



The 2001-2002 Word & World Lecture

The Creation Story and the Story of Jesus in a World of Violence

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BEFORE SEPTEMBER 11, THIS LECTURE WAS DESIGNED TO FOCUS ON THE COSMO-logical challenges to Christian faith and how the story of Jesus shapes a Christian reading of what the medievals called the Book of Nature. Although one cannot reflect on the mysteries of the universe without grappling with the reality of nature “red in tooth and claw,” one does not necessarily begin there. But the tragic events of September 11 as well as the suffering that led up to that day and was further unleashed in the days that followed demand our theological reflection, our work for justice and peace, and our unceasing prayer.

The images of workers with masks sorting through the rubble in New York, the devastation of the earth and the air in that city, as well as the respiratory threats to those who live and work in the area reveal the inextricable connections between human injustice and natural devastation. One of those workers described in the *New York Times*, Tim Sherman, had come from the Middlesex Water Company with a “gang” of co-workers with “strong backs and water main know-how and willing spirits.” The story described his search through the rubble: “Around them, smoke heaved from shapes no human hand could form. How ever many tons of stuff were on the ground, the landscape fell heavier and longer on the eye.” Then it reported the impact on this one weary worker: “‘There is no God,’ he remembers thinking.”¹

¹Jim Dwyer, “From the Rubble, a Picture and a Friendship,” *New York Times*, 23 October 2001, B1.

Insisting that all pain and suffering fall somehow within God’s plan is dangerous in the face of the terrible and unjust violence that plagues our world. Not all suffering is redemptive. The divine plan for creation is not suffering, but life.

That particular story actually had a happy ending, resulting in a reunion of old friends and the amazing survival of a man who had returned to the collapsing Trade Towers to help others even as he watched part of the building collapse on a firefighter just inches away. But what of that firefighter and so many others? While we all celebrate the miracles of those who escaped, we can't help but ask with my undergraduate students: "Why doesn't everyone who needs a miracle get one?" As we listen to the stories and questions of human anguish—whether in New York, Washington, Kabul, Kandahar, Buchenwald, Hiroshima, the Sudan, Johannesburg, San Pedro Sula, Chiapas, Zimbabwe, or beyond—we always return to what Schubert Ogden reminded us years ago is the only question there is: the question of God.²

Reflection on the patterns of nature and the mysteries of the cosmos only intensifies that question. Within days of the tragedy caused by human malice that also struck the nation's capital came the news of a tornado in the College Park area. Two young women were killed when they followed the advice of their father, a professor at the University of Maryland, and tried to get home before the tornado hit. This past week we experienced a similar "swarm of tornadoes" in South Bend. We have all watched the devastation of earthquakes and mudslides in India and Latin America. With each new natural catastrophe, people who were spared claim the blessing of God, while others echo the voice of an anguished woman pictured on the front of *USA Today* after a cyclone hit Bangladesh. The headline shouted her cry: "Why is God punishing us?"

Nor are human beings the only ones to suffer from nature's ways. No less a lover of nature than Annie Dillard discovered that attention to the marvels of the universe leads inevitably to awareness that the dynamics of creation include violence and loss. Initially, in her reverie at Tinker's Creek, Dillard contemplated the sacrament of creation that Augustine had described centuries earlier as marked by "the footprints of the Trinity." In Dillard's words,

If the landscape reveals one certainty, it is that the extravagant gesture is the very stuff of creation. After the one extravagant gesture of creation in the first place, the universe has come to deal exclusively in extravagances, flinging intricacies and colossi down aeons of emptiness, heaping profusions on profligacies with ever-fresh vigor. The whole show has been on fire from the word go.³

But her persistent attention to the whole of the mystery of creation led her soon to another, more disturbing realization, as she observed a giant water bug's attack on a small green frog. As Dillard described the violence she witnessed:

[The heavy-bodied brown bug's] grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes a victim with these legs, hugs it tight, and paralyzes it with enzymes injected during a vicious bite. That one bite is the only bite it ever takes.

²Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1963) 1.

³Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974) 11. At one point Dillard describes a feeding frenzy among sharks along the Atlantic coast of Florida as "grace tangled in a rapture with violence" (10).

