a capacity to relate, then we have a whole hierarchy in Creation of ways or degrees of relationality. At a very low level of relationality, you have inanimate objects—like a rock, which even physics tells us is intensely related to its environment. But if you go to the level of, say, a plant, you have an entity that can put its roots down into the soil—and there is almost a sentience being manifested here that consists of a deeper relationality than that of an inanimate object to its environment. When you come to the animals, speaking very generically here, there is a capacity for them to roam around in their ecological setting in a very, very rich variety of ways.

When humans come along in evolution, you have a being that is remarkably capable of forming deep and intimate relationships—not only with other people but with the natural world, with the universe at so many different levels. To make ecological or environmental sense of the notion of sin today one would then point to our refusal to relate. [Luther](#) referred to the *cor curvatus in se*, “the heart turned in on itself,” a refusing of relationality. Whereas, liberation—the liberation he felt by Christ—was that of opening himself up to the possibility of rich relationality once again.

So, there you have, in a way, one understanding of the meaning of *sin* and the meaning of *grace*. And then God, in this scheme, would be understood as *absolute relationality*. The theologian [Schubert Ogden](#) (also [here](#)) has brought this out in his work, which I'm afraid not too many people read today, but it's very rich. Ogden's thought, when compared with, say, that of [Aquinas](#), points out that for Aquinas, relationality is something that would seem to take away from divine transcendence. So Aquinas denied that there are real relationships in God—and this makes God so distant, so unresponsive about the Creation.

I'm not saying that this adequately represents Aquinas' thought—it doesn't—but a lot of people have characterized a medieval theology as presenting us with deity who is absolute in the sense of non-relationality. Ogden turns this around, especially in the light of [Alfred North Whitehead's](#) thought and [Charles Hartshorne's](#), and says we can preserve the notion of God's absoluteness—the classical idea of God's absoluteness—if we understand God as the *absolutely related one*, whose relationship is relative to nothing else. I think that's a very rich way of thinking about God and the relationship of God to Creation. It doesn't absorb God into

Creation. But it allows God—precisely because God is transcendent—to relate much more intimately to the world than previous theological schemes (at least this is my own thinking on this topic today). So that's another way in which I like to frame an evolutionary theology, since evolution is the story of Creation's reaching out for the richer and richer kind of relationality that we associate ideally with deity.

**Host:** What you're sharing, John, is really rich. In fact, just in the last few days, I've had communication with one of your colleagues, [Ilia Delio](#), and also with [Gloria Schaab](#) down in Miami, and both of them were talking about this *relationality* at the heart of our understanding of the divine; that it's not a coincidence that, as you said, ecology is all about being in right relationship. We're seeing ecological theology, evolutionary theology, relational theology—and it comes back to language that I've used previously, without being aware that you all were using those terms that way. I'm thinking of [evolutionary spirituality as the practices and exercises, the tools, that help us to be in right relationship to reality](#) (also [here](#))—that is, how to *think* in right relationship, and then how to *live* in right relationship to reality.

**John:** I would add this dimension, though, to the notion of relationality—and this comes from a biblical perspective once again. It's the notion of the *future*. For me, that has become probably the most important theological concept—and it's a really interesting history as to why that would be the case. For centuries we lost the notion of the future, because of platonic and neo-platonic ways of thinking of God as an eternal present from which every created reality is in some sense an imperfect deviation. [Teilhard de Chardin](#) showed that what we need now in an age of science and evolution is to rethink the whole idea of God. Yet we can still do that in a very biblical way—for God is now the one who comes from the future and is constantly bringing novelty into this web of relationality, challenging it to become more and more complex, more and more related.

There is in Whiteheadian thought, as well as in Teilhard's, the idea of the imperfection or evil. In an evolutionary worldview—that is, a world in process (and this is something I learned from Whitehead as much as anybody else)—there are two kinds of evil that contradict the ideal. One way of contradicting what is ideal is to cling to low-grade forms of harmony or monotony when it is relevant—especially for a living organism or social entity—to move on toward novelty, to something new that would keep it alive. Since life always involves self-transcendence, or going beyond, we constantly need to be challenged by the Author of new possibilities of being. One way of understanding *God* is as the source of these new possibilities.

