

Implications of the New Cosmology for Traditional Doctrine

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Introduction

In this paper on doctrine in the Christian tradition in the light of the New Story, the focus will be on the implications for traditional doctrine of the insights and understandings emerging from the discoveries of modern science in the field of cosmology. Before doing so it would be important to establish a context for this reflection.

In his seminal work, “The Passion of the Western Mind” ⁽¹⁾, Richard Tarnas highlights the rupture that occurred between science and religion in the seventeenth century as a consequence of the discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton. These discoveries led inevitably to the articulation of a philosophy of science by philosopher scientists such as Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon ⁽²⁾ ^(A0). The rupture between science and religion paved the way for the age of The Enlightenment, an age in which the scientists, freed from the constraints of religious dogma, felt free to pursue their scientific studies un beholden to religious authorities of any persuasion. A heady optimism gripped the imagination of the cultural elite of the Enlightenment Era, convinced as they were that science not religion would “save the world”. Progressively, over the next couple of centuries secularism and science worked hand in hand to fashion a new world vision, free from the tyranny of want, ignorance, disease, religious dogma and all of the other miseries that the Enlightenment perceived as a burden upon society. This secular vision of life was powerfully articulated by the philosophers of the French Revolution such as Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The scientific endeavour, which was the driving engine of the Enlightenment, gave birth to a powerful and versatile technology. This technology made heavy demands on the resources of the Earth in a vain attempt to satisfy the insatiable expectations of society. Inevitably, the Enlightenment Utopia failed to deliver on its extravagant promises, but not before it had made a profound impact on the role and purpose of religious belief in a modern society.

For its part, Christianity, the Catholic Church in particular, ceded the secular world to the scientists, and focused its attentions on things spiritual. Earth was presented as a place of exile, a testing ground for the soul. Heaven was the only goal worth pursuing. Ever since the Council of Trent, which had met for five sessions over a period from 1545 – 1563, the Church pursued a strongly dogmatic line in relation to what was expected of its adherents in matters of faith and morals. As the years slipped by, Mother Church focused more and more on things spiritual, and took refuge behind the ramparts of infallible dogmas and inflexible rules, working tirelessly to protect and safeguard her flock from contamination. There was no dialogue with the world of science, and great care was taken to preserve the sacred well of revealed doctrine from any kind of contamination from secular society. In this context, Pope Pius IX issued *The Syllabus of Errors* in 1864^(A1) in which eighty errors were specifically

identified and roundly condemned. Basically, it was a frontal attack on the claims of rationalism and secularism in all of its guises. His successor but one, Pope Pius X, repeated this ritual of condemnation in his encyclical, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* ^(A2) published in 1907. For the next half century, any attempt by Catholic scholars such as Teilhard deChardin ⁽³⁾ to bridge the chasm that had developed between the Catholic Church and modern science was systematically silenced either by censure or by expulsion.

Second Vatican Council

On 28 October 1958, the ageing Cardinal Angelo Roncalli was elected pope. He was seventy-nine years old, and it was generally accepted that he would be a transition appointment after the long papacy of Pope Pius XII. To the consternation of many of his cardinals, in January 1959, Pope John announced his intention to hold an Ecumenical Council. To quote Cardinal Montini "this holy old boy doesn't realise what a hornet's nest he's stirring up" ⁽⁴⁾ Pope John saw the Council as an opportunity to open, metaphorically speaking, the windows of the Church and to let the Holy Spirit in, after centuries of introversion and living behind theological barricades.

The Second Vatican Council ushered in a new era of dialogue between the Church and the modern world ⁽⁵⁾, the reverberations of which are still very much in evidence. One of the outcomes of this dialogue was the rapprochement that was effected between religion and science. For the first time, the writings of the scientist and mystic, Teilhard de Chardin, became readily available, and the findings of science were no longer being dismissed on the basis of religious dogmatism. Although forbidden to publish his writings while alive and exiled to the US from France in the 1950's, Teilhard was re-instated to some extent in recent times by the endorsement of his Cosmic Liturgy by Pope Benedict XVI ^(A3)

The communication between the Church and the scientific community was further normalised in 1990 when a group of well known scientists, including scientists of the calibre of Carl Sagan, Hans Bethe, Freeman Dyson, and Stephen Jay Gould issued an open letter to the religious traditions to encourage a spirit of common cause and joint action with the scientists to save the Earth.