Through the puncture shoot the poisons that dissolve the victim's muscles and bones and organs—all but the skin—and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim's body, reduced to a juice. This event is quite common in warm fresh water.⁴

Confronted by massive suffering as a result of natural forces and in nature itself, as well as at the hands of human perpetrators of evil and less visible systems of injustice, how do we, as Christian believers at the beginning of the third millennium, speak credibly of a God of salvation and love?

And in the face of the challenges of contemporary cosmology, can we speak credibly of God at all? Just days before September 11, I had showed a movie from the National Air and Space Museum in an undergraduate class on the “Mystery of Being Human.” Titled “The Cosmic Voyage,” the film challenges the human imagination to try to grasp the complexity and vastness of a universe that began to unfold thirteen to fifteen billion years ago with the explosion of a supernova filled with all the promise and energy of the universe, the explosion of life. The class reflected on how believers and theologians see in that same event the mighty wind of the Spirit of love, God's love poured out into the abyss.

But we also wrestled with the challenge of scientists and philosophers who remind us of the randomness of mutation, the disorder of entropy, and the possibility that the whole process occurred as a great cosmic accident, without purpose or future. The cover story of *Time* magazine suggested as much last summer. Reflecting on recent discoveries in astrophysics, journalist Michael Lemonick predicted, in T. S. Eliot's words, that “This is the way the world ends/ Not with a bang but a whimper.”⁵ The article's description of a “dark energy” at the heart of creation took on eerie resonance in light of last month's disaster. Lemonick described the anti-gravity effect of dark energy as “making the universe fly apart faster and faster all the time, like a rocket ship with the throttle wide open.”⁶ Citing University of Michigan astrophysicist Fred Adams's prediction that all this dead matter will eventually collapse into black holes, the journalist estimated that

by the time the universe is 1 trillion trillion trillion trillion trillion years old, the black holes themselves will disintegrate into stray particles, which will bind loosely to form individual “atoms” larger than the size of today's universe. Eventually, even these will decay, leaving a featureless, infinitely large void. And that will be that—unless, of course, whatever inconceivable event that launched the original Big Bang should recur, and the ultimate free lunch is served once more.⁷

He concluded his article with the following version of the creation story:

If the latest [cosmological] results do hold up...[b]y the time the final chapter of

⁴Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek*, 8.

⁵Michael D. Lemonick, “How It All Ends,” *Time*, 25 June 2001, 48-56, at 50.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., 55.

cosmic history is written...humanity, and perhaps even biology, will long since have vanished. Yet it's conceivable that consciousness will survive, perhaps in the form of a disembodied digital intelligence. If so, then someone may still be around to note that the universe, once ablaze with the light of uncountable stars, has become an unimaginable vast, cold, dark and profoundly lonely place.⁸

These recent theories about dark matter, dark energy, and the flatness of space-time may well be disproved or seriously challenged by astronomers and physicists as well as philosophers and theologians. But this world of scientific exploration and speculation is the one in which contemporary ministers, theologians, and all people of faith attempt to preach and teach about a God of life, a mystery of compassion at the heart of the universe. Upon reflection, the creation story and the events of September 11 are not entirely inseparable. As we ponder our place in the universe and the history of ancestors that precede us in many forms of life, new questions arise. Did we evolve from a purposeless universe in which violence is the natural way of the world and where only the most powerful survive? As Christian believers, how bold and how credible is our claim that the life and death of one first-century man profoundly affected that vast evolutionary history?

Especially during this celebration of Reformation Day, many of us gathered here may celebrate the cosmic reminder that Christian faith involves a radical trust that the world has long dismissed as absurd. But as we strive to witness to that faith in an ever more complex world, to hand that faith on to children who have absorbed the present worldview with their mother's milk, and to preach our faith in Jesus Christ and him crucified, we are called to reflect on how we understand and interpret that faith for a world in pain. An increasing number of scientists and philosophers as well as theologians have come to recognize that any assertion about the ultimate meaning and purpose of the universe—or lack thereof—is a wager, or in the broadest sense of the term, a faith claim. As Timothy Ferris, emeritus professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and popular science writer, has remarked, God's existence can be neither proved nor disproved; "atheism is no more soundly footed in cosmological science than is theism."⁹

I. IS SUFFERING PART OF GOD'S MYSTERIOUS PLAN?

But as persons of all religious traditions were painfully reminded on September 11, how we interpret our traditions—what we say and do in the name of God, and how we understand the will of God—can have an enormous impact on the human community, our world, and to some extent even on the universe. In a time of increasing violence perpetrated in the name of God, Christians of all denominations are called to reflect on the impact of our theologies of the cross and how we

⁸Ibid., 56.

