

Evolution and Emergence: a paradigm shift for theology¹

Augustine Shutte

Emeritus Professor, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

It is an extraordinary thing that an idea that in Darwin's time (and to Darwin himself) appeared so alien to and indeed destructive of Christianity should now prove so fruitful for the purpose of finding an expression of Christian faith appropriate for a scientific and secular age. The idea of evolution and the emergence of new forms of being – not simply in the biological sphere but in the cosmos as a whole and in human history itself – has in fact provided Christian theology with a new paradigm within which to conceptualise such basic elements of faith as the notion of creation, the doctrine of God's incarnation in Jesus, the indwelling in us of the Holy Spirit, and the function of the Church in the world. My aim in this article is to outline the steps taken that have made this possible, and to provide a sketch of the theology that results. In my recent work I have relied on many thinkers in this project, especially on the work of Karl Rahner and his "Christology within an evolutionary view of the world", but also visionaries such as Teilhard de Chardin and, in more recent times, Brian Swimme.

The opposition to Darwin's ideas when they first appeared, particularly that of public figures such as the Bishop of Oxford, has become so notorious that any sympathy with them from those who felt them to be compatible with Christian faith has been largely overlooked. Yet from the very first this was forthcoming, in spite of public opinion. One must remember that at the time Christian orthodoxy was almost universally held to imply what is now seen to be a seriously mistaken view of biblical inerrancy, as well as being bound up with the soundness of the design argument as advanced by Paley and others. Hence any acceptance of evolutionary ideas had somehow to be fitted in to the notion of design as well as a revision of one's attitude to scripture. One even finds Darwin himself writing, in a letter to Asa Gray the Harvard botanist, "With respect to Design, I feel more inclined to show a white flag than to fire my usual long-range shot...If anything is designed, certainly man must be" (Clark 1984:121). And in the *Origin* itself: "There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one." To which, in the second edition, he added "by the Creator" (Clark 1984:150).

Very soon after the publication of Darwin's "dangerous idea" attempts began to be made to see in evolution God's *method* of creation, or at least as God-directed, whether by intervention or not. And some thinkers, such as Alfred Wallace in particular, made a distinction between the evolutionary origin of the human body and the immediate creation by God of the human soul. A letter from Sir Charles Lyell, the famous geologist, to Darwin is very revealing in both these respects:

I reminded him (Alfred Wallace) that as to the origin of man's intellectual and moral nature I had allowed in my first edition that its introduction was a real innovation, interrupting the uniform course of the causation previously at work on the earth. I was therefore not opposed to his idea that the Supreme Intelligence might possibly direct variation in a way analogous to that in which even the limited powers of man might guide it in selection, as in the case of the breeder and horticulturalist. In other words I feel that progressive development or evolution cannot be entirely explained by natural selection. I rather hail Wallace's suggestion that there may be a Supreme Will and Power which may not abdicate its function of interference, but may guide the forces and laws of Nature (Clark 1984:134).

It would be some time before Christian theology was able to detach itself from the argument from design, and even longer before it felt able to abandon the idea of an intervention in world process by God in the case of the creation of the human soul, let alone the Incarnation. But the compatibility of the evolution of new species and Christian faith was an idea that only strengthened with the passage of time. This is exemplified by the following passage from a sermon given to the University by Charles Gore, later Bishop of Oxford, in 1894.

Objection to the idea of evolution on the grounds of the argument from design, has been, in the main, removed. In part it has been through the theologians abandoning false claims and learning, if somewhat unwillingly, that they have no 'Bible revelation' in matters of science; in part it has been through its becoming continually more apparent that the limits of scientific explanation of

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nature are soon reached; that the ultimate causes, forces, conditions of nature are as unexplained as ever, or rather postulate as ever for their explanation a Divine mind. Thus if one 'argument from design' was destroyed another was only brought into prominence. No account which science can give, by discovery or conjecture of the method of creation, can ever weaken the argument which lies from the universality of law, order and beauty in the universe to the universality of mind. The mind of man looks forth into nature and finds nowhere unintelligible chance, but everywhere an order, a system, a law, a beauty, which corresponds, as greater to less, to his own rational and spiritual intuitions, methods and expectations. Universal order, intelligibility, beauty, mean that something akin to the human spirit, something of which the human spirit is an offshoot and a reflection, is in the universe before it is in man (Clark 1984:235).

In this passage we find already a clear appreciation of the limits of science and the biblical writings, as well as of the original forms of the argument from design. And, more importantly, we also find an albeit somewhat tentative appreciation of two ideas that have since become quite central to the theological annexure of the evolutionary idea. The first is that of the unity and solidarity of a world-process in which humanity (and hence our distinctive mental capacities) is by no means an exception but an integral part. And secondly, it is this mental or spiritual aspect of evolution – rather than a mechanistic regularity or order – that is the clearest indication of a world-transcendent source. These ideas are so important to the story I am telling that I want briefly to indicate their origins in nineteenth century European thought, not indeed scientific or theological thought but philosophy. Of course the argument from design was itself philosophical rather than scientific. And its popularity in a scientific culture had an immediate theological effect. It gave rise to the idea of a 'natural religion' as opposed to a 'revealed' one like Christianity, a religion that was supported by, in fact based on, the discoveries of science. The fact that the scientific world view at that time was a thoroughly materialistic and deterministic one tended to be overlooked.

But not by Kant! He saw his whole philosophical endeavour as an attempt to justify our faith in human freedom, the immortality of the soul and, ultimately, the existence of God, all of which beliefs seemed threatened by the mechanistic Newtonian world-view. He did this by what he himself called his 'Copernican revolution'. For just as Copernicus had shown that the Sun and not Earth was the centre of our cosmic system, so Kant argued that the order science discovered in the world was the order of our minds rather than that of things in nature. Science itself was the creation of the knowing, choosing human subjectivity of the scientist and not something impressed by an objective nature on a passive human mind. Not that the truths of science were illusory, but they were partial, aspectual, provisional insights into the much richer and still not completely understood reality of the world. The importance for our purposes of this 'subjective turn' of Kant's is not so much its improved understanding of science as its focus on the scientist, and in general on the human person, as the knowing, choosing subject who creates and judges science, and who therefore transcends scientific study because always presupposed by it. In doing so Kant revealed both the inherent limitation of any actual or possible science, and at the same time a transcendent aspect of human nature that was the source of science, as well as morality and art – and religion. It was thus humanity itself, or at least this aspect of human nature, that came to provide grounds for a rational faith in human freedom, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God.