"As scientists many of us have profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded."⁽⁶⁾

One of the most symbolic manifestations of this reinstatement of the world of science was the formal withdrawal of the charge of heresy against Galileo by Pope John Paul II in 1992. Over three and a half centuries previously, in the year 1633, the Roman Inquisition forced Galileo Galilei to recant his theory that the Earth moves around the Sun. Under threat of torture, Galileo reluctantly recanted, but as he left the courtroom, he is said to have muttered, 'all the same, it (the Earth) moves'. On 7th November 1992, three hundred and fifty nine years later, the Church finally agreed that Galileo was not a heretic, and that the Earth did indeed orbit the Sun ^(A4). At a ceremony in Rome, before the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Pope John Paul II officially declared that Galileo was right. The formal rehabilitation was based on the findings of a committee of the Academy that the Pope had set up in 1979, soon after taking office. The committee decided that the Inquisition had acted in good faith, but was wrong. Galileo was reinstated, and placed on a pedestal as a model scientist, and a

model believer in whom reason and faith were harmoniously interwoven. It must be remembered at this juncture that Galileo was condemned by the Inquisition as a heretic in 1633 because his heliocentric theory on the movement of planets contradicted the literalist belief in the Bible that prevailed in the church at that time ^(A5). Pope Urban VIII's condemnation of Galileo as a heretic through the machinery of the Inquisition, and Pope John Paul II's reprieve of him stating he was not a heretic in 1992 fall on either side of the decree of papal infallibility promulgated in 1870 by the First Vatican Council convened by Pope Pius IX. The Franco/Prussian war precipitated the premature closure of the Council immediately after the dogma of papal infallibility was decreed.

The Bible Cosmology

The creation story as told in the first three chapters of Genesis portrays an image of God that has shaped Christian thinking about God for the two thousand years of its existence. The cosmology underpinning the story is captured in the diagram 1^(A6). It is not a cosmology that was particular to the Hebrew people, but was common to many cultures in the Middle East including the Babylonians and the Persians. Indeed, the sequence of creation days used in the Bible story parallels the way the Babylonians assigned certain aspects of creation to particular Babylonian gods after whom they named the days of the week. ^(A7).

The God that emerges from this story is a God that lives in the "Heaven of Heavens" and exists outside of creation. Creation is a kind of building project that this God undertakes in much the same way as a town planner builds a town. When the work has been completed and all of the elements have been put in place, the Master Builder sits back and admires the work of his hands. "On the seventh day God rested." The male pronoun is totally appropriate to this understanding of Divinity.

This creation story itself implicitly endorses the following beliefs:

- God created a static Universe. By the end of the sixth day, everything is in existence, the heavens the earth, land and sea, plants and animals.
- Every living species is a distinct creation of the Creator, unrelated to any other species.
- All living things are created complete in their form and function. There is no room for evolutionary development.
- When it comes to the creation of the human, God does something different. The human alone is made "in the image and likeness of God", and is given authority and dominion over all of the other life forms that inhabit the Earth.
- The uniqueness of the human is a fundamental element of the creation story, and logically leads to the assumption that humans are the crowning glory of creation, and essential to the Universe itself ⁽⁶⁾.

Having endowed human beings with such unparalleled privileges compared to all of the other species, the Bible story conveys the impression that God felt the need to test the mettle of the first humans to see if they were worthy of such privileges. In the decisive testing, they failed utterly. For them and for their descendents, the consequences were disastrous. Adam and Eve were deprived of their privileged status as special friends of God;

they were driven out of the garden of paradise; they were sentenced to a life of ongoing struggle and pain; the earth itself was cursed under their feet; the gates of heaven were closed against them and their descendants. To crown it all, they were left absolutely powerless to find a way out of this predicament. The one consolation offered them as they were driven from the garden in shame and misery was the promise that a redeemer would come to free them from their bondage.

The first three chapters of Genesis in which these events are set out, become the context in which all of Hebrew history is to be understood. The “fall” of Adam and Eve is presented as having immense consequences for all of humanity. Members of the human species find themselves in a state of total alienation from God, and utterly helpless to find a way out of the impasse.

The Biblical Image of God

The image of God that emerges from this creation story is that of a male God who shows little tolerance for human failure, and who imposes a heavy penalty on the creatures made in his own image and likeness. This harsh image of God is nuanced as the Bible story unfolds, but the rod of correction casts a long shadow over all of Bible history. A thread of fear and punishment runs through it from beginning to end. Fear rather than love is more likely to be engendered by a Divine Being whose punishments are inescapable, and whose disposition to punish the innocent for the failure of their ancestors persists down to the very last generation. It would be hard to imagine a more implacable God.

