
Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith

by David Ray Griffin
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Getting Started

You are serving as a leader in a worthy endeavor: to help individuals in the work of integrating their faith with a scientific understanding. While this is not a simple task, it can be one that is rewarding for you and the other adult learners.

The purpose of this online guide is to help you identify some of the key arguments, questions, and assumptions that lie within *Two Great Truths*. Additional suggestions for small group discussion are also included, as are biblical passages that might spark further conversation. You will want to shape the material around the needs and interests of your study group.

For many people, the relation of these “two great truths” leads to an intellectual quandary; for others, who may work in a scientific profession, the matter will be more experiential; and for others, a pattern of keeping two truths compartmentalized may need to be overcome. Your group may very well have individuals who come from each of these perspectives. As you begin the journey, assure the participants that the search for truth within the group, in response to David Ray Griffin’s book, will honor each of the unique questions and convictions.

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Lesson One

1. Welcome each participant. Ensure that everyone has a copy of the text. Ask participants to introduce themselves and offer a sentence or two about why they have chosen to take part in the study. Reassure all of those present that this will be a learning process; it is likely that some will be intimidated, given the immensity of information related to each subject (Christianity and science).
2. In the preface, the author writes, “The modern world has presented the Christian faith with many deep challenges, both practical and intellectual. The present book focuses on one of the intellectual challenges to Christian faith—the widespread view that it is in conflict with the worldview of modern science.”
 - List a few of the practical challenges to Christian faith.
 - List a few of the intellectual challenges to Christian faith.
3. The author offers a detailed interpretation of both Christian faith and science. His interpretation considers many of the important debates in Christianity and science; he suggests that there has been “distortion” in each but that each defends “a very great truth.” Invite participants to reflect on ways the faith has been distorted in recent history and to consider ways that science might also become distorted.
4. Read Colossians 1:15–20 (New Revised Standard Version). Ask participants to listen for words or phrases that are significant or meaningful to them. When Paul makes the claim about Christ that “in him all things hold together,” what might this mean? What might it mean that in Christ all things are reconciled? Urge the participants to enter into the study of these two great truths, Christianity and science, as an act of faith.
5. In chapter one, “Scientific Naturalism: A Great Truth That Got Distorted,” Griffin begins by acknowledging a form of scientific naturalism that is a distortion: one whose worldview is “materialistic, atheistic.” What do these terms mean to participants in the group?
6. Scientific naturalism is defined on the top of page 2: “the doctrine that the universe involves an extremely complex web of cause-and-effect relations; that every event occurs within this

web, having causal antecedents and causal consequences; and that every event exemplifies a common set of causal principles.” There is an order; there is cause and effect; there is interdependence. Further, the author argues, this order “cannot be interrupted” (page 2).

7. The author makes a distinction between naturalism that does not entail atheism, on the one hand, and supernaturalism, on the other (page 2). How do these ideas differ? Is this distinction understandable?
8. A significant portion of chapter one focuses on the historical emergence of scientific naturalism in Western culture. Griffin begins with attention to naturalism and materialism, laying the groundwork for a discussion of Plato and Aristotle. He summarizes Plato’s thought in the following way:

Plato offered the world a *naturalist theism* . . . This view involves a distinction between *our* world, which was created at a particular time in the past, and *the* world, meaning simply a realm of finite beings, which has always existed. Prior to the creation of *our* world, *the* world existed in a state of chaos. The divine creator created *our* world by bringing an ordered cosmos out of his chaotic state. The reason this point is so important is that it suggests that there is power inherent in the world, so that the creator is not absolutely omnipotent in the sense of being able to bring about any desired state of affairs by simply willing it. Plato emphasized this point, saying that although the creator sought to bring about the “best possible” result, the recalcitrance of the material with which the creator worked explains why our world is imperfect (pages 4-5).

I have quoted this extended summary for several reasons. It contains a number of Griffin’s primary concerns: creation and chaos, God’s power and limitations, God’s will and God’s actions, “creation out of nothing,” and the existence of matter apart from God’s creative activity.

Ask a participant to read the above paragraph. What would an argument with Plato sound like? List some important disagreements that might be offered in response.

9. Griffin describes Aristotle’s influence on the emerging discipline of scientific naturalism as “considerably more restrictive than Plato’s own version” (page 5). Why does the author make this argument?