⁹Timothy Ferris, *The Whole Shebang: A State of the Universe Report* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997) 310.

speak of God and God's will in the face of both human suffering and cosmic tragedy.

One response to the events of September 11 that even many devout believers found troubling was the proclamation that somehow the tragedy was in the mystery of God's plan. Religious leaders were clearly struggling—as we all were (and are)—to find words in the face of the evil and tragedy, as well as the heroism and grief, that broke into our lives that week. The majority of those who think we can and must speak of the events of September 11 as part of “God's will” or “God's plan” were not to be aligned with the views of other Christian religious leaders who were quoted as saying that the horror suffered by innocent victims was God's judgment on a nation that has lost faith, and even more specifically on feminists, gays and lesbians, abortionists, and civil libertarians. Not only does that kind of rhetoric breed the very intolerance that gives birth to terrorism, but even more important from a theological perspective, it identifies human evil with God's judgment.

But other religious leaders gave more thoughtful and anguished responses invoking phrases such as “somehow in the mystery of God's plan.” For some from my own religious tradition, this came from the kind of reasoning that led Aquinas to conclude that God permits evil, since no situation is beyond the power of God's absolute saving presence. To speak of God as the source of all that exists and of any power to act requires for them the conclusion that God at least permits all that happens, both in nature and in human history. One of my Dominican and Thomistic colleagues, Christopher Kiesling, once explained this view in describing his own battle with terminal cancer:

God does not directly will, or desire, or cause evil....In fact, evil is more repugnant to God than it is to us; God abhors it more intensely than we do. But God does permit it to occur; God allows it to happen, for good purposes which God knows but which remain mysterious to us....That God does not directly will evil is true. God creates and seeks only the good. But God permits evil; God allows evil to result from the conflict that occurs when the good creatures which God created pursue their individual goals. To deny that God allows evil in this way is to deny that God is God. It is to deny that God is the Supreme reality, the Mysterious Eternal One, who is master even of evil, and whose goodness will have the last word over evil. God's permissive will does not explain anything. It simply affirms that evil is not beyond the reach of God's knowledge, or power or mercy.¹⁰

Kiesling offers the best interpretation possible of that position. As his family, students, colleagues, community members, and friends witnessed his own struggle with the cancer that ultimately claimed his life, we were able to grasp something of the power of the faith that gave birth to those convictions and that sustained him in his own darkness.

But can Christians make a similar claim about the deaths of innocent persons in Nazi Germany, at Hiroshima, Nagasaki, My Lai or El Mezote, in Rwanda and

¹⁰Christopher Kiesling, “A Cancer Patient's Vision of Faith,” *America*, 31 December 1983, 426.

Bosnia, in New York and Afghanistan? In his reflections offered at the annual Holocaust Day commemoration in New York at the Wall of Remembrance, on which are mounted seven plaques of scenes from Nazi concentration camps, Avery Dulles suggested that Christians must somehow see even the Holocaust as taken up into God's redemptive plan. He remarked that

The Holocaust...appears to me as more than a merely human tragedy, more than a criminal act of genocide, though it is certainly both. It is a mystery. It challenges me, as I am sure it challenges all of you, to ask how God could allow this terrible disaster to befall his own chosen and elect people.¹¹

In Dulles's view the Holocaust presented religious believers with two alternative answers to that question:

- 1) Some Jews and Christians, unable to answer this question, have responded that the biblical God, almighty and all just, could not have permitted any such thing. They have made the Shoah the occasion for loss of faith....
- 2) The alternative, as I see it, is to say that the Holocaust, horrible as it seems, is somehow taken up into God's redemptive plan.¹²

Operating from very different theological foundations and more explicit biblical warrants, Reformation thinkers have made similar claims in relation to some theologies of the cross. Emil Brunner, for example, argued that