While these biblical myths offer deep insights into human nature, they raise profound questions about the nature of revelation itself and to what extent revelation is constrained by the limitations of human understanding, and the vagaries of human imagination. Robin Meyers refers to this distortion of our image of God in *Saving Jesus from the Church* ⁽⁷⁾.

Cosmology based on science

A synopsis of the New Cosmology will not be attempted here. It is a story that has been unfolding for the past 13.7 billion years and is still unfolding. It is beautifully sketched in the writings of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry ⁽⁸⁾. The New Cosmology Story is shaped by many scientific disciplines. It addresses three fundamental emergences:

- The emergence of the physical Universe itself
- The emergence of life
- The emergence of conscience self-awareness in the human

These emergences involve an engagement with a whole array of scientific disciplines: physics, astrophysics, astronomy, relativity, quantum mechanics, biochemistry, chemistry, biology, physiology, geology, palaeontology, microbiology; the human sciences – the list goes on and on. What has to be said of the scientific endeavour, however, is that its ultimate goal is scientific, verifiable truth. It also has an inbuilt self-correcting dimension to it. Experimental verification of its theories, and the replication and confirmation of its findings by a jury of its peers are intrinsic elements of its methodology. Sooner or later, scientific

errors are identified by the rigorous and robust self-correcting processes that are intrinsic to scientific methodology⁽⁹⁾.

In acknowledging the robust integrity of science, it is not the case that scientists themselves are dispassionate, detached, unbiased seekers of scientific knowledge. Some are passionate evangelists for the philosophical positions which they espouse, be they atheistic or creationist. Richard Dawkins, for example, is a well known evangelistic atheist who, as a matter of principle, uses science to bolster his atheistic views⁽¹⁰⁾.

A major limitation of the scientific approach is that it tends to reduce all reality to the world of matter, to what is measurable and in some way amenable to physical investigation. If a reality is not reducible to a formula, or a numerical value of some kind, or is not open to verification by experiment, then experimental science cannot deal with it, and will tend to regard it as a non-material reality, as an epiphenomenon – a thing of no consequence in the real world.

Another limitation in the scientific method is its belief in the heresy of reductionism. The scientific method proceeds on the basis that the truth will emerge from analysis of the parts. The conviction that breaking a thing down to its constituent parts will inevitably reveal its total reality is part of the gospel of science. There is more to a watch than the sum of all the parts. The reality of the whole can be missed by an over emphasis on an analysis of the parts. Ken Wilber in *A Brief History of Everything*⁽¹¹⁾ illustrates this deficiency of science quite succinctly.

The Coherence of Truth

The New Story, built as it is on scientific research and investigation, presents a number of challenges to traditional doctrine based on biblical revelation. For the past three and a half centuries, an unhealthy dualism has fostered the belief that religious truths belong to one order of reality, and scientific truths belong to another. Out of this duality has grown the conviction that scientific truths and religious truths do not have to be coherent – a thing can be true in religion even though all of the scientific evidence suggests the contrary. This is the predicament in which Creationists find themselves when maintaining a literal interpretation of Genesis chapters 1 – 3 in the face of the mounting evidence emerging from scientific investigation of the origins of life and of the Universe itself.

As Pope John Paul II proclaimed in an address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 1996, the truth does not contradict itself^(A8). If the Universe is of divine origin, then whatever science discovers about it must in some way be revealing an aspect of the Divine Reality. Human understanding may be inadequate to encompass the full complexity of truth, but science is in the business of discovering the truths of nature not inventing them. Good science is a process of discovering the way things are - they way they have evolved in nature. Thomas Aquinas⁽¹²⁾ maintained, that nature is the first book of revelation, and the book through which the Divine first communicated with humans. If the same divine source underpins the truths of science and the truths of religion then there must be coherence between them at the most fundamental of all levels – the divine origin of both.

The Interventionist God and the discoveries of science

In biblical cosmology, God was perceived as being outside of creation. Creation was something that God made in a biblical week and then rested. The Bible also presents God as an interventionist God who may intervene at any time to set aside the natural laws and their consequences. The sun can be stopped in the sky, the waters of the sea can be parted, manna can be made to fall from the heavens, a rock can be induced to gush forth fresh water etc., etc...