Unfortunately so strong was the hold that the deterministic, mechanistic Newtonian world-view had on the eighteenth century mind that Kant was only able to carry through his 'Copernican revolution' by virtue of a thoroughgoing dualism of body and mind. By virtue of our rational powers of intellect and will we transcend the determinisms of nature, of which as bodily beings we are an inextricable part. Philosophy in the modern period developed in two mutually interacting traditions, an empiricist cast of thought that was born from the influence of the natural, and especially the physical sciences, and a rationalist that emanated from the complex phenomenon of secularisation. The empiricist tradition was materialist, stressing the causal links discovered by the different sciences that bound humanity to the determinisms of both nature and society. Rationalist thinkers such as Descartes and Kant, to name only the most influential, influenced by secularisation's focus on humanity's capacity for self-determination as the central fact about human nature and the most important value for human life, stressed our transcendence of all such dependencies. It was only in the early nineteenth century, at about the time that Darwin's own ideas were beginning to take their epoch-making shape, that a philosopher overcame this sterile opposition of two half-truths in a synthetic vision in which the post-modern age was born.

It was Hegel who managed to combine the other-dependence of empiricist materialism with the self-determination of rationalistic dualism in a comprehensive view of humanity, both as individuals and as a species, as being essentially in a state of becoming through a process of transformation and transcendence. Hegel's conception of humanity as Spirit (the capital is necessary to denote its difference from the common idea of spirit that opposes it to matter) was a genuine novelty in European philosophy, and perhaps the philosophical expression of what could be called the 'spirit' of the age. It is so easy to read back into it many things that science – in its discoveries of emergence in world-process – and theology – in recent theories of *creation*

continua – have since developed, that one must be careful to identify the novelty precisely. I think it consists in the idea of reality, whether human or cosmic, as a process of self-realisation through transformation and transcendence. Whether this happens in a single cell or in a person, or in a transition from inorganic to organic being, or from consciousness to human self-consciousness, the structure of the dynamism is the same: there is a finality involved, a finality of self-realisation through self-transcendence. Although it is most manifest in human life, where it takes many paradoxical forms, it is present in the simplest form of physical being. At all events it presents a world-view that is evolutionary in a very deep and comprehensive sense, going well beyond both what the special sciences could authorise and Christian orthodoxy would allow.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Hegel's thought as far as theology is concerned is the fact that he applied his evolutionary conception to *humanity*, to the lives of human individuals and also to human history itself, and did so with great thoroughness and in great detail. Here, in the human sphere, he is concerned with the evolution of culture and consciousness and forms of human community. His account culminates in a description of the evolution of art, religion and philosophy, as the most developed forms of Spirit in which humanity progressively attempts to realise its capacity for self-consciousness and self-determination. Although Hegel is concerned to describe accurately the history he is not afraid to judge the forms that human culture takes, negatively as well as positively. But like many nineteenth century thinkers he is convinced of the fact of progress. And for him Christianity is the highest because the most human religion. Its only lack is the fact that it still holds its truth in mythological form, believing stories of God's interventions in history, in revelations and miracles and sacred writings fixed for all time. As a consequence, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he undertakes a radical project of demythologisation, translating all the central doctrines of Christianity into the language of his philosophy of Spirit. In this he was following Kant's pioneering work of demythologisation, in his *Religion Within the limits of Reason Alone*.

Hegel thus applied the evolutionary idea not only to the history of religion, tracing a development through all the forms of religion then known to him, but also to the history of a particular religion, namely Christianity, giving it a formulation he felt was more adequate to the age in which he lived. This was at a time when scholars in many different fields were studying the past, using the methods of science on humanity itself. And there was no human product that received more critical attention than the Christian scriptures.

I think I have said enough to identify what amounted to a revolution in thinking, a revolution that brought the 'modern' period of European history to an end. Darwin's thinking was simply part of it. John Dewey, speaking at the celebration of the centenary of Darwin's birth at Columbia University in 1909, summed up his influence as follows: "In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection as originating and passing away, the "Origin of Species" introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics and religion" (Clark 1984:254). This is a judgment with which Teilhard de Chardin would have whole-heartedly agreed: "Is evolution a theory, a system or an hypothesis? It is much more: it is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforward if they are to be thinkable and true" (1959:219). Teilhard's work was originally viewed with suspicion by Church authorities; it is now no longer. And it is time for us to turn to consider how theology has shaped itself to the new evolutionary paradigm, and how it might with profit continue to do so.

In the intellectual development whereby the notion of evolution has become central to the expression of Christian faith in a scientific and secular culture there are a number of salient themes. First is that of the position of humanity in the universe, both as regards the nature of human persons and the direction of human history. Various traditional dualisms had to be overcome: that of humanity and the rest of nature, and the dualism of matter and spirit that is bound up with that. Then there is the dualism of body and mind or body and soul in human individuals. Secondly there is the question of God and his relationship to the universe, the idea of creation as *creation continua*, the creation of really new forms of being, especially that of life from matter, human consciousness from life, and what is traditionally called grace in human hearts and minds. Finally there is the sphere of history, a history seen by theology as a dialogue between humanity and its god. As far as humanity is concerned, history is seen as involving an evolution of culture and consciousness, and therefore of religion too, an evolution that for theology culminates in the person and teaching of Jesus. With regard to God there are new ways of understanding God's 'special action' within the universe in human history, what is traditionally called 'the history of salvation'. These attempt to avoid the notion of 'intervention' by God in the course of history, as well as any appeal to the 'supernatural', whether in the form of miracle or authoritative inspiration or revelation.

These themes characterise especially the now well-developed dialogue between theology and the natural sciences, where the evolutionary world-view and its satellite themes occupy centre-stage. A particularly impressive example of this dialogue is the nearly twenty year-long series of seminars organised by the Vatican Observatory and the Centre for Theology and the Natural Sciences at Berkeley, which has just culminated in the publication of its sixth and final 'capstone' volume of papers by participants. The writers were drawn from the ranks of highly respected scientists, philosophers and theologians, and met regularly to discuss and revise their

contributions at Castelgandolfo and in California. The series as a whole bore the general title “Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action”.

As can be imagined the scholars involved were from many different backgrounds and with very different outlooks. Yet in the course of the meetings, and due to the method of discussion and revision employed, a remarkable consensus emerged. Keith Ward, in his article in the capstone volume that ended the series, describes this as follows: “there is a sort of metaphysical view that has arisen out of this series of discussions between scientists and theologians. It puts in place a background world-view for a restatement of religious doctrines that is probably as important as Aristotle was for the Christian church in the thirteenth century.”