The other kind of evil is the evil of chaos: when something orderly and good disintegrates when it's not necessary for this to happen. In fact, the evil of chaos is what we normally mean by evil. But [a process worldview](#) has allowed us to realize that we can also deviate from what is good, from what is essential, from what is beautiful and true, by becoming fixated on a particular formula for existence—the substitution of a sketch for a whole picture. There are all sorts of ways in which we can exemplify this in human life. From a biblical point of view, when

we suppress the prophetic call to justice by circumventing a society in such a way that the poor and the oppressed are marginalized: this would be a form of the evil of triviality, of the evil of monotony—not the evil of chaos. One of the harsh facts about the world we live in is that the “half-way house,” as Whitehead puts it, between triviality and perfection is chaos. There is the threat of chaos whenever we move from a low-grade form of monotony or harmony (or monotonous form of harmony) to a richer form. That’s one of the tragic aspects of our existence. It seems to me that that way of thinking also helps to contextualize the evolutionary process.

Evolution is not always pretty, and this is why people become obsessed with design. The whole [Intelligent Design](#) movement can be understood from this point of view as a kind of clinging to monotony or low-grade form of harmony, when it is possible that there are richer forms of novelty and richer forms of beauty. Now, if I could just go on for a moment on that theme, I’d like to bring in what I try to do in my own theology of evolution, and quite explicitly in my most recent book, which is titled [Making Sense of Evolution](#). I spend a lot of time trying to analyze why it is that people are so obsessed with design. It’s not only the Intelligent Design Christians who are obsessed with design; it’s also what I would call the [evolutionary naturalists](#), and the [evolutionary atheists](#). These are people who seem to believe that science is the only way to understand anything about reality and what comes to life—that the only way in which we can understand life is through evolutionary principles.

Well, I allow that evolution is one way of understanding life. But what the obsession with design does on the part of [Richard Dawkins](#), [Daniel Dennett](#), [Jerry Coyne](#) and others is that it puts them in the same camp intellectually with their opponents. With their opponents, there’s this idea that God is primarily a designer, or an elegant engineer, and so forth. And since evolution shows that there is no such thing as perfect design—there are no perfect adaptations; there are “design flaws” all over the place, as the evolutionary materialists put it—therefore God cannot possibly exist. So what I try to do—and I’m not the first to do this; [Teilhard](#) and [Whitehead](#) and many others were doing this too—is to emphasize that the conversation between evolution and theology needs to turn away from its fixation on design. The conversation needs to turn toward, what I call, “the drama of life” and, underneath that, the whole drama of the universe. *The point is not whether design points to deity, but whether the drama or the story of evolution carries a meaning.*

We tend to take for granted that evolution is a story. But what we don’t often notice is that we live in a universe which is already set up for an evolutionary drama from the very start by having three ingredients which are essential to every narrative, to every drama, to every story. Those three ingredients are, first of all, you need a lot of accidents. Secondly, you need a backbone of consistency or reliability. And third, you need time.

Speaking very simply here, if there were only predictability without any indeterminacy, then there wouldn’t be a story. You would know the ending from the very start; it would not draw you into it. Likewise, if there were no consistency, no reliability, no laws of nature, everything would collapse into a puddle of chaos at any moment. So there would be no future; there would be no reality that could unfold. Thirdly, you need time—and, of course, now what we know is that we



have not just a short amount of time but deep, deep time. So we have the material for a very, very large and long story. When I talk about this with people, I like to refer to a story about a rabbi who was once asked by his student, “*Why did God create human beings?*” The rabbi replied, “*Because God loves stories.*” What I try to do in my evolutionary theology is say, “God loves really, really big stories.” Who are we to say how short the story would be? The obsession with design, when you come right down to it, I think what it manifests—and this is a human weakness that we all have—is the demand for perfection, a kind of perfectionism.

This demand for perfection is what I see as the underlying problem in both the evolutionary atheist’s repudiation of God as well as in the Christian and Muslim clinging to the notion of God as the designer. There’s a kind of perfectionism, a kind of longing to associate God with that which is finished, that which is perfectly and elegantly engineered. The idea of God as Architect ends up with a very, very diminished understanding of ultimate reality.