In times past, when humans failed to find an explanation for some natural phenomenon, it was in the nature of things to attribute the cause to a divine intervention. Thus earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, plagues were all seen as acts of God, and as often as not as divine punishments for human infidelity. Insurance companies still use “an act of God” as an escape clause to avoid settling insurance claims arising from unforeseen natural disasters e.g. the recent volcanic eruption in Iceland.

The invocation of divine causality in straitened circumstances gave rise to the notion of the “God of the Gaps”, or the God of the inexplicable. This understanding of God is addressed in the opening chapter of Smith’s *God Energy and the Field* ⁽¹³⁾. This interventionist God gradually lost ground as scientific explanations accounted for more and more of the phenomena which previously had rested securely within the remit of the Divine Interventionist. The slow erosion of belief in a “God of the Gaps” was the inevitable outcome of this kind of theologising. The findings of science gradually offered convincing scientific explanations for more and more of the previously inexplicable gaps in human knowledge, thus obviating the need for input from an “Interventionist Divinity”. Science was systematically making the “God of the Gaps” woefully redundant.

A new dialogue between faith and science

Within the scientific community, faith in a Divine Being that is coherent with the revelations of New Cosmology is gradually becoming more acceptable now that the theology of “the God of the Gaps” is gradually being consigned to the archive of failed theologies. Thomas Berry’s last work, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, draws attention to this development ⁽¹⁴⁾.

The New Cosmology sees all natural phenomena as explicable within the laws of nature. Plagues and famines, earthquakes and tsunamis are not manifestations of God’s anger with human behaviour; they are the consequences of the way the Universe works. Chaos is an ongoing dimension of the way the Universe evolves from one state to another, with all of the destructive consequences chaos can have for living species of all kinds ⁽¹⁵⁾. The history of evolution is a long saga of chaotic events. In fact the Universe itself began in a moment of utter chaos.

The accommodation between God and the New Cosmology is best understood in terms of panentheism ^(A9). From a panentheistic perspective, God is everywhere within the Universe as its sustaining principle, its source of energy and creativity, its ultimate *raison d’être*. But God is not confined or limited by the Universe. The reality of God encompasses the reality of the Universe but transcends it. This concept of God is discussed to some extent in Ó Murchu’s *Quantum Theology* ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Panentheism itself does not resolve all of the God questions equally well. In some respects, it raises new questions

- How is this panentheistic God experienced as personal?
- Can a God who is best described as a source of creative energy satisfy adequately the deep human longing for intimacy with the Divine?

What is meant by divine revelation?

The fundamentalist position interprets divine revelation to mean that the words of the Bible are the result of divine dictation. God dictated the words of the Bible, and a human agent wrote them down. Clearly, this understanding of the origins of the Bible has a long history in Christian tradition. It is only in the last century that Biblical scholarship has succeeded in changing the landscape to some extent. Consider the following statements:

- On the 8th April 1546 the Council of Trent spoke of what the evangelists and apostles wrote in the New Testament as being “at the dictation of the Holy Spirit.”
- On the 24th April 1870, the First Vatican Council declared that what was written in the Bible was written at the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
- On the 18th November 1965, at the Second Vatican Council, the Council declared that the Bible books were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

In the Catholic tradition it was only in the 1950s, with the publication of the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* ^(A10) by Pope Pius XII that Catholic scholarship moved beyond the gridlock of fundamentalism. The Protestant tradition had been engaged in historical and textual criticism from the early decades of the nineteenth century onwards. Albert Schweitzer set new standards of biblical scholarship in “The Quest of the Historical Jesus” first published in 1910 ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The scientific evidence underpinning the initial Flaring Forth of the Universe, and the evolutionary story of the emergence of life on Earth makes it imperative for the Christian tradition to reformulate its understanding of biblical revelation so that the myths and metaphors of an earlier age do not continue to be mistaken for historical accounts of how God communicated with humanity. Joseph Campbell has much wisdom to offer on the history and nature of myths ⁽¹⁸⁾. For an insight into the role of myth in revelation, Wessels has something fresh to offer ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Revelation is ongoing. God speaks as loudly to-day through the wonders of Creation as God ever spoke in the past. To deny the ongoing nature of revelation is to deny in some way the story of the Universe and the way in which the Divine Presence continues to manifest in it and through it. To assert that our ancestors saw the Divine more clearly because they understood the Divine creation less clearly is a contradiction in terms. Ignorance is not the basis for revelation.