In the presence of the Cross we cease to talk about "unjust" suffering. On the contrary, as we look at the Crucified all suffering gains a positive significance. "To those who love God all things work together for good"—we know this as those who have perceived that the sufferings of Christ were for the good of the world....For us suffering loses its negative character; it becomes fruitful, as God's means of discipline, by means of which, in paternal severity, he draws us to Himself. This is the greatest transformation possible in the sphere of human experience.¹³

But are the options proposed by Dulles and Brunner the only alternatives? Christian faith does cling to the radical hope that no situation is beyond God's power to overcome evil with good and that the victims of historical holocausts, personal tragedy, and natural disasters fall into the hands of the living God. But does that mean that those events are themselves part of God's redemptive plan or taken somehow into the mystery of God, much less that all suffering is a means of God's discipline by which a severe father draws us to himself?

However well-intentioned or theologically nuanced, claims that events such as those that occurred on September 11 or in Nazi concentration camps are somehow part of the mystery of God's plan or a form of divine discipline are dangerous

¹¹Avery Dulles, "Never to Despair," *America*, 17 September 2001, 17.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Emil Brunner, as quoted by Larry L. Rasmussen in "A Community of the Cross," *Dialog* 30/2 (1991) 154-155, n. 11.

assertions that can serve not only to offer divine legitimation for those very evils but also to reinforce an image of God as an angry father who punishes his children out of love. In a society confronted by forms of violence that range from suicide missions by religious fanatics to child abuse in our homes and even our churches, how do we hear good news in the proclamation that God sent his own beloved son to die for our sins and our salvation? Was suffering God's will for Jesus and is it God's will for us? Is the cross a divinely-sanctioned form of violence, part of the mysterious divine plan? And what of the waste and violence within creation? Are these too part of God's redemptive plan?

II. THE STORY OF JESUS AS THE STORY OF GOD'S PLAN

If Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the key to the mysterious plan hidden from the beginning of creation (Col 1:15; Eph 3:9), our answers to those questions will depend on how we interpret the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The assumption here is that the suffering and death of Jesus cannot be preached as good news apart from the life and ministry that led to Jesus' death and the resurrection that is God's final word about all suffering and death. When we look first at the life and ministry of Jesus—his preaching in word and deed—there is no evidence in the gospels that Jesus willed suffering or responded to those in need that suffering was "God's will" for them. Instead we have the ministry of the one who saw his mission as bringing glad tidings to the poor, proclaiming liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, release to prisoners, and announcing a year of favor from the Lord (Luke 4:18-19). Jesus disclosed God's plan for humankind and for creation in healings and exorcisms, in forgiving sins and gathering friends and outcasts at sacred meals, in proclaiming God's blessing for the last and least. But that very life was a challenge to those who held power in his religious tradition and the threat of a new world order to the Roman empire. Jesus experienced suffering, rejection, and execution, not because that was God's will for him, but because a world of sin rejected his vision of the reign of God. This historical reading of the cause of the death of Jesus is the basis for Edward Schillebeeckx's startling claim that in one sense "we are not redeemed *thanks to* the death of Jesus, but *despite* it."¹⁴

From this perspective, the cross is not God's will, but the result of human injustice. Nevertheless, Jesus' imaging of God's saving presence reached its climax in his response to that unjust death. This man of God was convinced of the absolute presence of God to us, no matter how desperate our circumstances. He lived a life of solidarity with the outcast and faced his death the same way. Standing in solidarity with all victims, he died crucified between two thieves, forgiving even his torturers, undergoing whatever fidelity to his mission required, and trusting God to the end—even in the face of God's silence.

This does not mean, however, that suffering was in itself God's will for Jesus.

¹⁴Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Seabury, 1980) 729.

What was saving about his death was the love and fidelity of Jesus, his obedience to his life's vocation even unto death. Jesus, the image of God, filled an experience that was in itself meaningless and absurd, with meaning, love, and solidarity with all the innocent who suffer. What Christians celebrate is not the cross, nor the sufferings of Jesus, but the power of a love that is faithful even unto death. The triumph of the cross is the triumph of God's mercy bursting the bonds of sin and death.

