

DOING THEOLOGY IN AN EVOLUTIONARY WAY



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Introduction

In the course of the twentieth century, theology underwent a massive paradigm shift. Only now, as we move deeper into the twenty-first century, are the contours becoming clear, and as yet, the implications are largely unexplored. How the shift can be named and explained will largely depend on the context out of which the interpreter is operating. But it is also dependent on cosmic and planetary forces that today inform human consciousness to a degree unknown in previous times. These new contextual horizons include enlarged scientific understandings of cosmology and anthropology, evolutionary unfolding, quantum physics, consciousness-awareness, globalization, cultural diversity, and postmodernism.

As Karl Rahner hinted at many years ago, the Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not be at all; this applies even more forcibly to the emerging theology of our time, bearing in mind that mysticism celebrates, above all else, the enduring *oneness* evidenced throughout creation. The contemporary theologian will be a multidisciplinary visionary or won't be at all. If theology is the science of pursuing ultimate meaning (according to Paul Tillich), today that new horizon requires familiarity with several different

disciplines, and needs to transcend the time-honored distinction between the sacred and the secular.

Three theological paradigms are under review in this book. The first two belong to the confessional tradition, Christian in nature and supporting faith in Jesus as the Christ, the source of our salvation. The third embraces a new sense of God at work, primarily in creation, and laterally in human beings. Celebration of evolutionary life, rather than salvation for humans, is the newly emerging horizon. Coming to the fore is the God who works in and through creation, rather than Jesus and the Christian narrative. As in contemporary theopoetics, the *logos of Theos* is shifting from an anthropocentric to a cosmic focus.

The first I name as *codependent paradigm*, described simply as Creation–Fall–Redemption. The central emphasis here is on the flawed nature of everything in creation. Although it is God’s creation, God cannot rectify the fall, attributed to human recklessness (an irrational craving for power), so Jesus is missioned to rescue the flawed reality, a task that continues in the life of the church, often ensuing in humans entangled in several codependent relationships—hence, a primary reason why humans, maturing into a more adult consciousness, walk away from such an unhealthy faith system.

The second landscape I name as the *imperial Judeo-Christian paradigm*, which runs like this: Creation–Israel–Jesus–Church–Eschaton. More central to this paradigm is the rescuing imperial God of the Hebrew Scriptures, modeled primarily on the great King David, who in turn becomes the paradigmatic model for Jesus as Messiah. That same kingly, royal imperative permeates Christianity up to our own time. Although vehemently denounced and opposed by Jesus—as argued throughout this book—Constantine reestablished the imperial prerogative that then morphed into popes, bishops, and exclusive male clergy, with accompanying institutions to uphold patriarchal power. Of course, it will never truly satisfy authentic spiritual desire, in which case we need the

eschatological clause assuring us that God will eventually bring the whole thing to an end in a final act of divine deliverance.

The third landscape is postconfessional and has a radically different feel to it; even the language will initially seem strange. I name it as the *evolutionary paradigm*. It goes like this: Spirit–Energy–Creation–Evolution–Incarnation–Spirituality. Looks like we have dropped the very word, *God!* No explicit reference to Father, Jesus, or Holy Spirit, but fret not, they are included. No allusion to fall, redemption, church, or eschaton. And the reader may already be wondering what has happened to revelation, and to the inspiration of sacred Scripture. On top of all that, this paradigm looks rather impersonal!

The myth of origin is crucial here, as indeed it is for every faith system. Beyond the ex-nihilo prerogative of the patriarchal male creator lies a more ancient creative energy, insinuating the dark deep out of which the Great Spirit energizes all life—*ex profundis*. The Great Spirit is how indigenous peoples around our world name the divine reality (God). Energized by the Great Spirit, the Birthing Holy One begets the vast panorama we call *creation*, setting in motion the irreversible complex trajectory that today we call *evolution*. The evolving creative enterprise eventually gives birth to (incarnates) consciously embodied creatures called *humans*, for whom the historical Jesus serves as an archetypal model. Finally, I am suggesting that our primary theological responsibility at this time is to name and celebrate that magnificent mythopoetic drama within an empowering spirituality for our age.

Without church, hierarchy, or formalized religion, this evolutionary paradigm inhabits an open-ended theological landscape, unashamedly postmodern, wild, transgressive, and scary, with the proverbial mix of peril and promise. However, it has hope inscribed deep within it, and in that, more than anything else, rests its credibility and authenticity.