Whereas a drama—even through it takes many billions of years (and for all we know, it might be very early in the story)—at least has the capacity in principle of carrying a meaning. We’ve always in human life embedded our sense of meaning, of where we came from, where we’re going, what we should be doing with our lives. We’ve done this within the context of myths, stories, dramas, narratives. It’s narratives that make for intelligibility. But when you are talking about the cosmic drama, it’s not over. Coming back to the theme of the unfinished universe that we live in: Who are we at any point—whether religious or non-religious—to say definitively that there is no meaning in this drama? There’s a fear of that on the part of the Intelligent Design people and creationists, but there’s also a sense among the evolutionary critics of religion that if God exists, things have to be perfect.

But the biblical view (to come back to the central framework of my evolutionary theology) also has, along with the theme of promise, the necessity of *waiting*. We simply cannot know what it’s all about at this moment. But there is the sense that *waiting* is the authentic life. “Those who wait upon the Lord are those who will not be put to shame.” You see this theme constantly in the Hebrew scriptures, but you see it also in the *Epistle* of James, which was emphasizing the same thing. We cannot be Christian without adopting this attitude of waiting.

I’m always fond of quoting an essay (or meditation) that Paul Tillich wrote, titled *Waiting*. There he says that we are stronger when we wait than when we possess. The great gift that evolutionary thinking offers theology is the sense that a dramatic banquet has been laid out before us over the many millions of years of life and the billions of years of cosmic history. That should be a source of hope and also a source of strength. We’re stronger when we wait and hope than when we possess. [Teilhard](#) puts this so nicely in a line from one of his many essays. He says, “The world rests on the future as its sole support.” Wonderful idea! Whereas, the materialist worldview as I see it, and as Teilhard saw it also, is one in which you try to explain everything on the basis of what happened “back there” in the past. But the further back you go in cosmic history, the more things fall apart—are dispersed into primordial atomic entities—in other words, into incoherence. Whereas, the drama of time and evolution has brought about at least relatively more intense forms of coherence up to this moment.

But now situated as we are in this present moment, where are we going to find coherence? By looking toward the future. By turning around in an attitude of hope. It's only hope that lets the future in. In terms of any present moment in the cosmic story, it's only in the future that we really see things becoming intelligible. For example, we can really see what an atom is all about when it becomes part of a molecule, or what a molecule is really all about when it becomes part of a cell, or a cell when it becomes part of an organism. That's when each becomes intelligible. So likewise, at this present moment in what is clearly an unfinished universe, the coherence and intelligibility of *this* moment cannot be made accessible to us except in terms of the future. And this is why we form images of the future. This is also why we occasionally have to abandon our images of the future, so as to allow a newer and fresher future to come in. If you think in terms like this, as I've been doing for many years, then evolutionary science is such a *natural* discovery.

**Host:** Wow! John, there's just so much in this whole notion of [the drama of life, the story of evolution](#)—and that it's the *interpretation* of that story that gives our lives meaning and helps us have an understanding of the meaning of our time and the chaos of our time. It's so easy to slip into thinking that chaos is bad because it *feels* bad, because it disrupts things. And yet, where we find grace present, where we find divine creativity, is consistently throughout the history of the universe when chaos and breakdowns catalyze creativity. It's just so exciting! I had never heard before, as you articulated, the three ingredients of a drama, of a story—accidents and yet within the context of a backbone of consistency and time.

**John:** These ingredients are waiting at the cosmic table, before evolution comes along in the universe.

**Host:** Yeah. Yeah. Wow!

**John:** I refer to this as [the narrative cosmological principle](#). People talk about the entropic cosmological principle. At times I talk about the *aesthetic principle*. But I think the universe is somehow made intelligible by virtue of its having this quality of *narrative*.

**Host:** Yeah. Yeah. The only academic paper I actually presented in an academic conference was on “Pentecostal Narrative Theology,” and this is back in the 1980s. The importance of narrative also comes to mind in this way: One of the things that Connie and I have been doing a lot as we've travelled North America these last nine years is to immerse ourselves in so many of the bodies of water on this continent—we sort of have a baptism experience in rivers and streams and lakes all over the continent. I remember being in a stream one time, looking at the water that was coming towards me. But I couldn't see the water as it passed me. There was this sense that our lives are kind of like that, and history is kind of like that: We're always looking at the past because that's what we can see clearly, and yet everything is going forward.

In fact, if it weren't for the ocean where it is flowing to, we wouldn't have a sense of where we *participate* in this narrative—where we fit into this story and what it's all unfolding or emerging toward. In my thinking, it is always a sense of not just waiting—there is that for sure—but there's a waiting with a sense of *expectancy*, an anticipation or curiosity, of what's unfolding.

