

The Creator and a 13.7 Billion Year-Old Unfolding Creation

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When our cosmology changes, our understanding and experiencing of everything will undergo a corresponding change. I understand cosmology to refer to our understanding and experiencing of the emergence and unfolding of the Universe and the meaning this creative process has for our lives.

For those making the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, this unfolding takes place in three basic areas:

- 1) our understanding of and experiencing of ourselves;
- 2) our understanding of and experiencing of the Creator; and
- 2) our understanding of and experiencing of Jesus.

In these brief remarks I choose to limit myself to our understanding of and experiencing of the Creator.

As seen through 21st century cosmological eyes, God's creative action is not something extrinsic to the emergence and unfolding of the Universe. God creates in such a way that all possibilities are already contained within the Universe's original flaring forth. Accordingly, we find ourselves in a self-creating cosmos. The Creator is an insider God, present within the self-creating process. The Creator does not work in an interventionist fashion, coming in from the outside. In fact, there is no outside. The Creator is not a puppeteer and the Universe is not a puppet show with God pulling the strings from outside somewhere. The Creator maintains each being in existence; guiding but not controlling its development.

This is perhaps the biggest hurdle for us to overcome because our Judeo-Christian tradition has by-and-large placed the Creator on the outside. This happened because the Israelites borrowed their notion of the structure of the Universe—their cosmology—from their ancient Near Eastern neighbors, the Sumerians and the Babylonians. This cosmology firmly placed the Heavenly realm above Earth, above the firmament or arch of the sky. In many ways, we moderns continue to be under the influence of this old cosmology as, for example, in the many times that we pray, "Send down your Spirit..."

We are speaking here about deep time—13.7 billion years. We are speaking about a Creator who has a cosmic patience, who has been able to wait through all the stages of evolutionary time, throughout all the dead ends and windows of opportunity, without trying to control the unfolding. There is no forcing or commanding throughout this deep time. We can imagine God as being out in front, inviting the Universe to unfold into its future, something like during the Exodus of Israel, when the pillar of cloud out in front guided the people during the day and the pillar of fire guided them by night.

13.7 billion years... We are speaking here about a deep commitment on the part of the Creator to the Universe. Talk about 'hanging in there' for the long run. Some Christians, as they contemplate all the upheaval and violence in the world today, are quite concerned about things coming to an end. They have millennial worries and fears. We need not live with such worries and fears. They pale into insignificance within deep time. If the Creator has made a 13.7 billion year commitment, why not another 13.7 billion!



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*You can visit the Spiritearth website at:
www.spiritearthnet.org*

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Questions for Discussion

1. *How successful have you been at moving/keeping the Creator to the 'inside'?*
2. *Does the notion of 'deep time' help you to relegate matters of daily concern to 'back-burner' status...in the grand scheme of things?*
3. *Can you allow yourself to contemplate deep time "...as powerful evidence of the depth and breadth and length of God's love for all creatures; human ones and other-than-human ones'?*

13.7 billion years...Throughout this time the Creator suffers an enormous amount of suffering, catastrophe and chaos within the Universe. The evolutionary process involves lots of change and change involves things breaking down, going into some kind of chaos and passing into new forms. The Creator suffers all of this, taking the natural world on its own terms and we need to do the same. We need to stop raging about the way things work — from rain, ants and mosquitoes spoiling our picnics — to tornados, forest fires and earthquakes destroying our homes — to bacteria, poison ivy and cancerous cells impacting our health.

13.7 billion years...Can we imagine a love lasting that long? Deep time is powerful evidence of the depth and breadth and length of God's love for all creatures; human ones and other-than-human ones. So we need not hesitate to build our lives upon such a love! We need not hesitate to build our lives upon such a love!

Sunday morning prayer service at the gathering held at Cahokia, September, 2003. From left, Liz O'Brien, Kathy Bayless, Nina Hughes, John Surette, S.J., Rick Kunkle. Photo by Sr. Joan Shalpin, ASC

