

## **A Modern Ancient Story**

*An account of how two vastly different stories  
of humanity's origins, purpose, and future  
– the Christian and the Modern –  
can belong together*

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Amongst humans there is often found a desire to place our lives in a narrative larger than ourselves -- a grand story that explains why we are here, what our purpose is, and where we are going.

Countless such stories have been composed throughout history, some of which have been more persuasive than others. Western culture is dominated by two stories in particular -- 'the Ancient Christian Story' and 'the Modern Materialist Story'. The Ancient Christian Story tells us about a creator and redeemer God, as told by the Bible. The central element of this story is the life, death, and resurrection of *Jesus of Nazareth* – and by implication the dependence of humanity on God. In contrast, the Modern Materialist Story holds there is neither gods nor God; then it tells its story *not* on the basis of ancient texts such as the Bible or Upanishads or Koran, but rather on the basis of modern disciplines in mathematics, the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology, and paleo-studies), the human sciences (psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics), and the humanities (literature, history, philosophy). The central element of the Materialist story is the *autonomy* (self-sufficiency and inherent abilities) of humanity – the exact opposite of the Christian story.

The Christian story contends that humanity can only find its true meaning, and can only be truly saved, through the action of God in Jesus the Christ; the Materialist story contends that humanity can only find true meaning, and only be truly saved, through humanity's own efforts.

Current relations between advocates of these two stories are not good. Advocates for each of these often seem either completely unengaged with the other or else constantly at the other's throat. This mutual indifference or even contempt is, though, hardly surprising, for on an immediate comparison of the two stories, they could hardly be more different – *there appear virtually no commonalities or points of contact between the two stories.*

Nonetheless, there are important reasons for seeking to understand how both stories belong together, why they need each other. Both views have truth: the Christian story has truth about God and humanity's relationship to God; the Materialist story has truth about the nature of creation (through the natural sciences) and the nature of humanity (through the social sciences and humanities). Since all truth is God's truth, in God's mind there must be a single story that holds together all truth. As well, both Christianity and Modernity have important contributions to make to how we live, to what we make of our lives in our modern world; both frequently hold false assumptions about the other; and both have valid critiques of the other. (The longer version of this overview explains these points.)

So my undertaking here is an attempt to write a single grand story for our time, weaving these two stories together at the points where they belong together. Along the way I will address such topics as evolution, multiverses, freedom of the will, suffering, divine action, the nature of scripture, atonement, and a range of other topics for both believers and seekers in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

This book has two audiences in mind: on the one hand, it is for those who hold to some form of 'historic' or 'orthodox' Christian faith yet find significant elements of modernity persuasive, and thus are seeking to understand whether the two can belong together in some way; on the other hand, this book is also for the atheist or agnostic modernist or post-modernist who feels the lure of God and thus is moving toward the possibility of faith in God and discipleship to Christ, yet wants to see how this potential Christian faith relates to their modern or post-modern worldview and ways of living.

The book concludes with my version of the unified story – a modern ancient story for both believers and seekers.