

God After Darwin

2. Evolution and God's Self-Emptying, Suffering Love

July 30, 2006

9 to 9:50 am in the Parlor

All are welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

O God our heavenly Father, you have blessed us and given us dominion over all the earth: Increase our reverence before the mystery of life; and give us new insight into your purposes for the human race, and new wisdom and determination in making provision for its future in accordance with your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 828

J o h n F. H a u g h t



God After Darwin

A Theology of Evolution

God After Darwin. A Theology of Evolution.

John F. Haught,
Westview

Press, 2000.

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Background image on the
PowerPoint slides is
taken from the cover art
of *God After Darwin*

John F. Haught
**Responses to
101 Questions
on God and
Evolution**



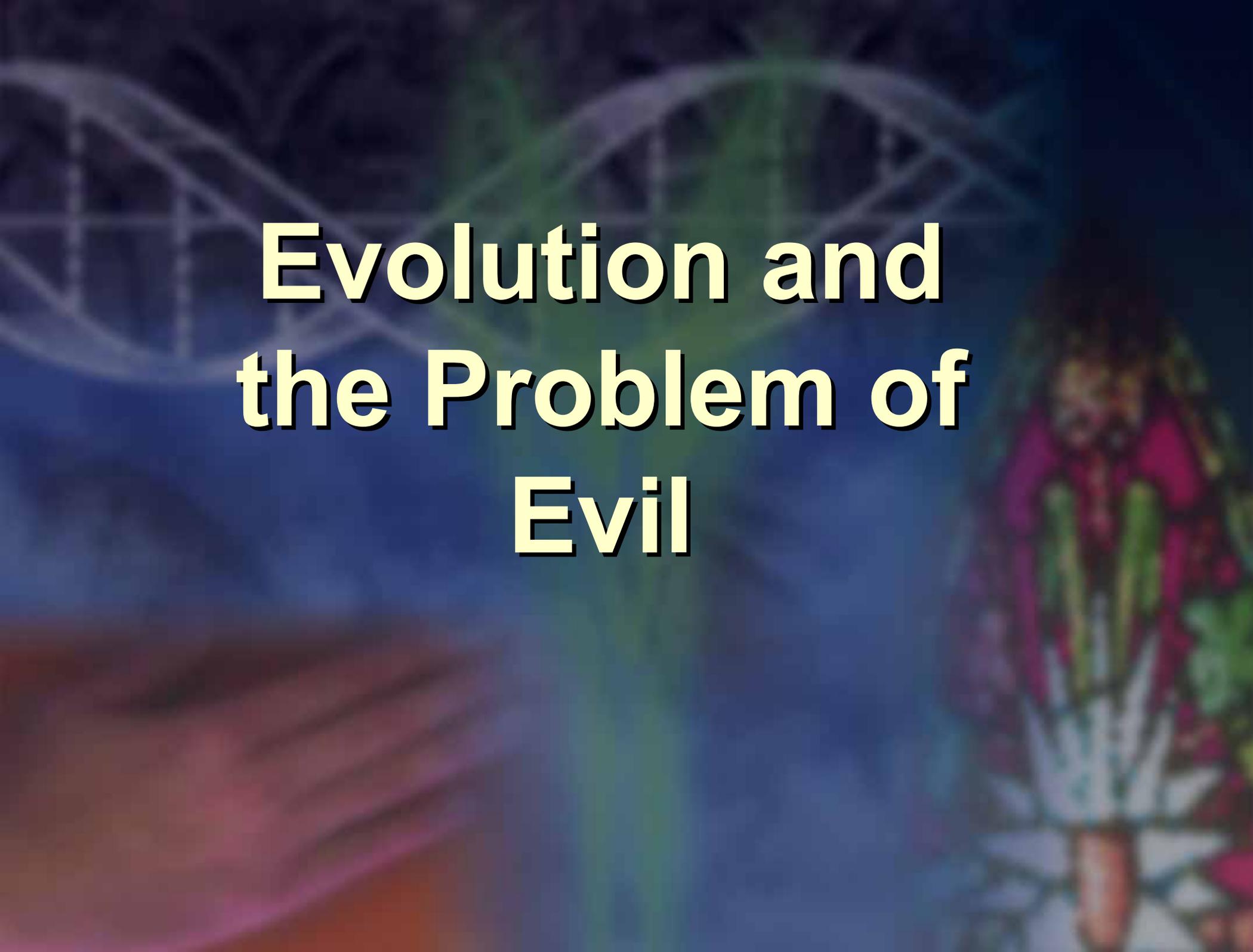
**Responses to
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John F. Haught,
Paulist Press,
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John F. Haught is the Landegger Distinguished Professor of Theology at Georgetown University, and Director of the Georgetown Center for the Study of Science and Religion.