10. The doctrine of “creation out of nothing, undermined the naturalism of the Greek tradition,” according to Griffin (page 7). Why is this so? Why is disruption of nature a problem for the emergence of scientific naturalism? The key figure who would come to speak to the tension of faith and naturalism was St. Thomas Aquinas.
11. On page 8, Griffin tells the story of an intellectual dispute between philosophers and church leaders. The condemnation of Aristotle’s propositions set the stage for the rejection of the belief “that nature is a system of natural causes that is closed to divine providence and hence miracles” (page 9). The rejection of these convictions was motivated by a desire to protect the freedom of God and the omnipotence of God. Thomas Aquinas develops the idea that the world has not been eternal but that God is eternal (page 9).
12. Griffin next responds to the development of Christian thought in relation to the natural world with a reflection on the thought of Charles Hodge and Calvinism. The key ideas are (a) God is the author of all things, (b) God is independent of creation, and (c) God is therefore free to act within the natural laws of the world or beyond them.
13. On page 11, Griffin summarizes what he calls four major syntheses of thought: (1) Plato’s doctrine of creation out of chaos; (2) the modification of Plato’s thought; (3) Thomas’s modification of the thought of Aristotle; and (4) the emphasis on divine omnipotence and creation out of nothing, which was a further distancing from Greek philosophy.
14. A fifth synthesis of thought occurs in the seventeenth century: Griffin describes this as “supernaturalistic mechanism.” God was still the author of creation, but matter behaved in systemic ways. Griffin defines the worldview at this time in history as having “a mechanistic doctrine of nature, a dualistic doctrine of the human being, and a supernaturalistic view of the universe as a whole” (page 12).

Reflect on this statement. How might each of these three understandings be present in our world today? What are the positive and negative implications of a mechanistic doctrine of nature, a dualistic doctrine of the human being, and a supernaturalistic view of the universe as a whole?

15. On page 14, the author offers a political motivation for this understanding of nature and human being. Are you surprised that the outcome of “the battle of the worldviews” was in this case determined by social interests more than by the explanatory power of the ideas? Why or why not?
16. How would you define a miracle? What is an example of a miracle in the New Testament? In ordinary life?
17. On pages 17–18, Griffin describes the transition from a supernaturalistic worldview to a naturalistic one. Ask for comments about this historical shift. This sixth synthesis of faith and Greek tradition came to be known as the “deistic” shift and implied a “clockwork universe.”
18. In what respects does our universe seem to function like clockwork and in what respects does it not?
19. Compare the author’s definitions of Darwinism and Neo-Darwinism.
20. Discuss the transition from dualism to materialism (pages 19–21).
21. Summarize the primary distortions in the history of scientific materialism as the author conveys them (pages 22–26). You will want to cover the following themes: experience, mental causation, and human freedom.

Prepare the group for the next meeting. Participants will want to read chapter two, “Christian Faith: A Great Truth That Got Distorted.”

*A note about the structure of the group meetings: Four gatherings have been suggested, roughly corresponding to eighty-three questions/exercises. If you want to meet for five or six sessions, simply divide the questions in such a way that the material fits the time allotted for discussion. The numerical order will also help to provide a pace for the discussions. For a further resource that may serve as background reading, see *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* by John B. Cobb Jr. and David Ray Griffin (Westminster Press, 1976).

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Lesson Two

22. Welcome the participants once again. Read Genesis 1:1–5 (NRSV). Remind those gathered of the title of the second chapter: “Christian Faith: A Great Truth That Got Distorted.” Ask if anyone present would like to share an observation about distortion (see above).
23. Griffin offers a summary of the Christian faith (the content of the faith, *fides quae creditur*) by listing eight doctrines:
 - Our world has been created by a good, loving, wise, purposive God.
 - God, loving all of us, desires that we treat each other with justice and compassion.
 - Our world is essentially good, even though it is now full of evil.
 - God continues to act in the world, especially through human beings, to foster good and overcome evil.
 - God’s love, concern for justice, and purpose, having already been expressed through a series of prophets and sages, were revealed in a decisive way through Jesus of Nazareth.
 - The divine purpose, thus revealed, is to overcome evil by bringing about a “reign of God” on earth, in which the present subjugation of life to demonic values (lies, ugliness, injustice, hate, and indifference) will be replaced by a mode of life based on divine values (truth, beauty, goodness, justice, and compassion).
 - Salvation can be enjoyed here and now, at least in a partial way, through direct experience of, and empowerment by, God as Holy Spirit, and by the faith that, no matter what, our lives have ultimate meaning, because nothing can separate us from the love of God.
 - The divine purpose is also to bring about an even more complete salvation in a life beyond bodily death.