The scientific understanding of a universe of intelligible law and emergent creativity changes the perspective within which one sees divine action. God will not be seen as an interfering designer correcting a partly incomplete mechanism. God will be more like a universe-envirning field of Spirit, setting the parameters of nature, guiding its emergent development, and ensuring the eventual fulfilment of the divine intention for its existence (Russell et al: 2008:298).

In this, the final volume, the acronym NIODA is used to identify this consensus. It stands for “Non-interventionist Objective Divine Action” in world process and applies both to God’s creative causality in nature and also to his ‘special’ activity in human and ‘salvation’ history. This way of understanding God’s action in the world is so important for the way we express Christian faith in a scientific and secular culture that I will quote William Stoeger’s account of it at some length. Stoeger, incidentally, is not only a scientist (an astronomer), but a philosopher and theologian as well, and has been one of the editors – and a moving spirit – of this project from the beginning.

Certain events or sequences of events initiated by secondary causal agents” (Stoeger is employing the traditional distinction between the primary causality of God as creator whereby God is the ultimate cause of all that happens in the universe, and the secondary causality of things in the universe whereby the integrity of nature is maintained.) “(either those which are freely and consciously chosen, or those which are not) are turning points within creation, or within history, and thus are specially revelatory of God’s immanent creative presence. As such, these are in deeper harmony with God’s intended purposes and with the essential structures and relationships already established with creation itself. These events or sequences of events would indeed be “God’s special salvific acts,” even though they were not direct acts of God (i.e., not without the intermediary of a secondary cause). Nor would they lack a sufficient cause within the manifold of dynamisms and potentialities of creation or of history, presupposing the universal primary creative action of God. They would nonetheless, be special, salvific and revelatory, precisely because they are clear expressions of what God intends, and/or fulfil God’s purposes and intentions in a particularly unambiguous or exemplary fashion (2008:245).

This way of conceiving God’s special salvific acts in terms of God’s overall creative action has definite advantages, Stoeger believes, both from the point of view of science and of theology. “It connects directly with the richly differentiated, transcendently immanent presence and action of the creator God within creation and with God’s radically kenotic, deeply effective but hidden availability within nature. Furthermore, it emphasises that what is fundamental is not so much God’s action, or actions, but rather God’s ongoing relationship with creation. Again, the divine creative relationship is highly differentiated with respect to each entity and system within the universe – and God’s action flows from the character of that relationship” (2008:245).

As far as science is concerned, and the world-view that is the result of science, this is to my mind an essential way of conceiving God’s action in the world. It is also a new way, and a new way that the development of science has itself suggested. Stoeger himself is in no doubt about this “Thus, we can also say, in a way we could not have before the advent of the natural sciences, that God’s universal creative action, though unique, is also realised in a highly differentiated and evolving way throughout nature. This evolutionary, emergent and unfinished character of creation revealed by the sciences serves to emphasise the continuing character of God’s action through the regularities, processes and relationships God sustains” (2008:230).

The evolutionary character of the scientific world-view is perhaps not sufficiently stressed in the rather general picture I have been painting. I now propose to deal with that directly, and first philosophically in its implications and fruitfulness for ‘natural theology’ and then, in some detail, with its place in theology as such. The classical treatment of the evolutionary origin of humanity as a theological issue is Karl Rahner’s 1958 monograph *Hominisation*. Rahner’s early work, *Spirit in the World* and *Hearers of the Word* in particular, had provided a new philosophical foundation, derived from the history I have recapitulated above, for the traditional Christian view of humanity and its place in the world.

For Rahner, as for Kant and Hegel, human beings have a dimension that transcends anything the sciences can know since it is what produces and judges the sciences. It is what makes us self-aware, self-determining subjects of thought and action, and is the source not only of science, but of morality, art, religion and, in general, culture. It is what makes us persons in the technical sense, spiritual as well as material beings. To say that we are spiritual is to draw attention to the peculiar internal relation human beings have to themselves (self-awareness and self-determination) that is not merely some part of us related to another part, but of ourselves as a whole in relation to the whole of ourselves. This is contrasted with our materiality which refers to the equally constitutive relationship in which we stand to all that is other than ourselves, the whole universe in fact, personal and impersonal. As spiritual beings we transcend the whole of the impersonal universe in the sense that it does not explain our existence and cannot fulfill those desires that we have precisely as spiritual beings. It must however be pointed out that we are unable to exercise, develop or fulfill our spiritual capacities except through our relationship to the rest of the universe, both personal and impersonal, and in dependence on it.

This insight into our human nature does not, in Rahner's view, depend on faith but on philosophical reflection on experience. But unless one recognises this character of our human nature it is not possible to understand adequately the essentials of Christian faith. And what is more it makes possible the integration of our understanding of humanity into an evolutionary view of the world. The well-founded theories of contemporary science have enabled us to understand that the universe is an evolutionary process in which, over time, progressively more complex forms of being come into being through a real transformation of what preceded them. Humanity is the most complex (in its materiality) and the most simple (in its spirituality) being known to us. As such we contain in a transformed unity all the preceding forms of being discovered by the sciences. Though these are part of us we cannot be reduced to them but transcend them in the way Rahner makes clear. In addition we are able to contain the universe as such in our minds and endow it with meaning and value in our decisions and our acts. Thus the universe as a whole is most properly understood as a plurality of human persons. It is the object of our thought and choice, and its impersonal aspects constitute the milieu in which a plurality of persons can exist and a medium in which interpersonal transactions can bring about our development and fulfillment. Put simply, there is more of reality in a person than a fundamental particle or physical force.

Again it must be stressed that such a conception of humanity and the world is a purely philosophical one and owes nothing to Christian faith. Nevertheless it provides a way of understanding the Christian conception of our god as our creator that is consonant with our contemporary scientific and secular culture. We experience our transcendent subjectivity in all our cognitive and volitional activity. And at the same time, according to Rahner, we experience our openness to and inclination towards something absolutely transcendent that is immanent in our activity. I say 'something' because it is not any specific object of knowledge or desire; nor is it simply we ourselves as the knowing, acting subjects. It is however inherent in our conscious free activity as the condition that makes it possible, not merely as a 'logical' condition but as a reality that is essentially mysterious.

There is an unlimitedness to human consciousness and desire that indicates an unlimited reality and value as its source, an absolutely transcendent reality and value that is nevertheless immanent in our experience of ourselves as knowing, choosing subjects. There is thus philosophical space that a Christian god can come to occupy.