Christians preach the cross only in light of our faith in resurrection. What Christians celebrate is that death and evil do not have final victory; the power of God does. In and through Jesus' love and fidelity, God has taken on the evil and suffering of this world and broken their hold once and for all with the stronger power of love. What is impossible for us is possible for God. As Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann has written, "Faith sees the raising of the tortured and crucified Son of Man as God's great protest against death and everyone who plays into death's hands and threatens life."¹⁵

III. THE DIVINE PLAN FOR ALL OF CREATION

Returning to the cosmic context for these reflections, the patterns of nature may help us to distinguish between situations where it is indeed true to claim that death gives birth to life, that suffering has a redemptive power, and situations of evil and violence where invoking God's will only deepens the scandal and the tragedy. If the story of Jesus remains the interpretive key not only to the meaning of human life, but to reading the Book of Nature, ecological theologian Sallie McFague reminds us that the ethic of Jesus is not only countercultural but counter-biological, and in some ways counter-evolutionary as well.¹⁶ The good news of the reign of God proclaimed and embodied by Jesus announces that despite all the evidence to the contrary—in nature as well as in human history—flourishing is the final destiny of all life. Evolutionary history to date does not promise future fulfillment for all of earth's creatures, especially for the vulnerable and the weak. However, self-consciousness and ethical responsibility are now a part of the unfinished creation story. The story of evolution is historical and cultural as well as biological. The Christian hope, rooted in creation faith, is that the story of the cosmos is a story of grace in which we are called to participate, and that story has received a new energy and a promise of final blessing in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

In his life story, Jesus offered an alternative reading not only of human life but of all of life as interrelated, and of a power of love at work throughout creation.

¹⁵Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 31.

¹⁶Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 189. At the same time, McFague describes efforts to move beyond conventional standards and natural selection as "hints and clues of a new stage of evolution, the stage of our solidarity with other life-forms, especially with the needy and outcast forms" (189).

His reading of reality included the potential of compassion to change stories that seem inevitable. Resources that appeared limited and inadequate—fish and bread—were available in abundance when they were shared rather than hoarded. The power at the heart of the universe that he named “Abba” was a God of life, not destruction. Again and again, he revealed an energy of love—the power of the Spirit—at work in the world, healing human bodies and spirits, casting out demons, and calming chaos in both human life and nature. The reign of God he preached, the divine will he enfolded, disclosed a God of mercy and compassion, who sides with the poor and oppressed, who stands in solidarity with those who suffer, who grieves dying, loss, and violence, who promises life. Jesus’ radical solidarity with the vulnerable and the outcast even unto death limns the shape of a Christian reading of the creation story.

From one perspective, the story of the universe reveals the truth in the insights of Dulles and Brunner. Some forms of both human suffering and natural loss give birth to new life. Natural processes in the web of life reveal the paschal mystery that life emerges from death. Gail Ramshaw identified one such natural parable in a “nurse-log,” where a decaying log from a dead tree provides nutrients for a new living tree. As Ramshaw described the paschal mystery at work in nature, “The young tree grows upright from the log lying spent on the ground.”¹⁷ In nature’s rhythms, life and death are interwoven aspects of a larger mystery of life. Paul draws on multiple images from nature to develop his own theology of paschal mystery, turning to human patterns of sleeping and waking as well as to seeds and plants for analogies for the resurrection in 1 Cor 15. In the Gospel of John, too, death and resurrection are portrayed as two dimensions of a larger mystery of God’s revelation. Nature’s patterns of dying and rising serve to reinforce that paradigm when the Johannine Jesus proclaims: “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (John 12:24).

But, again, distinctions must be made. Much of the death that occurs both in human history and in nature is the result not of natural processes of life, but of exploitation, violence, and destruction. The death of an infant at the hands of an abuser, torture and the systematic rape of women and young girls as weapons of war, genocide in the name of racial purity or tribal superiority, bombings and murders of innocent bystanders in the name of religious loyalties, random violence and hate crimes—none of these forms of suffering or death can be classified as forms of suffering that lead to new life or manifest the mysterious ways of God. Likewise, human exploitation of nature’s resources to provide ever higher levels of consumer comfort cannot be justified either as part of a divinely-intended natural pattern of dying and rising or as humankind’s biblical right to dominion. Neither can the ravages of AIDS, which is now destroying whole countries and continents, be dis-

¹⁷Gail Ramshaw, *Under the Tree of Life: The Religion of a Feminist Christian* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 131.

missed as a “natural disaster” or blasphemously attributed to God’s mysterious ways.