The author confesses that this is a summary of his own understanding. Ask participants to look over this list (numbered and italicized on pages 29–31). Do they agree with the listing, or disagree? Would they add any other statements? If

there is time, you could work in groups of two or three to relate each statement to a verse or passage of Scripture (for example, the second statement might be linked with John 15:12, “Love one another as I have loved you”).

24. The author distinguishes between these primary doctrines and what he refers to as “secondary doctrines” and “tertiary doctrines” (pages 31–32). What examples does he give of a secondary doctrine and a tertiary doctrine? And why is the distinction between the three kinds of doctrine important?
25. Ask participants to brainstorm about possible Christian teachings that they might consider of secondary or tertiary importance. Make a list of them. Do you find it easy or difficult to make such a list? Why?
26. Griffin suggests that we err when we make secondary matters primary and that this presents an obstacle to the faith for some. Do you agree or disagree?
27. The author speaks of three categories in which doctrines are understood: those that are literally true, those that are mythologically true, and those that are false (page 33). His discussion of these categories follows on pages 33–37. This is an important section of the chapter for those seeking to integrate theological convictions with scientific understandings. His argument is that Christian faith can resonate with scientific naturalism at the level of primary doctrine, but that problems arise at the levels of secondary and tertiary doctrine.
28. The major distortion, according to Griffin, is the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). Drawing upon the work of recent biblical scholarship, Griffin suggests that God did not create all things, but created out of a preexisting primeval chaos. This will be crucial to the author’s argument: “The idea that God created our universe out of a chaotic state opens up the possibility that the ‘material’ from which our world was created had some power of its own, so that it was not wholly subject to the divine will” (page 38).

This statement is related to the author’s reflection on the problem of evil. He continues, drawing on the writings of Jon Levenson, “our ordered world came into being only after God had defeated a primordial source of chaos. . . . Chaos had only been circumscribed, not annihilated, with the result that it constantly threatens to erupt” (page 39).

Do you find this argument helpful in explaining the presence of evil in the world? Does this argument change your perception of God?

29. Read the following passages from the New Testament: John 1:3, Romans 4:17, Colossians 1:16, and Hebrews 11:3. Do these seem to support the doctrine of creation out of nothing? Or do you find a lack of support for the doctrine in them? Or do you find the texts ambiguous on this issue?
30. The author describes the heresy of Marcion's gnostic theology. Pay close attention to the paragraph at the bottom of page 40 and top of page 41, which gives a summary of gnosticism. How does Marcion's theology threaten one of the primary doctrines of the Christian faith?
31. Help the participants to understand the development of the doctrine of "creation out of nothing" as a response to Marcion.
32. Ask one of those gathered to comment on the contribution of Hermogenes, an early Christian theologian. Why were his insights important? Why did they not ultimately prevail? What was lost, according to Griffin, by this development? (See pages 41–43.)
33. The summary statement on page 44 is worthy of reflection:

The move to the doctrine of creation out of absolute nothingness turned out to be the most fateful decision made in the history of Christian theology. Spearheaded by theologians who were uninterested in taking a circumspect view of things because of their single-minded focus on the threat to Christian faith from Marcion's gnosticism, and who evidently were also intellectually unequipped to do so, this adoption of *creatio ex nihilo* was made without due regard to the warning by Hermogenes about the threat to Christian faith implicit in *this* doctrine—the threat to the perfect goodness of God. The history of the discussion of the problem of evil would bear out this warning that if God is said to have created the world out of absolute nothingness, the origin of evil cannot be explained, at least without implying that God's goodness is less than perfect. This problem would become one of the major reasons for the rejection of theism in modern times.

Ask the participants to reflect on this passage. Where would they locate the origins of evil? What are the options?

