

# Who is God in an Evolutionary World?



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The pre-evolutionary worldview of God is quite different than our emerging sensibility.

A Zen master once said, "The purpose of life is to see." Yet so much depends upon where we are looking for truth and insight: Where in our search for God do we seek? Where is our treasure?

An old Sufi story teaches the futility of searching in the wrong place: we hunt in the light, yet the treasure is on the other side of the mountain hidden in the shadows; often we hunt for meaning—love—truth—God---in all the wrong places.

Too often, we "surmise" God; we operate on a "probability". Yet God is never a certainty; God is a Mystery; God is a Choice.

Whatever our images of God, or ideas of God, these are a measure of our own spirituality, and determine all other consciousness of reality. Having an idea or belief in God is not unique. This is common to all cultures. But what is significant is the kind and shape of God that is significant to us. To believe in a God of "wrath" or God of transcendent "indifference" will eventually shape us and the world we manifest – the world we create. God the "law keeper", or the god we cry out to in order to meet our every need, to change the traffic light as we impatiently drive our cars (and trains and planes) toward an aimless, pointless future of our own convenience---turns us into children who believe in a "God of magical coincidence."

So: Who is God for me? Obviously, this is not the same God that I knew in 1950. Sadly, God remains a mystery that nobody wants because most people still covet the God of certainty, of surety; yet realizing that we are ignorant, realizing that the God of fear, or the God of judgment, the magical God, or the convenient God, is a puny God; we recognize this is not the true God but a fabricated one made in our own image, for our own convenience; this is "God in a box"; this God is a crutch; he is an intolerable God who permits oppression and injustice; and to continue to believe in this false God is something we can no longer afford. The notion of a God "out there", a God who effectively ignores me, and others, a God who is a puppeteer, a potentate, a persecutor, a God in whom obedience is the only proper response: these images of divinity are nothing but "a graven image of ourselves."

Repeatedly, throughout the ages, we create God in our own image, making a mockery of the Mystery and the fullness of the divine being. Evolution is now "settled" science; close to certainty; it is clear that evolution reflects the very "nature of nature," meaning that nature is self-creating. Science is now inviting us to draw a new picture of God; to keep seeing with new eyes. Whereas the "possible" is given over to matter and to us as ordinary people, God takes over the "impossible" roles that reside within and around evolution; and this work is nothing short of extraordinary.

# A Reflection

The traditional view was to obey all the fundamental rules and to follow God's will; this view has radically changed in recent years with the insight of science.

We now are coming to realize that there is no such thing as spiritual perfection; there is no eternal plan which a few privileged few, or chosen, can see; there is no certainty; the questioning of old as to whether or not "we can figure out God's plan," or "God's will," the childish notion that life is a cosmic game in which only some "get it" and others just don't - is no longer tenable. This perspective came to an end when a Belgian priest clarified that all life began with the "Big Bang" and showed us that we are all involved in what can best be described as an "unsettling process" of evolution.



Two perspectives challenge us in the present day: the traditional old view of nature which suggests that creation is unique, and purposeful, and that everything that is created shows God's plan and touch of instant design, order and intelligence. The second view destroys this notion and reveals that life is an "emergent process" in which there is no evidence of completeness, or unique purpose, and that chaos (as well as order) is reflected in the universe. Therefore, it is not clear that God "knew" what God wanted.

Life in this model is self-generating. Therefore, the idea of an all-knowing, all-powerful, omniscient intelligence, overseeing and guiding every step of creation, is now under attack. Science suggests there is no direct purpose or direction to life: chaos, development, cascading complexity, and evolution is at the very heart of the story – our story – the story of the universe.

So are we purposeless? This seems spiritually bleak. Our humanity must rethink our story of creation, of God, and of the self. How do we understand ecology and communion of life?

Einstein's words about God, perhaps his most profound, are: "God is subtle but not malicious." The perennial question about the source of evil is now made more complex with scientific understanding. If life is self-creating, what then is the purpose of life?

Science confronts and condemns the old view; we are encouraged to see complexity, the multiple view, the multi-verse view. Science is our new "spiritual director;" beyond the primary view of "self" spirituality we must learn the "larger" view. The old view of God as all-powerful, all-knowing, becomes harder to believe when we see that God does not save our world from injustice, war, poverty, and oppression. The Old Testament story sends heroes, saviors, redeemers for each generation. "I am sending you to deliver them." Therefore, God does not save us; we must do the work.

And in this new paradigm God is not a cosmic calculator, or a counter of deeds; there is no way to merit God in this new consciousness. God is not patriarch, lawyer, or judge, but an encourager who invites us to participate in life. Our God is not the god of the Greeks who pronounces edicts from a lofty throne, who is indifferent, unapproachable, unemotional and uncaring.

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Instead, God is a sending, caring, Merciful God. It is in fact, irrational to conceive of a God who is all-knowing, and all-powerful, a God of perfectionism, who demands we depend and obey him - and still maintain the notion that we are free. How can we be free if God knows all? This elevates God to an “inconsistent glory.” Creation is ongoing; life is intent on its own development. Life is involved in its own emergence; in other words, we find completion and greater fullness by surrendering ourselves to increased complexity.

In the end, we are a “work in progress;” growth is inherent in the very nature of consciousness. Perhaps, within this paradigm shift, we can believe that it is our nature to eventually merge or melt into God; perhaps, this is the point of our “becoming.” This is the “process” we hope to discover in “wisdom/age/grace.” Possibility and mistakes are what teach us how to get to the next level. This requires new life and insight. Our failure is our glory. This teaches us to grow, to become, to begin again. We are creature of divine imagination, born into something unimaginable; this carries us beyond fear and regret. Our choices, our freedom, our personal decisions, our actions, will become more important; these choices are the “natural selections” we make toward our own evolution. Therefore, what I do about global warming in a very real way defines my “spirit,” my morality, my emergence—the natural selection of my “evolving self.”

This is creation. We are self-creating—co-creators who along with a humble God must participate in defining the vision of our future self and world. We are “empowered” by God to use our own “power” to grow, and birth the world. In this radical scenario, GROWTH becomes the purpose of life—not perfectionism. The God of the universe is “on the way”—growing—and all creation is growing, groaning, straining in the pangs of child-birth.

Life is not a tease for a hidden agenda.

God becomes--BECOMING. God invites, joins, ordains and beckons us to the next step; this is not a secret; there is no hidden agenda beyond doing what we do best; God stands by, and with us, as we fulfill and become our fuller selves, as we evolve in awareness, insight love and wisdom. The past is not a template for the future, or forever; God is promise, possibility, and invitation from within; God creates us by inviting us to the process of growth. God is God of the future. We have living to do. We must extend our own possibilities to become our best self. We create the world of the next-generation; this is our role. We grow into God one level at a time: to discover, uncover, and better our deeper selves. God as mother, tends us as we grow; she sustains, heals, and enfolds life.

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Evolution is THE great spiritual teacher. Growth is a slow process that demands trust and time. It can be cumbersome and painful. Failure is inevitable. Yet it is a holy invitation to become more than we are at present. Struggle is not condemnation but invitation. God is alluring, beckoning, inviting us. Our destination is transformation, showing us a new face of God in which to believe, honor, and hope. Our religion is more than myth, legalism, labels, and definitions. Our work and growth really matters; it is not a test of moral limits. We are not alone; together we strengthen and shape life. God leaves the “possible” to us; our purpose is to construct the future, to matter, to show that we lived at all, to always begin again, to make a difference. This solid theology for 2016 is what serious Catholics are getting today.

(Session given by Sr Joan Chittister OSB at Oakville, IL and summarized)