Photos captured from the on-line interview with Dr. Haught at: <http://MeaningOfLife.tv>

The background is a composite image. On the left, a DNA double helix is visible. In the center, a globe of the Earth is shown. On the right, a person wearing a red coat and holding a staff is depicted. The overall background is a mix of blue, green, and red tones.

Evolution and the Problem of Evil

Evolution and Theodicy

The Problem of Evil

- ✚ One of deepest and most anguishing problems believers have struggled with through the ages is how a loving God can permit so much evil and suffering in the world.
- ✚ a **theodicy**: an explanation that tries to justify why God allows evil and suffering.
- ✚ The problem, as stated by Epicurus (341-270 BC):
 - Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?

Evolution and Theodicy

The Problem of Evil

✝ In Fall 2004, we tried to live up to our calling as the new Israel (Israel = “the people that wrestle with God”) and explored the problem of evil and various “theodicies” in a 7 part Adult Ed series. The PowerPoint presentations are available at:

<http://www.StJohnAdultEd.Org/probevil.htm>

✝ Evolution greatly intensifies the anguish of the problem of evil.

Evolution and Theodicy

What Evolution Tells Us

✚ The modern theory of evolution (= the “**neo-Darwinian Synthesis**”) says that the great diversity of life can be *naturally* explained by the combination of **chance, law, and deep time**:

- 1. **Chance**: accidental, chance events or contingencies:
 - a genetic mutation that lead to new characteristics in an organism
 - a natural disaster that changes the environment that an organism must adapt to
- 2. **Law**: the deterministic laws of **natural selection** (nature “selects” as survivors organism who best adapt to the environment; all others perish), chemistry, and physics
- 3. **Deep Time**: enormous depths of time

Evolution and Theodicy

What Evolution Tells Us

✚ Evolution tells us human beings are the result of billions of years of a meandering, haphazard process of “**natural selection**,” a journey marked by untold pain and suffering, loss, waste, and in the end, extinction for most species.

- More than 99% of all species born in the crucible of evolution have died out under the relentless jackboot of natural selection.

Evolution and Theodicy

God the Designer?

- ✠ How can we make any sense of these billions of years of meandering struggle, pain, waste, and loss?
- ✠ If **God is a designer** who made the world as a “stage” to help mold and prepare human beings for eternal life with God, then why did God include a “preamble” of several billion years of untold pain, suffering, waste, and loss before human beings even arrive on the scene?
- ✠ What was the point of the existence of the 99%+ of all species who have become extinct?
 - Were they just God’s “cannon-fodder” on the way to creating human beings?

Evolution and Theodicy

God the Designer?

✚ If God is really the “hands-on” intelligent designer of life, the quarterback who has been calling the shots through the billions of years of evolutionary struggle and loss, then why was God “fooling around” for so long before “getting down to business” and making human beings?

- Does God *enjoy* watching suffering and pain, death, waste, loss and extinction?

Evolution and Theodicy

God the Designer?

- ✠ The billions of years of meandering evolutionary struggle, pain and suffering, waste, loss and extinction before human beings appear *cry out* for explanation.
- ✠ It seems nearly impossible to justify (= provide a **theodicy**) why a loving God who is the **quarterback** calling the shots, the **hands-on intelligent designer**, would **plan** so much prehuman struggle, pain and suffering, waste, loss and extinction in order to bring human beings into existence.