A reflection on our capacity for free choice will make this clearer. When we deliberately affirm something as true or choose something as good our act transcends all the causal networks the universe contains and the sciences are able to discover. Not that the laws of nature break down in us, or the social influences that have formed us cease to operate. Indeed they are absolutely necessary if we are to act at all. But they are not sufficient. If they were we would not be free. And what holds for the free action must also hold for the capacity to act freely that is part of normal human nature as outlined above. It follows that causal networks of the universe (such as are necessary to produce human beings from pre-human nature), though necessary are themselves insufficient to produce beings like us with the capacity for free action. There must therefore be another kind of causality at work, within the evolutionary process though beyond the reach of science, that is absolutely transcendent of the universe though immanent in its processes to bring us into being.

The production of beings with the capacity for free acts such as ourselves is only the clearest case of a feature that is universal in the evolutionary process uncovered by modern science. This is a process in which really new forms of being are continually coming into existence through a transformation of what preceded them. The most dramatic examples, apart from the emergence of humanity, are those of consciousness from preconscious being, of living from non-living, and of the universe itself from an initial singularity. In general cosmic evolution is from the simple and dispersed to the complex and centred. And at every stage the new form of being is not simply the product of what previously existed. Though necessary, physical things and forces are insufficient to produce biological organisms. Something more is required, a causality that transcends the cosmic process our science can investigate though immanent in it.

Rahner's philosophical anthropology thus not only provides one with a conception of humanity that is thoroughly at home in an evolutionary world-view. It also brings to light a more general feature of a world-view

such as this. Emergence of new kinds of being through a transformation of the kinds of being that preceded them is only possible by virtue of the operation of a different kind of causality altogether, one that is incommensurable with the causes science can deal with. Rahner's anthropology amounts to a new form of an argument for the existence and action in the world of a cause that would satisfy the classical Christian definition of a creator, namely one that is transcendent of the universe but is immanent in all that it is and does. The evolutionary world-view is a perfect exemplification of this. And Rahner's account also satisfies the legitimate requirements of the traditional doctrine of God's 'immediate creation of the human soul' without lapsing into any dualism of body and mind.

There is a final part of Rahner's philosophical anthropology which is of the utmost importance for understanding Christian faith in terms in an evolutionary world-view and that is his treatment of the personal development of individuals. If evolution continues in humanity it is because it is borne by human individuals themselves, in whom there is either development or decline. For human beings, though transcending impersonal reality, are nevertheless dependent on it for all we are and do. There is no thought without images, no images without sensations, no sensations without sense organs sensitive to a spatio-temporal environment in which alone we can exist, express ourselves and communicate with others. This is what is known as our historicity. As transcendent beings we are able to develop an inner life, to live by meanings and values. But we can only do this in a process that unfolds in time and in a milieu that identifies us in space. We develop ourselves only in dependence on what is other than us. And, most importantly, through our relations with other persons, in a social and cultural milieu that humanity itself has constructed. Historicity is a feature of the life of individuals and of humanity as a whole.

For beings such as we are our relations with other persons are crucial for the exercise, development and fulfilment of our distinctively personal capacities of self-consciousness and self-determination. And a philosophical phenomenology of intersubjectivity shows that certain definite kinds of relationship with others are necessary for this. It reveals the startling fact that the more we are influenced by other persons in whom these capacities are already developed, the more self-determining we are enabled to be. Apart from such influence we are unable to grow as persons. This can appear to contradict the fact that the capacity in question is that for self-determination, for action that is free. But careful analysis of experience proves the contrary: the more I am influenced by the other in a certain way, the more the act is my own.

This is in fact what our philosophical anthropology should lead us to expect. For we saw there that the existence of beings with a capacity for self-determination was only possible as the effect of an absolutely transcendent cause immanent in the evolutionary process. And in our experience of ourselves as knowing, choosing subjects we are conscious of an apprehension of reality that is absolute and of a desire for something of absolute value. This experience is however not objective; the transcendent source of our knowing and valuing is only implicit in our experience of ourselves. Here however, in the relationships with others in which we exercise develop and fulfill our capacities for self-knowledge and self-affirmation, we actually experience in an objective way the power and presence of an absolutely transcendent personal reality immanent in the very relationships themselves. It is precisely this that explains the paradoxical 'interpersonal causality' whereby the more we are subject to the influence of the other, the more self-determining we become. If the influence exercised on us was simply that of a finite cause other than us, the more it caused us to act, the less the act would be our own. But the opposite is the case. We are thus bound to recognise that within the relationships in which my capacity for self-determination is developed there is a truly transcendent personal cause at work, whose influence is incommensurable with that of finite causes, personal or impersonal.

This understanding of the necessary conditions for the exercise, development and fulfilment of human persons thus provides the basis for a 'natural theology', a new natural theology moreover that is consonant with a scientific and secular world-view and closer to the reality of religious faith than traditional arguments for the existence of God. It also provides, in my view, a fruitful approach to the problem of death.

In the sketch of the history of religion that I will presently be providing I make the point that however differently different religious traditions conceive the nature of the predicament from which their gods are understood to be able to save us, it is always characterised by two elements: conflict between human beings and death. The account just given of the interpersonal relationships required for personal growth provides a theoretical solution to the first of these, a solution that can only be realised through power from a fully transcendent source. And it is only power of this kind that can provide an answer to the problem of death. If my account of the necessary conditions for personal growth is accurate, and these conditions exist, then they also are able to answer the problem posed by death.

If it is true that human persons are transcendent in the sense that the causes science is able to identify are insufficient to bring us into being, then it follows that those same causes are insufficient to make us cease to be. But, more positively, the dynamism of personal growth through the influence of the other, is one of self-gift from and so to the other. Within the circumstances of ordinary life it is always possible to fool oneself as to whether this has been achieved; a habitual fear and self-centredness can always provide an impediment. Death however confronts one with an unavoidable choice. For human beings death means the limit of human power to

control. But the experience of personal growth through the gift of the other can help us to recognise the same feature in death. Self-assertion is futile; self-surrender to a power we have learnt to trust robs death of its threat. Instead it becomes the climax of a life in which we only have ourselves by giving ourselves away.

Seeing creation in terms of emergence, rather than as the act of starting the universe or even as the activity of conservation that keeps it going, though a purely philosophical development, thus provides a firmer foundation for theology proper to build on. On this basis I want now to summarise the aspects of the theory of evolution and emergence which have direct relevance for Christian theology as such.