**John:** I should have mentioned that. Yes. Very good point.

**Host:** Well, John, could you say a little bit more in terms of how you speak to students who are grappling with how to hold onto their faith and evolution. You and I, as well as all the other speakers in this series, know that it's not just about reconciling, but the two are mutually enhancing. When you meet students and young people who are struggling with how to hold that, what kind of advice do you offer?

**John:** The first thing I want to do is to make sure that I in no way sound negatively disposed toward their hope for ultimate meaning and consolation. I completely sympathize with how they can latch on to a particular story in the Bible, or take the Bible in some sense literally. And it's a process. In fact, my course in science and religion was one in which I began to realize that you really can't make a convert to evolution overnight. It takes time. Most of the students at [Georgetown](#) are in no way biblical literalists, though occasionally I have one from the South or Midwest, and sometimes they come back years later and say of the process that it has finally worked! But you have to be very sensitive, and I think it's more of an art form than anything else. You have to deal with each student individually to see what they are capable of. What I try to do is to just make it possible for students to realize that the fundamental teaching of Christianity—that God is love—is actually realized much more richly by an evolutionary worldview rather than the pre-scientific, hierarchical, vertical, static view of nature.

**Host:** Yes. Yes. Amen!

John, could you say a little bit about your books, because they have touched so many of us in so many ways—and I really want you to take some time to help us know what's there.

**John:** Okay. Well, I suppose if one's looking for a more developed understanding of evolutionary theology than I've been able to express here, you might want to look at my book [God After Darwin](#) as a starting point. I followed that book up with a book called [Responses to 101 Questions on God and Evolution](#), which is more, I suppose, approachable by the people at the collegiate level or maybe even high school. I think these ideas have to be presented in religious education in high school, and some Catholic high schools are doing this—but not as nearly as many as could.

I followed that book up with a book I titled [Deeper Than Darwin](#) in which I said, Yes, I fully accept the evolutionary science, but what I want to express in that book is my belief that a materialist interpretation of evolution actually stultifies, suffocates, and drains all the juice out

of evolution. Furthermore, a materialist view, instead of making evolution intelligible, ultimately brings everything back to the dead mindlessness of matter—as it’s conceived in some evolutionary thinkers as a kind of a dead and essentially lifeless world. And what I wanted to do, in addition to pointing that out, is to argue (as I said earlier) that religious metaphysics or theological metaphysics can make sense of that basic narrative structure of cosmic reality and of the evolutionary process, which becomes embedded in that narrative quality of nature. Therefore, even in that book (in *Deeper Than Darwin*), I tried to develop somewhat of a beginning sense of drama as the framework for thinking about evolution.

And then in my most recent books—one of them is titled [God and the New Atheism](#)—I tried to show that by thinking of God simply as a designer, as a scientific hypothesis as [Richard Dawkins](#) does, is talking about something that I’ve never heard. I mean, I don’t relate to that religiously, so I don’t believe in *that* God either. Furthermore, I believe that the New Atheists, most of whom use evolution as the intellectual foundation of their thought, are instead of coming to grips with religion and theology, they are intent unconsciously on presenting readers with the most undeveloped and theologically weak idea of God that is possible. Its no wonder that they choose as their conversation partners the Intelligent Design community. They never talk about the great theologians, like [Paul Tillich](#), [Karl Barth](#), [Karl Rahner](#), [Jürgen Moltmann](#), [Rudolf Bultmann](#), [Wolfhart Pannenberg](#)—all of whom were very, very in love, you might say, with an evolutionary worldview.

**Host:** Yes. Exactly.

**John:** My latest book is [Making Sense of Evolution](#), subtitle, [Darwin, God, and the Drama of Life](#), and it’s there that I develop the notion of drama as a better framework for making sense of evolution than the notion of design allows for.

**Host:** Thank you, John. Are there any last words you’d like to share with our listeners?

**John:** Celebrate the idea that [we have finally discovered that the universe is a story](#). We didn’t know this for sure until the mid-twentieth century. A lot of people still aren’t sure of it. We haven’t fully appropriated the idea—and that’s understandable. It’s such a recent idea, but I think it’s going to be the framework for any decent future theology.

**Host:** Amen! Well, John, thank you so much for sharing your perspective, your wisdom, your experience and so many of your rich thoughts with our listeners today here on the leading edge of faith.

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