Evolution and Theodicy

God the Designer?

- ✠ Part of our problem here is our desire to believe in:
 - A God who is the **hands-on intelligent designer** of the world and life, the architect of order.
 - A God who is the quarterback calling the shots.
 - A God, in other words, who is an **imperial deity**, a **divine Caesar ruling all of creation**.
- ✠ Such a view of God seems irreconcilable with the eons of meandering, painful evolutionary struggle that led to human beings.
- ✠ Evolution thus forces to think deeper about the nature of God.

Evolution and Theodicy

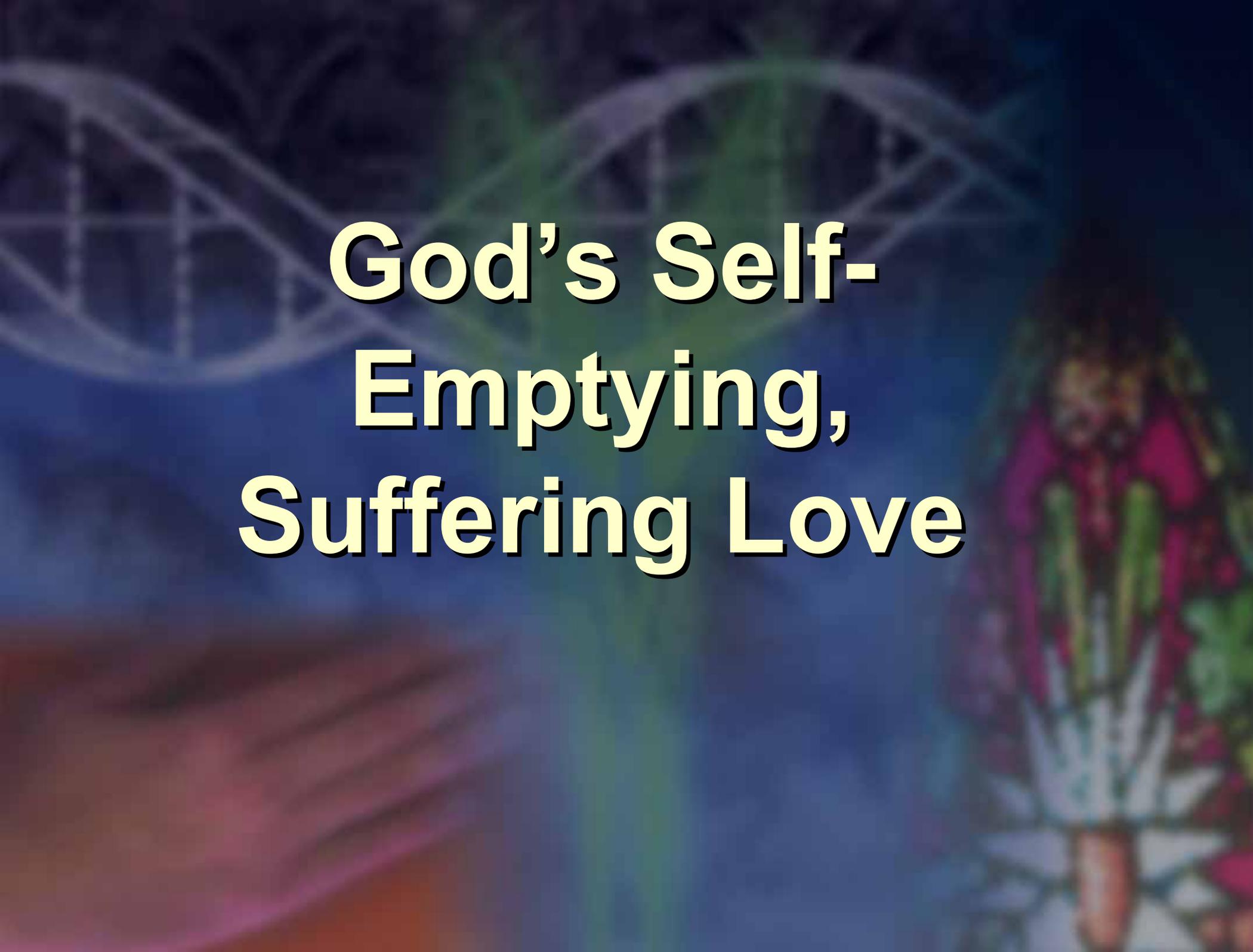
The God of the Bible

✚ Haught suggests that there is better way to think about God that is:

- not only compatible with evolution,
- but helps to explain
 - evolution,
 - and the pain and suffering, waste and loss of the eons of evolutionary struggle.

✚ Furthermore, this way of thinking about God is not a “new” way that we have to invent.

✚ We simply have to go back to the view of God we find in in the Bible.

The background of the slide is a blurred image of a stained glass window. On the right side, there is a vertical panel featuring a figure, possibly a saint or a religious figure, dressed in a purple and red robe. To the left of this panel is a large, circular stained glass design with a grid-like pattern, possibly representing a globe or a similar symbolic motif. The overall color palette is dominated by deep blues, purples, and reds.

**God's Self-
Emptying,
Suffering Love**

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

- ✝ The most fundamental Christian revelation of the nature of God is that out of love for the world, God chose to humble God's self, to “empty” God's self and enter into creation, living fully as a human being, even to the point of suffering and dying on the cross.
- **Kenosis** = the divine “self-emptying” of God in order to enter into creation
 - Karl Rahner (considered the greatest Roman Catholic theologian of the 20th century): “the primary phenomenon given by faith is precisely the **self emptying of God.**”
 - Donald Dawe (renown Presbyterian theologian, Union Theological Seminary, VA): “belief in the **divine self-emptying** or condescension in Christ ... is basic to Christian faith.”

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

✝ **John 3:16-17** (Jesus speaking): “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (NRSV)

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

✝ Philippians 2:6-8 (Paul, quoting from an early Christian hymn): "... though he [Jesus] was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but **emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.** And being found in human form, he **humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.**" (NRSV)

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

✝ 2 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”
(NRSV)

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

✝ The meaning of these “famous” quotes, whose words often skate over the surfaces of our minds slick with their familiarity, is scandalous and bears repeating:

- Out of love for creation,
- God “humbled” and “emptied” God’s self,
- God became vulnerable and defenseless as a human being,
- God accepted creation’s finitude and entered into the world’s suffering, even to the point of suffering and dying on the cross.

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

- ✝ John Macquerrie, Anglican theologian, on the strangeness and scandal of such **divine humility**:
- ✝ “That God should come into history, that he should come in humility, helplessness and poverty—this contradicted everything—this contradicted everything that people had believed about the gods. It was the end of the power of deities, the Marduks, the Jupiters ... yes, and even of Yahweh, to the extent that he had been misconstrued on the same model. The life that began in a cave ended on the cross, and there was the final conflict between power and love, the idols and the true God, false religion and true religion.”

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

✝ The Christian doctrine of the Trinity reinforces for us that Jesus' suffering, passion and death was not an experience "external" to God, but became part of the **very inner being of the triune God**, part of the eternal "life-story" of God.

✝ God then is a God who:

- pours the divine selfhood into the world in an act of unreserved self-abandonment,
- and willingly takes the suffering of the world into the divine selfhood.

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility

- ✠ This **divine humility** of God is an insight into the eternal nature of God.
- ✠ Haught: this self-humbling is not just a posture that God assumes for a brief time during an “earthly” incarnation in the historical life of Jesus. Rather, it is an attribute that exists in God from all eternity. We should not think of God as ever having existed in any other way than as **humble, self-giving, empowering, promising, redemptive love.**