God’s role in the violence that occurs within nature itself (as when whole species disappear due to natural catastrophe or powerful creatures prey on more vulnerable ones) provides the most difficult case of theodicy to ponder. As Christians we have no answers as to why God would allow such radical freedom not only to human creatures but to the very forces of nature. But if the risen Christ is the mystery hidden in creation from the beginning, God’s will is life and life in abundance. In the life and death of Jesus, God pledged solidarity not only with vulnerable human life, but also with all creatures who have been considered expendable.

Most of the specific examples cited above involve human betrayals of right relationship or failures to act on behalf of one’s neighbor or cosmic kin. In these situations theological reflection on the paschal mystery requires a hermeneutic that differs from the web-of-life approach that views death as a necessary counterpart to new life.¹⁸ Those forms of death brought about or compounded by human injustice call to mind the earliest Christian memories of Jesus’ crucifixion as scandal. While human persons who face those forms of death may do so with courage and in solidarity with other innocent victims, and while we may lament the death of any of God’s beloved creatures, the deaths themselves are the result not of natural processes leading to life but of human evil leading to destruction. The only hope for a paschal pattern here is a triumph of life that occurs in spite of death.

The hope of Christians—and of all Christian preaching—turns on the claim that Jesus’ death was not the end, that the Spirit of love restored the dead Jesus to a transformed life. That same love which moves the sun and the stars promises transformed life for all forms of life that have been defeated or destroyed. If the testimony of the first Christians is true, if God has indeed raised Jesus from the dead, then there can be a future for the rest of creation as well. Rooted in the conviction that the incarnation involves the union of divinity not only with humanity, but with material creation, Karl Rahner has pointed out that Easter is the feast of the future of the earth (and the entire cosmos):

[Christ] rose not to show that he was leaving the tomb of the earth once and for all, but in order to demonstrate that precisely that tomb of the dead—the body and the earth—has finally changed into the glorious, immeasurable house of the living God and of the God-filled soul of the Son. He did not go forth from the dwelling place of earth by rising from the dead. For he still possesses, of course, definitively and transfigured, his body, which is a piece of the earth, a piece which still belongs to it as a part of its reality and destiny....His resurrection is like the first eruption of a volcano which shows that in the interior of the world God’s fire is already burning, and this will bring everything to blessed ardor in his light. He has risen to show that has already begun. Already from the heart of the world

¹⁸For a discussion of this issue in terms of the diversity of women’s experiences of suffering, with particular attention to suffering resulting from abuse, see Patricia L. Wismer, “For Women in Pain: A Feminist Theology of Suffering,” in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology*, ed. Ann O’Hara Graff (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995) 138-158.

into which he descended in death, the new forces of a transfigured earth are at work.¹⁹

For Christians, the resurrection is the linchpin not just of the Christian story and the human story, but of the universe story. As the history of evolution and the story of the cosmos unfold, forces of entropy and chaos as well as human decisions for destruction and domination threaten the future of humanity and the “dream of the earth.”²⁰ Neither the history of humankind nor the history of evolution provide clear evidence that hope for the future is warranted if that hope is to include the vanquished. But resurrection faith is grounded finally neither in human commitments nor in confidence in the evidence of natural processes, but in the power of the Creator God who gave birth to the cosmos in its beginnings, who draws life out of death and redeems the lost, and whose Spirit is the source of all life moving through the universe.

A Christian reading of the Book of Nature as God’s creation turns precisely on the hope that *Time* magazine’s journalist found so unlikely. In the face of the possibility that the world could end as a vast, cold, dark and profoundly lonely place, Christians proclaim that “the inconceivable event that launched the Big Bang can recur.” In the resurrection of Jesus, the Creator God who is the source of energy that moves the sun and stars has spoken a final word about God’s plan for all of creation: “Let there be life.” ⊕

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¹⁹Karl Rahner, “Easter: A Faith that Loves the Earth,” in *The Great Church Year* (New York: Crossroad, 1993) 192-197. For a Lutheran perspective that proposes an earth ethics formed by cross and resurrection, but places more emphasis on the “sobering shadow of the cross,” see Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996) especially 282-294.

²⁰The phrase is taken from the title of Thomas Berry’s book, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988).