The first of these is the idea of the unity and integrity of world process such that any metaphysical dualism is avoided. And so is materialism, since the unitary process culminates in the mind and will of human beings. Each individual recapitulates in the womb the whole evolutionary process that has led to humanity, and then continues it in a specifically human way in their own life. Humanity thus appears as a microcosm of the universe as a whole, containing all other levels of reality within itself; it is a paradigm of reality and not just one species amongst others. At the same time the universe itself appears as our true home, the only place, in spite of its imperfections and incompleteness, in which we can be real. Whatever the theological notion of 'salvation' means it cannot mean our being saved 'out of' the world. There is no other place! The evolutionary world-view suggests a better alternative in a further transformation of the human world (and thus the universe), in the line of those transformations that have brought humanity into being and still continue, as we shall see, in human history to this day. In a perspective such as this, the struggle to 'make the world a better place', to overcome dehumanising poverty and injustice and to take good care of the natural environment, can make better theological sense.

The second aspect of evolutionary theory of direct relevance to theology is the notion of energy it embodies, and in particular the idea that the basic energy of the universe is a 'form-producing' energy (to borrow Brian Swimme's felicitous expression) whereby every kind of being manifests over time a capacity for self-transcendence, and always in the direction of greater complexity with the increasing 'centredness' that that entails. The notion that evolution has a direction (in spite of, or perhaps even because of the annihilations and extinctions that have occurred at regular intervals during its 14 billion year history), a direction defined by the production of truly new kinds of being through a transformation and transcendence of what has gone before, is perhaps the single most important feature of the theory as far as theology is concerned. Not only does it offer a new model for the idea of creation, as we have already noted; it also helps one to see the Incarnation in a new way, as well as the ideas of salvation and grace and the notion of the Church – as I presently hope to show.

Extending the notion of evolution to humanity itself, to human history, is a third aspect one must take into account. This must not be confused with a facile idea of progress; even if the newest science is usually the best, the same cannot be said of morality. But evolution, at every level of reality, is never simply progress. It involves experiment, trial and error, though always in the end, new being through transformation and transcendence. In human history evolution takes the form of transformations of culture and consciousness and the communities in which individuals develop. The direction taken by these transformations in the human sphere is similar to that in the evolution of living beings, and indeed to that of the cosmos as a whole. It is an evolution from simplicity and homogeneity towards diversity and complexity. In human culture Eric Voegelin calls this the movement from compactness to differentiation. In primal societies politics and religion, philosophy and theology, economics and spirituality are not distinguished but form an integrated largely unconscious whole. Then technology supersedes magic, philosophy replaces myth, theology is distinguished from philosophy, eventually religion is seen as a distinct sphere of human life and contrasted with secularity. Finally the history of each of these spheres of life comes to be written. This evolution of culture, consciousness and community takes place within the sphere of religion itself, as in all the other spheres of human life. We will examine this in more detail presently. And then within Christianity there is an evolution in the development of doctrine, spirituality and liturgy.

A final, but possibly the most important, aspect of an evolutionary world-view is the idea of the necessity of a causal factor in world-process that is incommensurable with any cause discoverable by the sciences. This notion of incommensurability is of the utmost importance for dealing in a theological way with Christian faith. It arises, as we have seen, through an insight into our experience of our capacity for self-determination, and is given a more comprehensive and concrete character on our actual experience of personal growth in relationships with other persons. The fact that this experience is something universal available to humanity and not exceptional should not blind us to its essentially mysterious character. If my account is accurate then it is indeed the case that we have real experience of something absolutely transcendent, and therefore incommensurable with human persons, in our ordinary interpersonal relations.

Rahner corroborates this insight and its importance in a theological way in his treatment of the notion of creatureliness and our experience of this. Being a creature in this context entails a unique relationship to our transcendent creator, a relationship that is traditionally expressed by the notion of incommensurability. The notion of the incommensurability of creature and creator is central to classical theism and taken for granted by Aquinas. One cannot add God and the universe and make two. This is not because either is unreal, or that God

and the universe are identical, but because there is no common measure in terms of which they could be added to or subtracted from one another. The reality of each is too different. An analogy would be that of a poet composing a poem about himself. One cannot say there are two poets, the one composing and the one in the poem. But to say there is only one is misleading because the poem already exists in the poet's mind. Rahner makes use of this idea in his discussion of our creatureliness. The following quotation serves the purpose of making the connection with the idea of 'interpersonal causality' outlined above.

The radical dependence and the genuine reality of the existent coming from God vary in direct and not in inverse proportion. In our human experience it is the case that the more something is dependent on us, the less it is different from us, and the less it possesses its own reality and autonomy. The radical dependence of the effect on the cause and the independence and autonomy of the effect vary in inverse proportion.

But when we reflect upon the real transcendental relationship between God and a creature, then it is clear that here genuine reality and radical dependence are simply just two sides of one and the same reality, and therefore they vary in direct and not inverse proportion. We and the existents of our world really and truly are and are different from God not in spite of, but because we are established in being by God and not by anyone else (1978:79).

The best example of this apparently contradictory, but in reality paradoxical, relation is that of the human capacity for self-determination. In our discussion of Rahner's philosophical anthropology it was pointed out that only an infinite cause could be sufficient to bring beings with the capacity for freedom into existence, albeit through the causal mechanisms of evolution. It follows that even the exercise, development and fulfillment of our capacity for self-determination is the effect of the creative causality of God. Human freedom means freedom from total determination by worldly causes, not freedom from God. It is precisely this paradoxical truth that my analysis of interpersonal causality is intended to substantiate.

Christian theology grows from the reflection of his first followers on their experience of Jesus. The fruits of this reflection are documented in the writings of the New Testament. We are now in a position to appreciate these against the background of an evolutionary view of the world and the evolution of religious thought, in the history of Israel in particular.

Religion is as old as humanity and is the expression of a deep desire natural to humanity for a comprehensive and enduring fulfilment to all our most basic capacities and needs, especially those beyond our own powers. The gods of all religions are seen as sources of power transcending our own that can do this. Thus all religions see life as a predicament, the general form of which is that we are conscious of deep desires that only power transcending our own is able to fulfill. The history of religion offers many different accounts of this predicament and correspondingly different conceptions of the gods that are able to overcome it. Two elements however stand out as present in all traditions: the desire to overcome sickness and death, and the desire to overcome human conflict of every kind.