God's Self-Emptying Love

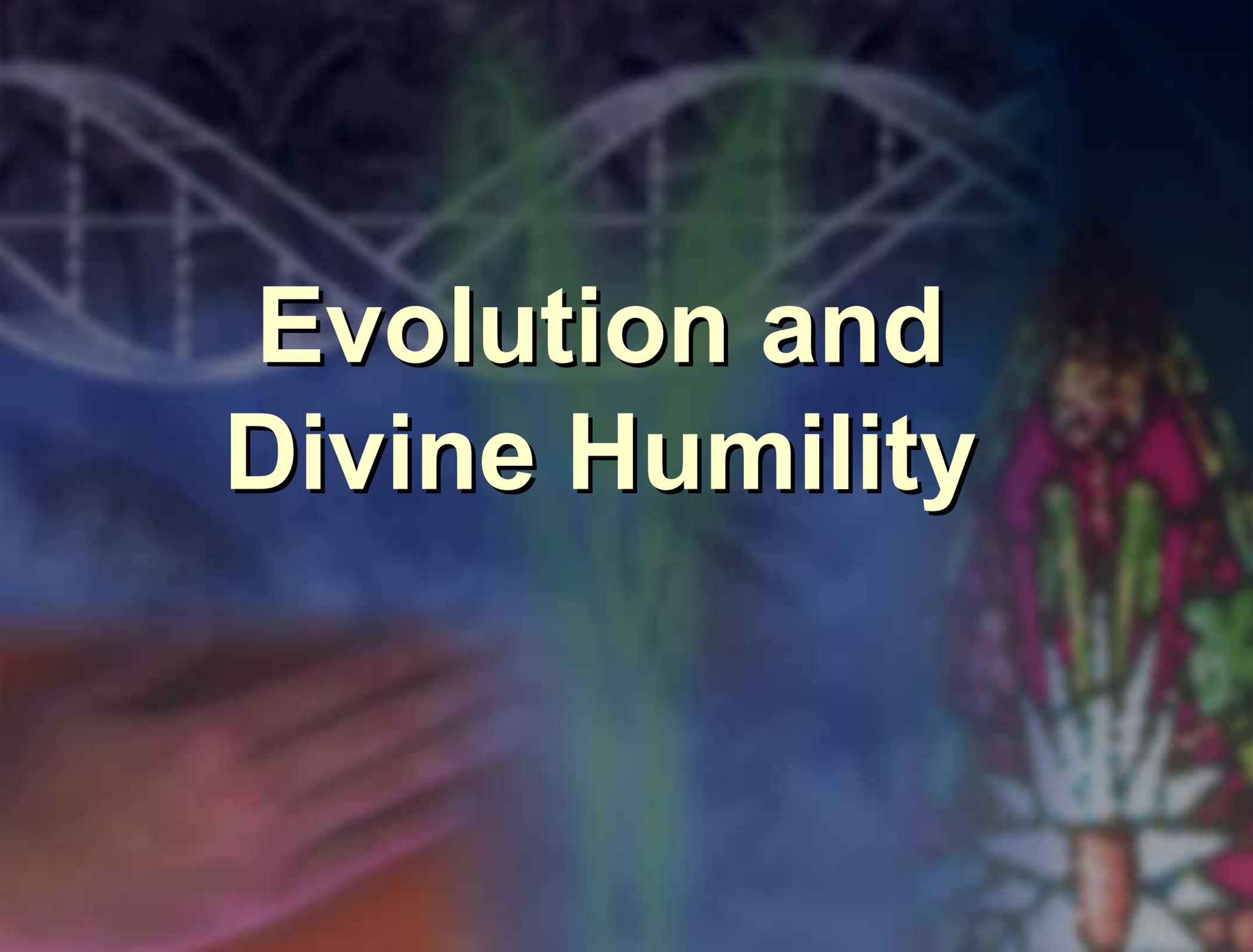
Not Powerlessness

- ✝ God's **humility** does not mean God is powerless or weak, but rather that God lets God's self become **vulnerable** and **defenseless**.
- ✝ Roman Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx on God's power (= omnipotence):
“the divine omnipotence does not know the destructive facets of the human exercising of power, but in this world becomes ‘defenseless’ and vulnerable. It shows itself as power of love which challenges, gives life and frees human beings, at least those who hold themselves open to this offer.”