Revelation and experience

Revelation arises out of an experience of the Divine. If there is no experience of the Divine, there can be no revelation. Revelation like prophesy is on-going. It is a denial of the

fundamental belief that God is revealed in and through creation to suggest that revelation ceased two thousand years ago, and that all we have doing ever since is living off of past experiences of God. As Gabriel Moran has succinctly put it:

“A prophet does not tell people revelations; instead he awakens the revelatory character of their own lives. Revelation is not what prophets have, it is what communities experience. Far from being isolated from community, the prophet is the one most deeply in touch with the roots of the community’s life. Like the artist he will not conveniently fit into the ordinary framework of the community. He will be strongly opposed by part of the community. This is the test of true prophets who persist in trying to awaken the whole community to its undreamt of possibilities. The only final test of the prophet is whether he does eventually succeed, that is, whether his words and actions resonate in the experience of humankind ⁽²⁰⁾.”

The unfolding Universe is a permanent source of divine revelation by the very fact that it is ever unfolding. God continuously speaks to us through the revelatory power of the Universe.

The origins of humans

The Genesis Story of the creation of the human is not a historical account of what happened. Genesis is a story of human origin handed on from generation to generation to make sense of life as an ancient people experienced it. Genesis is a profound articulation of how a primitive people experienced the reality of life, and how they experienced the Divine in the ebb and flow of their history. They tried to make sense of what they experienced – the good and the bad - and since they were a people deeply aware of their own limitations, they looked beyond themselves for an explanation of their plight. That they ended up with a concept of the Divine having many of the eccentricities and foibles of human beings is hardly to be wondered at. Revelation is always limited by the capacity of the receiving party to understand and interpret the message. A primitive recording instrument will not do justice to the beauty of a Mozart horn concerto no matter how well the orchestra has played it, but it will catch something of the magic nonetheless, and heighten the appetite for more.

In 1859, Charles Darwin published his seminal work on evolution – *The Origin of Species* – for which he was both lauded and vilified by the critics of his time. In this work, Darwin makes the case that humans evolved from pre-existing life forms, and gradually, over time, came to self-conscious awareness as a species. At no point along the evolutionary process is there evidence for the existence of a primary pair of humans fitting the description of Adam and Eve. Humans evolved from primates on a number of different occasions over a span of a few million years. The story of the evolution of the human species upon the Earth is wonderfully told in the *Smithsonian Intimate Guide to Human Origins* ⁽²¹⁾.

These two stories of human origin are not compatible. The Bible story underpins the Fall/Redemption theology that has dominated Christian thinking and teaching from the earliest days. St. Augustine is seen as the one who articulated this theology most succinctly and most powerfully for succeeding generations of Christians.

The story of human origin as articulated first by Darwin in 1859, and subsequently by the scientific community with every increasing clarity, does not accommodate the scenario

presented in the creation and fall story of Genesis. If the modern scientific story is correct, it poses a huge challenge for Christian theology.

The fact that evolution was posing a huge problem for traditional understandings of Christian dogma was clearly felt by Pius XII when he wrote on this issue in 1950.

“The Teaching Authority of the Church does not forbid that, in conformity with the present state of human sciences and sacred theology, research and discussions, on the part of men experienced in both fields, take place with regard to the doctrine of evolution, in as far as it inquires into the origin of the human body as coming from pre-existent and living matter—for the Catholic faith obliges us to hold that souls are immediately created by God.” (A11)

There was a marked change in the papal view of evolution between Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II. The change is highlighted in Doug Linden’s article wherein he quotes the Pope as follows:

Today, almost half a century after publication of the encyclical (*Humani Generis*), new knowledge has led to the recognition of the theory of evolution as more than a hypothesis. It is indeed remarkable that this theory has been progressively accepted by researchers, following a series of discoveries in various fields of knowledge. The convergence, neither sought nor fabricated, of the results of work that was conducted independently is in itself a significant argument in favour of the theory.

Evolution, a doctrine that Pius XII only acknowledged as an unfortunate possibility, John Paul accepts forty-six years later “as an effectively proven fact” (A12).

It is one thing to accept the broad concept of the evolutionary process, it is another to accept the inevitable unravelling of ancient teachings that have been folded into the Genesis story and proclaimed as central dogmas of the faith over the centuries. This prospect opens up a Pandora’s Box of theological difficulties only some of which can be referred to in this paper.