Although the gods of the different religions are always seen as having powers that transcend human power, the way these powers are understood depends on the view held of human nature and its capacities, its needs and powers. There is always an intrinsic connection between the conception of our god and the conception of humanity itself. This connection is illustrated in the case of Israel by the idea that humanity is the 'image' of Yahweh. For the historian of ideas it is also true that Yahweh is the 'image' of humanity. And as human culture evolves and conceptions of human nature change, so too do conceptions of our gods. There seems to be a measure of agreement among historians that during what came to be called the Axial period (roughly 800 to 300BC) in all the major centres of civilisation, a similar development in outlook took place, a development that one can call (following Voegelin) 'the discovery of transcendence'. All cultures of the time were religious so one could call this a development in religion. However it occurred in Greece as well where it took the form of a rejection of the Greek gods in the name of an absolutely transcendent element in humanity itself as well as an absolutely transcendent sphere that was its source. Plato, for instance, saw the human soul as possessed of a transcendence of anything material, and identified what he called the Form of the Good as the transcendent source of all reality, the gods included.

Be that as it may, in the history of Israel, especially in the time of the later prophets such as Second Isaiah and Ezekiel, it was a development in religion. Yahweh, originally a tribal god among other tribal gods, came to be seen as the god above all gods, and eventually as the only god, transcending not only human powers but all powers absolutely, of whatever spiritual beings the universe contained. The final step was to see that Yahweh was not part of the universe at all but its creator. This absolute transcendence of a god was a novelty in the history of religion. And, as the history of religion would lead one to expect, it was connected in the thinking of Israel's prophets and sages to a similar, though derived, transcendence in humanity itself as Yahweh's image. The universe, though necessary for human existence and fulfilment, was neither sufficient to produce or fulfill beings like us who had capacities, and thus needs and desires that only an absolutely transcendent being could

fulfill. Hence the endless hostility of the authors of the Old Testament writings towards the 'gods of the nations' who were not to be treated as gods at all since they were powerless to fulfill the transcendent needs of beings such as we.

This conception of humanity and its god gave a special character to the understanding of the human predicament in the later thought of Israel's prophets and sages, an understanding that is spelled out in mythical form in the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. These stories, especially those of Adam and Eve in the garden and the Tower of Babel, are stories of idolatry. The human predicament is depicted as a state of conflict within the human family, the consequence of which is death. The cause of conflict is sin. And sin is simply idolatry. Idolatry is self-worship, the desire to be like our transcendent god without dependence on it. And this is almost inevitable for us since we have a godlike capacity for transcendence and creativity, but one that can only be developed and fulfilled by our transcendent creator. The solution developed in the history of Israel to this predicament lay in Yahweh himself taking control of human history, overcoming human disunity by transforming the hearts and minds of his people so that they would accept and engage with him as their saviour and their king. Then they would be a community of love and peace, a universal community that would last forever.

This then is the background of the historic event documented by the writings of the New Testament. In summary: the disciples' experience of Jesus and his effect in their lives, culminating in the mysterious experience of meeting with him after his death and of his continuing presence amongst them, led them to believe that God himself was present in Jesus and in them in such a way that they shared in his own sin-and death-transcending life. This vision and spirit had come to them from Jesus and so they called him 'saviour'. This interpersonal interaction with Jesus is the event from which all Christian theology derives. It is this which, in our scientific and secular culture, we need to understand in terms of the evolutionary view of the world.

Traditionally this foundational event is called, in the case of Jesus, the Incarnation and, in the case of his disciples, Salvation or Redemption. And traditionally it is understood as an intervention by God in human history for the purpose of our salvation from a situation more or less like what I have just sketched above. *Cur Deus homo?* theologians from Anselm to Aquinas have asked. And the answer given to this question was invariably "To save us from sin and the effects of sin." No sin, no Incarnation, no need! In an evolutionary perspective however everything looks different. We have learnt to see creation as a continuing process, a process that produces humanity and continues in human history as an evolution of consciousness, culture and community. From the standpoint of Jesus and his first followers this can now be seen in the history of Israel culminating in them. God is creating a new consciousness in humanity, a new insight into human nature and into God himself that is to permeate our culture and its institutions with a new spirit so that a new community of humanity will result. In this perspective human history is essentially a history of revelation and a history of salvation. And what is more, the mysterious secret finally revealed and realised in his followers' relationship with Jesus, is that this will be a community with God himself, God present in our minds and hearts and in our lives. As Karl Rahner would put it, the whole of human history is a history of God's self-communication to us. And it reaches an unsurpassable climax in the life of Jesus and his effect on his disciples. Subsequent history is to be the spelling out of the implications of this vision and the implementation of this spirit universally. Evolution has now a new direction, the construction on this foundation of a hospitable home for humanity where they can live as a loving family with God.

I want now to show how this basic outlook affects the way we understand the central doctrines that have developed in the history of the Church to explain the nature of Christian faith. I will use the work of Karl Rahner to do this since he has explicitly situated his theology within an evolutionary framework. In particular he sees human evolution as recapitulating that of the cosmos: it is the universe itself that continues to evolve in us, in our thoughts and actions. "The history of nature and of spirit form an intrinsic and stratified unity in which the history of nature develops towards man, continues on in him as *his* history, is preserved and surpassed in him, and therefore reaches its own goal with and in the history of man's spirit" (Rahner 1978:187). Rahner sees this evolution as God's creative achievement and as a moment within that self-communication of God that culminates in the Incarnation and its effects in us: "Now according to Christian teaching, this self-transcendence of the cosmos in man towards its own totality and towards its ground does not really and fully reach its ultimate fulfilment until the cosmos is not only something established in existence by its ground, is not only something created, but also receives the immediate self-communication of its own ground in the spiritual creatures which are its goal and its high point. This immediate self-communication of God to spiritual creatures takes place in what we call 'grace' while this self-communication is still in its historical process, and 'glory' when it reaches fulfilment. Not only does God create something different from himself, but he also gives himself to this other. The world receives God, the infinite and the ineffable mystery, in such a way that he himself becomes its innermost life. The always unique self-possession of the cosmos, which is concentrated in each individual spiritual person in its transcendence towards the absolute ground of its reality, takes place by the fact that the absolute ground itself becomes immediately interior to what is grounded by it" (1978:190).

In this evolutionary understanding of Christianity God (as the one Jesus called Abba) has a quite distinctive character and relationship to us. In the first place it is God who is now recognised as the source of our existence and the one whom we experience in our experience of ourselves as knowing, choosing subjects involved with other persons in a milieu of culture and of nature. And it is God whom we experience especially in those relationships with others in which we exercise, develop and fulfill those capacities that make us subjects, and, in particular, our desire for the fullness of personal community and death-transcending life. For Rahner nobody is without this experience, and it is in this sense that he uses the term 'anonymous Christian'. Of course experience is not knowledge, and primal cultures had only inadequate ideas of God, as are expressed in their religion. But for Rahner the whole of human history can be seen as an evolution towards the true understanding of the power that moves history towards its goal through the insights and freedom of humanity. And this is because he believes that human history is the history of *God's self-communication* to humanity. The notion of God's self-communication to humanity is the fundamental conception in Rahner's theology. It is this idea that defines both salvation and revelation for him.