34. Ask the participants to define the word *theodicy* (see page 45). Theodicy is a critical concept in the book's argument. Popularized, theodicy has to do with the question Why do bad things happen to good people?
35. The remainder of the chapter focuses on two forms of theodicy. The first is "the Theodicy of Traditional All-Determining Theism." In this theological tradition, the author locates Augustine (fourth century), Thomas Aquinas (twelfth century), Martin Luther (sixteenth century), and John Calvin (sixteenth century). Augustine makes a strong case for divine omnipotence and a limited place for human freedom and action. Thomas also assigns limited value to free will, seeing God at work in both primary and secondary causation (pages 47–48). Luther sees the human will in bondage and assigns freedom to God alone. This presents a problem for a doctrine of the goodness of God (see pages 48–49); in essence, God himself is the standard by which goodness is measured. Calvin, with his doctrine of predestination (some saved, some damned) affirms the sovereignty of God (page 50).

After a brief treatment of these four major theologians, Griffin makes the following comment: "Christian faith, as presented by all-determining theists, not only did not solve the problem of evil but increased it" (page 52). Why might this statement be true?
36. Reflect also on the following statement: "The doctrine that human actions are totally determined by God is, like the closely related belief that nothing truly evil occurs, a belief that no one can consistently live out in practice" (pages 52–53). Would you agree? Why or why not?
37. The second form of theodicy is "the Theodicy of Traditional Free Will Theism." While continuing to affirm creation out of nothing, some thinkers sensed a need to make a greater place for human freedom. This arises out of God's self-limitation and leads to a more reasonable understanding of human sin (page 54). There are, however, two problems associated with theodicy and free will. Ask participants to reflect on them (see pages 54–55).
38. The chapter concludes with a listing of other distortions within the Christian faith (defense of the status quo, even when it undergirds injustice, intolerance of other faiths, etc.).

As a closing act, ask the group to refer again to Griffin's summary of the primary doctrines. In light of the discussion, are there any new insights?

Send the group forth with blessings that affirm the goodness of God, even in the midst of our human limitations.

Welcome the participants. Thank them for their willingness to engage in the material, and encourage them to continue in the journey.

Begin with a reading of Matthew 22:37 (NRSV). Pose the following question to the group: What does it mean to love God with our minds?

We move now into the third chapter, “Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith: A New Synthesis.”

39. The first full paragraph (on page 61) summarizes much of the book’s argument thus far. It is worth re-reading, perhaps in the group meeting but also for preparation in moving into the new material.
40. The distinction is made between “conservative to fundamentalist theologies” and “modern liberal theology” (page 62). How do they differ according to the author? How do they differ in your own experience?
41. On page 63, the author distinguishes between “natural theology” and “supernatural theology.” How are these different? Griffin notes that “liberal Christian theology, by virtue of its acceptance of epistemic naturalism [rather than supernaturalism], is methodologically in harmony with modern science, which likewise bases its claims to truth, at least in principle, on reason and experience” (pages 64–65).
42. The author makes an important distinction, as the argument proceeds, between “liberal theology” and “modern liberal theology.” Why does he affirm the former and not the latter? See page 65:

The problem with *modern* liberal theology is that it has accepted the distinctively modern ideas about the nature of the world in general and human experience in particular. . . . Modern liberal theology accepted, that is, the mechanistic idea of nature and the sensationist doctrine of human experience. At the same time it accepted the liberal commitment to rest its case entirely on experience and reason, therefore, modern liberal theology agreed to employ a very impoverished notion of experience, and thereby a very restrictive notion of what could be accepted as reasonable.

Why is a mechanistic view of the world an “impoverished” way of seeing reality?