Christology and the Evolution

For the past two thousand years, we have lived with an interpretation of the life and death of Jesus that made perfect sense in the context of the Great Cosmology Story out of which the Old Testament was written. The core of Genesis may be synopsised thus:

Adam and Eve were a special creation of God; they were placed in a position of power and privilege; they disobeyed God’s ordinances; they were banished from the Garden of Innocence; the gates of heaven were closed against them. They were condemned to live while on Earth in a state of fearful alienation from God, with the terrible possibility of eternal alienation in the hereafter. They were sustained in their earthly struggle by the promise that a redeemer would come who would win back God’s favour for them and open the gates of heaven once again.

Although Jesus himself never talked about the need for a blood sacrifice to appease an angry God, and prise open the gates of heaven closed as a consequence of the original sin, Christian tradition has interpreted his death in exactly these terms. Today, this interpretation of the life of Jesus now faces many difficulties. If the notion of a necessary blood sacrifice to

appease an angry God is not how we can understanding the Jesus event today, what empowering and life sustaining meaning can we attribute to it?. In brief, we need a compelling answer to the following question:

What is the meaning of the human life of Jesus outside of the context of the blood sacrifice of atonement?

The New Cosmology story requires a new articulation of the response to the fundamental question of why Jesus came upon the Earth. The Fall/Redemption paradigm no longer provides an adequate explanation. What is now needed is a way of understanding the Jesus phenomenon that resonates with the revelation we have received from the New Universe Story. This is not to deny the appalling mess we humans have made of our management of the Earth's resources, nor does it minimise in any way the profound need for healing and reconciliation within the Earth community.

The need for the articulation of a new Christology is gradually becoming more apparent. There have been some tentative steps in this direction as may be noted from the work of Hill⁽²²⁾. The issues are so fundamental, however, and the censuring of "dissidents" so persistent, that there appears to be a great reluctance in the theological world to come to grips with the magnitude of the challenge that has to be faced.

Immutable dogmas in the light of an emerging Universe and emerging revelation

In the Christian tradition, over the years, various councils have issued dogmatic statements that were proclaimed to be infallible and immutable – they were true for all time. An infallible, immutable statement on the face of it is an assertion that, at the time of its proclamation, all of the relevant information was to hand, and all of the concepts necessary for its comprehensive articulation were adequately developed. This seems to be a massive assumption to make in relation to any kind of human creedal statement. The basis for proclaiming immutable dogmas rests on the belief that these truths come directly from God through divine revelation. We are back then to the question of what we mean by revelation, and is revelation divine whispering into the ear of humanity, or is revelation a human articulation of a divine experience. If it is the latter then the integrity of the revelation is limited by the capacity of the human intelligence to perceive and to understand, and to articulate. The difficulty lies not with the message but with the limitations of the receiver of the message.

If, as Aquinas held, the Universe is our primary book of revelation, and if, as science clearly indicates, our knowledge of the Universe is constantly growing, then our revelation concerning God is constantly growing. If that is the case, then, no articulation of it at a particular time can be adequate for all time. New understandings of the Universe bring new theological insights, and with them the need to re-interpret the insights coming to us from a different time expressed in the wisdom of that time.

The new scientific understanding of the Universe, the emergence of life and the nature of humans are raising many more issues, both profound and disturbing, for the community of Catholic believers, issues that have not been even referred to in this brief paper. Here are a few of the more fundamental:

- the nature of the human soul
- the ongoing evolution of the human species
- the paradox of infallible teachings in an evolving, dynamic Universe
- how an ecclesial institution can grow beyond the limitations of its history

There is also a whole raft of ethical questions to be addressed because of the power we humans now possess. These ethical questions include the following

- stem cell research and its implications
- manipulation of the human genome
- the need to limit the size of the human population
- the abuse of the non-human species
- the devastation of the Earth itself and the over exploitation of its limited resources

Suffice it to say that the New Cosmology that is emerging from the discoveries of modern science has brought us to the boundary of a new and unfathomed world where Divine Wonder invites us to approach with great sensitivity, walking as it were with bowed heads and bare feet. It invites above all an attitude of humble reverence before the awesome mystery of the Divine, and a candid acceptance of human limitation in adequately describing it.

Does a Church beyond the certitudes of religious Dogma, and more aligned with the Way of Jesus, offer a more appropriate pathway to an unknown, uncertain and evolving future?

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