God's Self-Emptying Love

Divine Humility and Evolution

✝ So how might a God who is eternally humble, self-giving, empowering, promising, redemptive love help us understand and explain evolution?

The background is a composite image. At the top, a DNA double helix is visible in shades of blue and green. Below it, a globe of the Earth is shown in a similar color palette. In the bottom right corner, a hand is holding a bouquet of colorful flowers, including purple and pink blooms. The overall background is a dark, textured blue.

Evolution and Divine Humility

Divine Humility and Evolution

A Creation Which is Self-Creative

- ✝ Love needs an “Other” that is not oneself to love. Without an “Other” who is independent of oneself, love cannot be actualized.
- ✝ God’s self-emptying, self-giving love is manifest in allowing creation to come into being **independent** of God’s self – to be “**Other**” than God – and endowing that creation with the ability **to evolve = to be “self-creative and self-ordering (= autopoiesis).**
- ✝ Such a universe is really the only kind of universe that could be the product of love – for love desires the **independence** of the “Other.”

Divine Humility and Evolution

A Creation Which is Self-Creative

✝ *All of creation* is the “Other,” the object of God’s self-emptying, suffering love.

- God’s love is not simply focused on human beings
- Creation is not just a “stage” for testing or molding human beings for heaven.

Divine Humility and Evolution

A Creation Which is Self-Creative

✚ The sciences of cosmology and Darwinian evolution reveal to us the remarkable self-creativity and self-ordering of the universe:

- In fits and starts, creation has meandered and experimented with the possibilities given it by God, to self-creatively grow from a hot soup of quarks 13.7 billion years ago to an unimaginably vast panoply of stars, galaxies, clusters and superclusters of galaxies
- Furthermore, creation has become conscious (in the form of ourselves, and maybe others) and developed a new freedom and power to willfully change itself (via the agency of ourselves, and maybe others)

Divine Humility and Evolution

A Creation Which is Self-Creative

✝ Haught: “God's unobtrusive and self-absenting mode of being invites the world to swell forth continually, through immense epochs of temporal duration and experimentation, into an always free and open future, and to do so in the relatively autonomous mode of ‘self-creation’ that science has discerned in cosmic, biological, and cultural evolution.” (p.54 *God After Darwin*)

Divine Humility and Evolution

A Creation Which is Self-Creative

- ✠ The price paid for allowing Creation to be “Other” than God, to be given the “freedom” to be self-creative, is the eons of pain and suffering, seeming waste, loss, death and extinction that is part of the Universe’s self-creativity that we call “biologic evolution.”
- ✠ The nature of love is to refrain from coercive manipulation of the “Other.” Out of absolutely self-giving love, God restrains God’s self and allows the universe to unfold and respond to God’s allurement at its own pace.
 - More about God’s allurement in future sessions...

Divine Humility and Evolution

God's Redeeming Love

- ✝ The eons of pain and suffering, of seeming waste, loss, death and extinction that is part of biological evolution are not however meaningless.
- ✝ The same divine self-emptying love that allows Creation “to be itself,” to be “Other” than God, is also continuously poured out redemptively on Creation as the object of God's love.
 - God takes into God's self all of the suffering, travail, enjoyment, and creativity of all of Creation – not just that of the human sphere.

Divine Humility and Evolution

God's Redeeming Love

✝ Haught: A vulnerable God, ... could not fail to feel intimately and to "remember" everlastingly all of the sufferings, struggles, and achievements in the entire story of cosmic and biological evolution. By holding these and all cosmic occurrences in the heart of divine compassion, God redeems them from all loss and gives eternal meaning to everything, though in a hidden way that for us humans only faith can affirm. (p. 56, *God After Darwin*)

Divine Humility and Evolution

An Unfinished Creation

- ✠ A creation that is self-creative, that is still growing and evolving, is an **unfinished** creation.
- ✠ A creation that is not yet finished cannot yet be “perfect.”
- ✠ Thus an unfinished, still evolving Creation gives us another explanation (another **theodicy**) for the presence of evil and suffering in a world created by a loving God: Creation is *unfinished* and hence *imperfect*.