43. How do a mechanistic idea of nature and a sensationist doctrine of perception shape our understandings of divine activity (God’s working in the world)? See pages 67–69.
44. On pages 69–70, the author discusses miracles in relation to Christology (our understanding of Jesus). This leads, Griffin will argue, to a form of deism and ignores the uniqueness of Jesus.
45. Modern theology, according to the author, has given little authority to either divine activity or religious experience. Thus theologians have questioned not only the secondary and tertiary doctrines but also the primary doctrines: “Modern theologians . . . have been unable to do justice to any of the eight primary doctrines of the Christian faith discussed earlier, because these primary doctrines affirm God as creating the world, acting providentially, savingly, and self-revealingly in it, as being experienced as Holy Spirit, and as being good, loving, wise, purposive, and concerned for justice” (page 73).
46. How did the late theologian Reinhold Niebuhr interpret the resurrection of the body? (See page 74.) How was his denial an example of modern theology? And how does it undermine hope?
47. After concluding that modern liberal theology has been a failure, Griffin outlines the rise of a new worldview, which he fleshes out in the remainder of chapter three. He continues to reflect on the key themes of the book—theodicy, creation out of nothing, freedom, causation—but in new ways.
48. Scientific naturalism, as interpreted by Alfred North Whitehead, undergoes a shift that replaces sensationist, atheistic, and materialistic assumptions with ones that are prehensive, pan-experientialist, and panentheist. Each of these last three words bears defining.
49. Prehension might be defined as “the nonsensory sympathetic perception of antecedent experiences, [whereby] we are able to reduce several apparently very different types of relations to one fundamental type of relation. [It] explains not only memory and perception, . . . but also temporality, space, causality, enduring individuality (or substance), the mind-body relation, the subject-object relation in general, and the God-world relation.” (From David Ray Griffin, “Charles Hartshorne,” in

David Ray Griffin et al., *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993], p. 209.)

“This prehensive doctrine of perception is crucial, accordingly, for Whitehead’s development of a form of naturalism that is adequate for both the scientific and the religious communities” (page 77).

50. Panexperientialism maintains the unity of the mind and the body without being dualist. According to Griffin, how is this helpful in relating the mind to the body? (See pages 79–81.)
51. Panentheism affirms that everything is in God, and it differs from pantheism, which claims that everything is God. You might refer participants to Acts 17:28 (“In him we live and move and have our being”).
52. Griffin returns to the problem of *creatio ex nihilo* (“creation out of nothing”). The philosopher Whitehead suggests that “nothing” should be relative and not absolute—“our world was created out of a chaos of events” (page 86). This makes a space for a primordial creativity (or to use the phrase from the Russian Orthodox theologian Nicolas Berdyaev, “uncreated freedom” [see page 87]). A distinction remained between God and the uncreated matter, which existed in time together.
53. The distinction, between God and uncreated primordial freedom, helps as Griffin returns to a key theme of the book: the problem of evil (page 88). If God created all that exists, then God is also the author of evil. If creation is more an ordering of life, then evil has a separate origin. Here the interpretation of Genesis 1:1–5 is important.
54. Discuss the concept of the nature of God as persuasive rather than coercive. You might read pages 89–90 in preparation.
55. The author reflects on the problem of evil as a barrier to belief in our world: “It is the enormity of evil that leads many people to doubt that our world was created by a loving deity. The idea that our world was created out of relative nothingness, rather than absolute nothingness, is also relevant to this dimension of the problem. As we have seen, this way of understanding the relation between God and the world implies that there are some principles of order inherent in the very nature of things, which are not due to a divine decision” (page 90).

Do you agree or disagree? What are the implications for persons in our world who cannot believe in the face of enormous evil?

56. The author poses the following principle: “the possibilities for good cannot be increased without also increasing the possibilities for evil” (page 90). Do you agree or disagree? Read the paragraph on the bottom of page 90 and top of page 91. Griffin is reflecting on the concepts of power and freedom. In response to the question “Why didn’t God create rational saints?” he replies (following the perspective of Whitehead), “God could not have created such beings, because God could guarantee that creatures otherwise like us would not sin only by creating them devoid of freedom, and that was impossible” (page 91).
57. Evil is thus the shadow side of freedom: “We can criticize God for the world’s evil only if we can honestly say that human evil is so bad that the world would have been better off without human beings” (page 92).
58. How do the philosophers William James and Alfred North Whitehead affirm the activity of God while denying supernaturalism? Discuss the concepts of “ideal impulses” (James) and “initial aims” (Whitehead).
59. Having read and discussed the material in chapter three, ask the participants to develop a group definition of a “God of naturalistic panentheism” (page 93).

