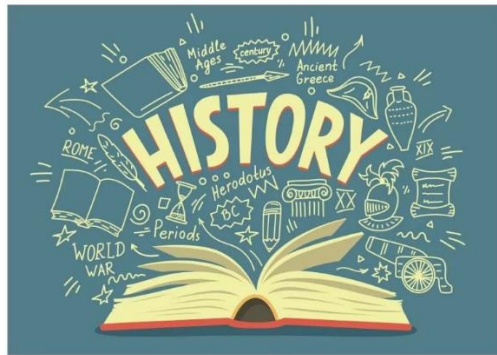


# We are Historical

**We grow in Knowledge and Understanding: We live in an evolving World**

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Evolution is a fact not a theory. Evolution of life on earth has been going on for 3.5 billion years. Anthropologists have discovered that the first humans (Homo Sapiens) most likely developed in the Horn of Africa between 300,000 and 200,000 years ago. Cave paintings and rock paintings began to emerge on multiple continents some 30,000 years ago. The physical universe, our planet, and all living organisms are still evolving.

It is amazing that only in the last 400 years people have begun to appreciate the size of the universe in which we live and how long it has existed. The observable universe

is more than 46 billion light-years in any direction from Earth and about 93 billion light-years in diameter.

The sixteenth century brought a tremendous change in cosmological understanding thanks to astronomers like Nicolaus Copernicus (1473 - 1543), Galileo Galilei (1564 - 1642), and Johannes Kepler (1571 - 1630).

Not just our understanding of the universe, but religious understandings have evolved as well. It is widely accepted among contemporary biblical scholars, for example, that the ancient Israelites were originally polytheistic. The transition from polytheism to monotheism was a multifaceted process that occurred from the 9th to 6th centuries BCE. The belief that Yahweh alone is God was solidified during the Babylonian exile in the sixth century, when official Israelite religion finally became monotheistic. There was also a movement away from human sacrifice, which until about the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, was an acceptable part of Israelite religion. We all recall the biblical story of the near sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham, found in the book of Genesis, most probably composed around the 5th century BCE.

When it comes to Christianity, our knowledge and understanding have grown as well. We know today that Jesus' disciples were men AND women. And unlike some later Christian scholars, like Jerome the biblical translator, the historical Jesus did not discriminate against women in any way. Jerome (c.342 - 420) who translated the Bible into Latin (the translation that became known as the Vulgate) had a very simple view of women. To him "woman is the root of all evil."

Women were leaders of early Christian households and -- contrary to what recent popes have maintained -- women were deacons and women were presiders at celebrations of Eucharist. The Apostle Paul tells of women who were the leaders of Christian households such as Apphia in Philemon 2, and Prisca in I Corinthians 16:19. This practice is also confirmed by other texts that mention women who headed Christian

communities in their homes, such as Lydia of Thyatira (Acts 16:15) and Nympha of Laodicea (Colossians 4:15).

Today we understand that the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" is much broader than just the Roman Catholic Church. This is not an anti-RCC statement. But a contemporary reality. And yes, I am still a Roman Catholic or as my old friend Cardinal Godfried Danneels (1933 - 2019) said, "a thoughtful, constructive, and critical Catholic."

Ecumenism is not about being kind to "separated brethren" but humbly living, collaborating, learning from each other, and growing in a multidimensional faith community which is the Church of Jesus Christ.

Today we understand much better than even a hundred years ago that all religions have accumulated images that matched the culture of a particular time and place and that some people find it difficult to abandon them as new discoveries are made, and society moves on. Historical and contemporary understandings about human sexuality and gender are a good example. Last week, after reading a book about evolution, I started thinking again about Henry Morris (1918 - 2006) and his "Young Earth" creationists who insist that the Earth is only 6000 years old. Today, however, it is widely accepted by both geologists and astronomers that our Earth is roughly 4.6 billion years old.

As my friend William Joseph, who is a priest, physicist and computer scientist, has often reminded me: " Just as we have science and science fiction, we also have religion and religious fiction." I strongly recommend William Joseph's book: *An Evolutionary Biography of God: Christianity in a World of Science*.

As we journey on in our lives, the challenge is to observe, reflect, ask questions, find answers, and continue on our discovery journeys as we do grow in knowledge and understanding.

Today my wife Joske and I are celebrating our fifty-fourth wedding anniversary. Today, as well, I am happy to announce that I am resuming my Another Voice reflections.

The coming months -- especially in the United States -- will certainly be filled with abundant religious, social, and political developments. Key issues are sure to involve the rise of authoritarianism and the abuse of religion to foster extremism.

I welcome your thoughts and questions. Two well known TRUTH affirmations have guided me over the years: "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32) The other is the old Latin proverb *Veritas Vincit* (truth conquers). The challenge today of course is distinguishing truth from falsehood.

Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, published in 1961 has contemporary 2024 significance as well: **"It was miraculous. It was almost no trick at all, he saw, to turn vice into virtue and slander into truth, impotence into abstinence, arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honor, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice. Anybody could do it; it required no brains at all. It merely required no character."**

In the coming months, I hope we can all be supportive and prophetic truth seekers.

Jack

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