The salvation of humanity consists in the creation of 'the unity of humanity in union with God', to paraphrase the expression used by the Second Vatican Council. For Rahner the way to this is God's self-communication to us throughout human history, but finally and fully in the life of Jesus. For a union between God and humanity to exist it must be achieved in our human world, the world God created for this purpose. It cannot take place anywhere else, for human beings cannot be real anywhere else. We are 'evolution become conscious of itself'. However transformed, it is this universe that is our eternal home. And it has been created by God with the purpose of making it a home in which God can be with us. We don't go to God; God comes to us. This is the import of Rahner's idea of God's self-communication. And so the Incarnation (the complete and therefore un-surpassable form of God's self-communication) is seen as the purpose of creation, and salvation as the purpose of the Incarnation. One must of course add that the notion of salvation is only appropriate because of sin; it is God's continuing creation and self-communication in the process of overcoming sin and the effects of sin in us. Finally, salvation can only be achieved if God's self-communication is accepted. For Christian faith it is, and completely, by Jesus. The acceptance of God's self-communication, by Jesus or by us, is also always the result of God's freedom-creating power in human acts, 'grace' in Rahner's terminology.

Revelation, as Rahner understands it, is not primarily the revelation of truths but the revelation of God himself. It is an aspect of God's self-communication, that which imparts the personal knowledge of God. This knowledge is personal knowledge, the knowledge of acquaintance, not knowledge of truths about God, not something that can be written down. It is thus not to be identified with scripture, whether Jewish or Christian. It is that which is possessed by the persons - prophets, apostles, Jesus himself - who write or are written about in the scriptures. Rahner, as I have already indicated, sees the history of God's revelation of God as coinciding with the whole of human history. And, as with salvation, revelation proceeds by fits and starts, developing in different ways and to different degrees in every culture and religion. It reaches an unsurpassable completeness only in Jesus.

Because Christian faith in God is faith in the one revealed in the person and life of Jesus it depends on a knowledge of that person and that life. This is as true for those who were intimate with him before his death as it is for us. But for us this knowledge is mediated to us by that original community as it has expanded through two thousand years. And it is complicated by the fact that the original community (and its extension through time and space) was formed by a faith in Jesus' resurrection. So there is no way of getting to know anything (or anything of importance) about Jesus apart from those who believed in his resurrection. Certainly all the writings of the New Testament are written from the point of view of this faith. Modern scientific study of these has helped a great deal to form an objective picture of what Jesus said and did and of the effect this had on his followers. But the project of building up a detailed biography of Jesus is doomed to failure. That does not matter however from the point of view of Christian theology. As theologians we want an accurate picture of the *faith* of Jesus' followers and, if possible, the faith of Jesus himself. Since the authors of the New Testament writings believed that their faith in God was the same as that of Jesus - since they had acquired it through their intimacy with him - they are providing us with first hand information about the nature of that faith. And that is what we really want. Rahner (though not himself a biblical scholar in the strict sense, had studied more works of biblical scholarship than most who are) certainly believed that we are in possession of sufficient knowledge of what the first followers of Jesus believed, and of what Jesus himself believed, to be able to share their faith. He is supported in this conviction both by the philosophical insights into the capacities and deep desires of our human nature that I have outlined, as well as by the history of religion I have sketched above. And he certainly believed that if a person was not in touch with his own humanity, but had a mind full of contemporary illusions or ancient myths, then authentic Christian faith would be virtually impossible.

Rahner felt that one can say something about Jesus' own self-understanding. Jesus certainly saw himself as standing in the historic line of Jewish prophets, but with this difference: he was bringing this line to an end. All other prophets saw themselves as bearers of God's word to Israel, but that word was not seen as God's final word. The prophets saw their words as God's words ("The Lord your God says this" and "Thus says the Lord"),

but still expected God to say more. Jesus, on the other hand, had a message whose very content implied that it was the final one, final because complete and unsurpassable. Rahner sees Jesus' gospel of the kingdom of God as implying God's *self*-communication to the world, not just a message. And not even God could do more than that.

So the first stage of human history was coming to an end; the final stage was beginning. 'Was beginning ...?' Rahner believes that Jesus did not know, perhaps even was mistaken, about the 'times and seasons' of God's full and irrevocable entry into human history, his 'kingdom'. But he also believes that Jesus saw himself as in some way or other responsible for its inauguration. And that he felt this responsibility because of his experience of God's extraordinary closeness to him. Here is how he puts it: "Jesus experienced a relationship to God which he experienced as new and unique in comparison with other men, but which he nevertheless considered to be exemplary for other men in their relationship to God... Jesus experienced in himself that radical and victorious offer of God to him which did not exist before in this way among 'sinners', and he knows that it is significant, valid and irrevocable for *all* men. According to his own self-understanding he is already before the resurrection the one sent, the one who inaugurates the kingdom of God through what he says and what he does in a way that did not exist before, but now does exist *through* him and *in* him. At least in this sense the pre-resurrection Jesus already knew himself to be the absolute and unsurpassable saviour" (1978:253 – 254).

Certainly his followers saw him in that light, and even before the resurrection experience of his being with them although he had died. Unless they had his death would not have been the catastrophic disaster it clearly was. And nor would their experience of the resurrection have had the meaning that it did.

What the followers of Jesus came to see, and what later theology has tried ever since to find appropriate words for, was that the immanence of the transcendent god of Israel in historical events, and especially in the words and acts of the prophets, had reached an unsurpassable climax in Jesus and his relationship with them. In this experience they saw God as uniting Jesus to himself by taking his human nature into himself in such a way that the incommensurability of creator and creature found full expression in Jesus' character and life, and in the influence he had on his disciples. As they came to put it, they experienced Jesus as being 'without sin', in virtue of the unity between God's Word and Spirit and his own. God's self-communication had always provided the ultimate environment of humanity; never before had it been fully accepted.

