

In Search of a God for Evolution: Paul Tillich and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

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The world's religions, at least during the period of their emergence, knew nothing about Big Bang cosmology, deep time, or biological evolution. Generally speaking, they have still not caught up with these ideas. Even in the scientific West, the findings of evolutionary biology and cosmology continue to lurk only at the fringes of contemporary theological awareness. The sensibilities of most believers in God, including theologians, have been fashioned in an imaginative context defined either by ancient cosmographies or, if philosophically tutored, by equally timeworn ontologies that are static and hierarchical. Our religious understandings of ultimate reality, our thoughts about the meaning of human existence and destiny, our intuitions about what is ultimately good and what the good life is, and our ideas of what is evil or unethical—all of these at least originally took up residence in a human awareness still innocent of the implications of deep cosmic time, and largely unaware of the prospect that the universe may still be only at the dawn of its journey through time.

How, then, are we to think about God, if at all, in a manner proportionate to the new scientific understanding of biological evolution and cosmic process? Probably the majority of scientists have given up on such a project, settling into their impressions that the immense universe of contemporary natural science has by now vastly outgrown what astronomer Harlow Shapely once referred to as the anthropomorphic one-planet deity of our terrestrial religions. Theology, meanwhile, is just beginning to reconsider the idea of God in a way that would render it consonant with evolution.

The famous Jesuit geologist and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) was far ahead of professional theologians in perceiving evolution's demand for a revitalized understanding of God. Our new awareness of nature's immensities—in the domains of space, time, and

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