

On the End of All Things

Luke 24:13-35

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?" And he replied to them, "What sort of things?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

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After Darwin, after the idea of an evolving world was introduced into our horizon, the cosmos acquired a history and a future. And hence the horizon of human expectation could shift toward a future that includes the universe and the entire breadth of evolutionary time. In this way... evolutionary science not only opens up space for the insertion of hope within the temporal sphere; it also provides theology with the chance to get over its fascination with God as control freak and power-monger. The picture of nature that evolution offers—of random genetic mutation, natural selection, and immense stretches of time—is of a wild lottery riddled by chance, struggle to survive, waste, dead ends, and tragic outcomes as well as unaccountable good luck. For many a scientist, in fact, the picture is so grim as to render the notion of a benevolent "intelligent designer" God utterly incomprehensible, for the designer of so much misfortune and lucky accident, mass extinction and cruel competitive struggle would have to be a sadist. Indeed, even for those who persist in believing, adjustments will be required. For if the God of evolution is not to seem a sadistic control-freak, then God cannot be conceived as first of all a designer of all the dead ends, cruelty, and vast wastage of evolutionary eons. The God of evolution must take chances or "play dice." In other words, God must be conceived in more Taoist terms of non-coercive "non-doing" and "letting be."

Instead of constituting a loss or disadvantage, however, this will prove a positive gain. After all, the unmoved Mover of Aristotle or the oriental despot who determines everything that happens down to the last twist and turn has never born any resemblance to the God of the Bible. Ridding ourselves of these notions of omnipotence, then, should bring us closer to the biblical image of God—to the God who lets creation develop in relative autonomy, who lets the world be, who renounces power and empties himself, who hears the cry of the poor and suffers with us. An evolutionary perspective, moreover, could also stimulate us to retrieve the ancient religious intuition that redemption involves more than the human family. It is, as the