An evolutionary world-view is a scientific and secular one. It is therefore important that Christianity avoids the appearance of mythical thinking. Too often the figure of Jesus has been presented in this way, as a kind of 'superman' (*übermensch*) or a mere 'humanoid' apparition of God. There were indeed monophysitist tendencies in Christianity from the start. In view of the universal human tendency towards idolatry outlined above this should not surprise us. The defence of Jesus' genuine humanity is still necessary. And this is one of the main aims of Rahner's "Christology within an evolutionary view of the world". He stresses that the "hypostatic union may not be seen so much as something which distinguishes Jesus from us, but as something which must occur once and only once when the world begins to enter upon its final phase" (1978:181). And this because "the intrinsic effect of the hypostatic union for the assumed humanity of the Logos consists precisely and in real sense *only* in the very thing which is ascribed to all men as their goal and their fulfilment, namely the immediate vision of God." (1978:200) In Trinitarian terms, it is the same presence of the Father's Word and Spirit in Jesus and in his followers that enables them to participate in God's sin- and death-transcendent life.

It remains true that for Christian faith God's presence in Jesus has a completeness that cannot be surpassed, since it is in fact there that it is fully revealed – to Jesus in the first place, but also to his disciples.. But according to the same faith God has always been present in human history though not fully experienced as such. Nor can it be thought that human history, and the evolution of culture and community that implies, is now at an end. Too often religions, and Christianity in particular, attempt to fix their faith on some past event and the earliest expression of its meaning. This is the idolatry of fundamentalism. Instead, in order to do justice to the evolutionary understanding of reality, an authentic faith can only exist in changing forms of culture and community. Such changing forms are always created and carried by a small minority of believers. And it is only in the nineteenth century that the idea of 'the development of doctrine' becomes fully conscious. It is a genuine fruit of human evolution nonetheless, as Newman saw when he observed that "to live is to change and to live perfectly is to have changed often". In this light it is not fanciful to see the phenomenon of secularisation, in spite of all its imperfections, as a fruit of that unity of humanity and God identified in the Incarnation. Charles Taylor, does in fact see it in this way when he describes it in *A Secular Age* as the completion of the Axial discovery of transcendence (2007:774).

So human evolution is not over with the Incarnation. For Christian faith it is at a new beginning. If the Incarnation is the ultimate revelation of God's saving presence in human history, it is not something that is now over and done with. To believe in the resurrection of Jesus is to believe in his continuing 'real presence' in the world. And that means that God's Incarnation continues, though now in the sacramental mode we call the Church, which is a communion of Jesus with his followers.

Christian faith is personal knowledge of a person, given and received in a relationship between persons. For this reason it cannot be exhaustively or finally expressed in any form of words. For the same saving

relationship to be achieved in different times and places, different words must of necessity be used for its expression. This of course is the ongoing work of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum*. And if we are to take the notion of an evolution in human history seriously we are bound to look for a development in theology as well. If there is an increase in our knowledge of the world and of ourselves, surely there can be an increase in our understanding of our faith as well.

A word of caution: the newest science is the truest; the same is not true of philosophy, or of any of the other forms of knowledge that constitute wisdom. This more comprehensive, deeper understanding is always the achievement of particular individuals. And it cannot be communicated to others in the way that the knowledge of the sciences can. Nevertheless I think that the achievements of science as well as philosophy enable a deeper, fuller understanding - in our post-modern setting, beyond pre-modern superstition and modern materialism - of the event on which Christian faith is based.

The account given above of the necessary conditions for the exercise, growth and fulfilment of our capacity for self-determination, an account that provides evidence for the presence and influence within the intersubjective relations of human persons of a strictly transcendent yet personal power, does to my mind help one to understand better the relationship between Jesus and his disciples that constituted both their salvation and a revelation of God. There in an extreme form we have the 'interpersonal causality' that reveals the presence of the transcendent in our experience of personal growth: the gift of self from and so to the other. In this connection it is worth remarking that the consonance we pointed out between the self-offering dynamism involved in personal growth and the living of our death as the final gift of self to God, is exhibited perfectly in the disciples' experience of Jesus' resurrection. This is at one and the same time an experience of union with him and an insight into the meaning of his life and death.

It can be reasonably asked of Christians who accept the evolutionary view what form an evolution of Christianity might be expected to take. There is no simple answer to this question. The traditional answer: missionary activity and conversion, no longer seems appropriate. We have to look for an answer to the new social and cultural environment in which any such evolution must take place.

Keith Ward, in his courageous and perceptive work *A Vision to Pursue* argues for a critical engagement on the part of Christians with their own tradition, the purpose of which is to renew it. Renewal, as Ward understands it, is something radical in which a real transformation takes place, so that what emerges is something really new though comprising all the essential ingredients of the old. Nor is it only Christians who must engage in this creative criticism; it is a necessity for all religious traditions, a necessity produced by the evolution of consciousness, culture and community of which I have spoken. As always, renewal of a tradition is the work of a small minority of the faithful. Ward however believes that "within each tradition there are many who stand within the tradition, but think that they can, and should, revise some of its central ideas to take account of advances in scientific knowledge, scriptural and historical scholarship, or changes in moral and philosophical outlook" (1991:194).

In our post-modern context we are confronted with a plurality of cultural and religious traditions, and new ones are beginning all the time. Insight into evolution should lead us to expect this. And we should also recognise that not all traditions of this kind are equally true or good, not all constitute an evolutionary advance. At the moment this global plurality of cultures and religions is a theatre of conflict if not a war-zone. This is often depicted by religious traditions as at root a conflict between the old and good and the new and bad: "They see the basic modern religious conflict as one between an ancient and irreformable truth, embodied in one cultural framework, and destructive forces of secularism and materialism, which must be resisted by a return to the old absolute value" (1991:206) This is a mistake: "The true conflict is between a form of Enlightenment thinking which has become, self-defeatingly, trapped in a dogmatic system of materialism and a form of religious faith which is open to new insights and repentant of old mistakes. It is not the opposition of one dogmatism to another, as the fundamentalists suppose. It is the endeavour to open up the Enlightenment to its spiritual basis and goal, in the relation of free finite spirits to the unconditioned freedom of the supreme creative Spirit underlying all things. This does necessitate a criticism of all traditions; but only in order that they may move to a wider and deeper grasp of what is implicit within them. It does necessitate a conversation of traditions with one another; but only in order that each may learn its limitations by learning the differing visions found elsewhere" (1991:207).

This suggests that the way forward, the direction to be chosen, involves developing a conversation between religious traditions and perhaps particularly between those traditions that have lasted, the biblical religions of the Middle East and the Eastern religions of India and China. But a condition of health of such a conversation will be its ability to recognise and express itself in terms of the scientific and secular culture that is here to stay. Indeed I would go so far as to say that it is only a 'natural theology' based on the insights into our human nature provided by this culture that can provide both a standard for judging the truth and value of any religion and also a basis for genuine dialogue between them. I hope I have done enough in this paper to show that a Christian faith expressed in terms of an evolutionary world-view has nothing to fear from such a conversation.

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