Much of the discussion of chapter three, related to the nature of God and our comprehension of God’s activity, is speculative and even mysterious. Read portions of the book of Job, an example of Wisdom literature that reflects on both the creation and the problem of evil. In particular, note Job 38–42. If there is time, read some of this section out loud; if not, ask participants to spend some time with these chapters prior to the group’s next gathering.

A note about process theology: The author, David Ray Griffin, is a prominent proponent of process theology, which seeks to integrate Christian thought and symbols with the writings of process philosophers, especially Alfred North Whitehead. The following is taken from the Web site of the Center for Process Studies (<http://www.ctr4process.org/>), founded by John Cobb and David Ray Griffin:

Process thought in general seeks to elucidate the *developmental* nature of reality, emphasizing *becoming* rather than static existence or being. It describes reality as ultimately made up of experiential events rather than enduring inert substances. The universe seeks the-many-becoming-one in a sequence of integrations at every level and moment of existence. Reality is the process of creative advance in which many past events are integrated in the events of the present, and in turn are taken up by future events. Events particularize ultimate creative power. The world is the realization of a selection of creative potentials. Ideas that further characterize process thought are inter-relatedness, unity-in-diversity, non-dualism, panentheism, mutual transformation, person-in-community, and panexperientialism.

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Lesson Four

As you gather, invite the participants to listen carefully to a reading of Psalm 104 (NRSV). Meditate in silence on the activity of God in the natural world that surrounds us.

60. The fourth and final chapter is briefer than the previous three. The author begins with a summary statement. Ask one of the participants to share verbally with the group the summarization of chapter one (first paragraph, page 98). Ask a different participant to share verbally with the group a summary of chapter two (paragraph on the bottom of page 98 and top of page 99).
61. The key distortions of scientific naturalism are sensationism, atheism, and materialism. These distortions, Griffin argues, are not helpful in relation to our religious and moral lives, and they are also inadequate from a scientific point of view.
62. The chief distortion of Christianity, according to the author, is the confusion of primary with secondary and tertiary doctrines. This distortion leads to unfortunate developments in the history of Christian thought and, by extension, in the history of Christian practice. Discuss one of the historical practices that was influenced by distorted doctrinal understandings (see pages 98–99).
63. The author reflects on a form of arrogance that was also the result of distorted Christian doctrine (see page 99). Read the following, or have a participant read it in the group meeting:

This arrogant attitude lay behind the Christian persecution of Jews, which forms one of the sorriest chapters in Christian history and led to the Nazi-induced holocaust in the twentieth century. This attitude also lay behind the crusades against the Islamic world, the aftereffects of which are still very much alive today. This attitude also lay behind the American theology of “manifest destiny,” which justified what David Stannard calls the “American Holocaust,” meaning the virtual extermination of the Native Americans (page 99).

- Do you agree with his diagnosis? How are Christian institutions arrogant in our own time? How are we as individual Christians arrogant at times?
64. Modern liberal Christianity was a response to the events of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries (page 100). This theological development had both positive and negative implications, according to the author. What does he cite as an example of the latter?
 65. In your own words, how would you describe the increasing timidity and loss of confidence among Christians in our intellectual life?
 66. A positive implication of modern liberal theology, according to Griffin, is religious pluralism. He writes: “many theologians concluded that Christianity is not the only means through which God brings religious truth and salvation to humankind” (page 100). How do participants respond to this conviction? What are the strengths and weaknesses of such a position? How does this conviction relate to Griffin’s primary doctrines?
 67. Quoting the perspective of Alan Rice, Griffin reflects on the negative aspect of religious pluralism: a “debilitating relativism” which rises from the perception that “all religions are equally true in a way that makes them equally false” (page 101). This has contributed to the timidity and lack of confidence in the development of Christian thought in relation to science. If all faiths are equally true, what merit does a particular tradition have to offer?
 68. As Griffin moves toward the book’s conclusion, he poses his key question: “Can we recover confidence in the universal truth and importance of the primary doctrines of Christian faith while, at the same time, accepting the great truth of scientific naturalism and manifesting respect for the other great religious traditions? In other words, can we develop a theology that, while being both naturalistic and pluralistic, is robustly Christian?” (page 101). One of the ways the author accomplishes this is to distinguish between “materialistic naturalism” and “pantheistic naturalism.” How would you describe the differences in these two terms? (See page 101.)
 69. In the section of the fourth chapter titled “Reconceiving God as Trinitarian,” Griffin offers the doctrine of the Trinity as a way in which the above question (number 68) can be

answered affirmatively. Griffin discusses the history of the Trinity in relation to the concept of “creation out of nothing” and its interpretation as revealed (supernatural) theology (as opposed to natural theology). He refers to the work of the Anglican theologian Charles Raven (page 103). Ask one of the participants to comment on Raven’s contribution to Trinitarian doctrine.

70. How are the three persons of the Trinity described by Raven and Griffith (see the bottom of pages 104–5). Griffin refers to the three persons as “the divine mode of action”—“creation, saving revelation, and sanctification . . . operating in one and the same way—the way of love.” The three persons act “persuasively,” not interrupting normal functions of human and natural life. This conviction lays the groundwork for Griffin’s reflections on the Trinity.
71. Griffin suggests that “the doctrine that our world was brought about by divine persuasion is . . . compatible with its age” (page 106). What is meant by this statement? What would a coercive account of creation look like?
72. How does this persuasive account of creation differ from Darwinism (or neo-Darwinism, as Griffin describes it)? Since atheism rules out any kind of purpose and order, instead reckoning events as happening purely by chance, how does theism differ? (See page 106–7.)
73. Griffin offers a third alternative for creation, beyond either supernaturalism or materialism. What problem does the former pose to scientists, and the latter to Christians? Why is theism an attractive alternative, and what can it mean for our understanding of creation?
74. How is Jesus a unique and decisive revelation of God? The author poses this question, and his answer is summarized on pages 109–10.
 - God presents initial aims toward the best possibilities for individuals; in Christian tradition this has been referred to as prevenient grace.
 - The best possibilities will differ among human beings and across species in the natural world.
 - These aims for individuals flow from the general divine aims of God.

- Jesus received, within his own tradition, the general divine aims of God.
- It is appropriate for us to envision Jesus as a decisive revelation of God's character, purpose, and mode of operation.

Griffin wants to make a case for the uniqueness of Jesus without claiming any kind of superiority for him (in relation to other faiths). He quotes John Cobb in arguing that perhaps different faiths ask different questions (page 110).

Question: Can we hold to the uniqueness and value of our own faith while also respecting the uniqueness and value of other faiths?

75. In his discussion of "Sanctification through Persuasion," the author speaks of eschatology, which is the doctrine of the last things. For Christians, this is our vision of the future hope and ultimate triumph of good over evil. Griffin refers to theological traditions that focus on coercive and violent endings, even when Jesus modeled nonviolence (page 111).
76. The author states: "God . . . will not resort to coercive power to bring about the ultimate victory of good over evil. Indeed, if we say that the power of love cannot overcome the power of evil, we are in effect denying that love is the ultimate power of the universe" (page 112). Do you agree or disagree? Refer again to Griffin's primary doctrines in chapter two (see pages 29-31).
77. If we are to believe that love ultimately overcomes evil, why is belief in life after death necessary? (See page 112.)
78. Discuss the implications of the "resurrection of the soul" (pages 112-13). How does this differ from the doctrine of the resurrection of the body? Would this matter of faith be considered a primary doctrine among individuals in the group study? Why or why not?
79. Through sanctification we become more loving, as we are transformed into the image of God, who is love. This, Griffin suggests, is a work of divine grace that continues in the life to come. Further, the ultimate purpose is to sanctify all people. How can this happen in a way that is not coercive?
80. "Salvation," the author writes, "[is] a gradual process of sanctification, in which the divine love gradually purges us of our enslavement to demonic values" (page 113). How

does this definition of salvation compare to other definitions you might have read about? How is a doctrine such as sanctification sometimes distorted?

81. In reflecting on chapter four, how is your confidence increased in the primary doctrines of the Christian faith? Can you articulate any primary doctrine at a deeper level and with more precision?
82. “God is love,” we read in 1 John 4:8 (NRSV). How is love central to the thesis of this book: our understanding of God, our love for the natural world, and our love for all people?
83. Thank the participants for their willingness to reflect on their faith and to enter into the world of scientific naturalism. Send them forth in the peace and love of the God who creates us, who saves us, and who sustains us.