

## **St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall**

[www.stmagnus.org](http://www.stmagnus.org)

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation](https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation)

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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

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You can find our Sunday worship here.

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or on YouTube here.

<https://youtu.be/kh6DFCfvtI0>

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

[stmagnuszoom@gmail.com](mailto:stmagnuszoom@gmail.com)

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

Let there be light, let there be understanding, let all  
the nations gather together face to face leading to peace  
on earth. Let there be light.

We come here today from our own places, perhaps feeling  
wilted, a bit battered by the events of our world, or our  
own lives  
We rest a while together, to heal, and seek replenishment  
of the  
spirit.

As we journey through life, creating our future,

We acknowledge our creative source, we feel the creative power of this season.

And as we come together today, we enjoy the spirit of community:

The Psalmist says that we are wonderfully made  
Planted in us are different gifts, no two of us are the same.

On our own we may or may not shine, but together we can be turned into a kaleidoscope of grace.

Sometimes we lament the busyness of our lives, sometimes we bemoan the emptiness. These are signs of our longing for a fulfilment we cannot create, but which we can receive from the One who made us, knows us and loves us.

#### Reading from Genesis 1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But the earth became chaos and emptiness, and darkness came over the face of the Deep—yet the Spirit of God was brooding over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Light: Be!" and light was. God saw that light was good, and God separated light from darkness. God called the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening came, and morning followed—the first day. Then God said, "Now, make an expanse between the waters! Separate water from water!" So it was: God made the expanse and separated the water above the expanse from the water below it. God called the expanse "Sky." Evening came, and morning followed—the second day. Then God said, "Waters under the sky: be gathered into one place! Dry ground: appear!" So it was. God called the dry ground "Earth" and the gathering of the waters "Sea." And God saw that this was good.

#### Reflection

Does God intervene. A view from Science. Spoiler alert... much of this comes from my very limited understanding of science itself, so please do not ask me to explain things like a 'quantum vacuum' or a 'magnetosphere'.

Does science have anything useful to say about this, assuming some notion of God? I think so.

To start, did God create the universe? Cosmologists say that our universe had a finite beginning 13.798 billion years ago. The physical laws of the universe are fine-tuned such that tiny alterations to the value of any of the fundamental forces would prevent a universe like ours forming. As the probability of this happening by chance

is vanishingly small, this may suggest a creator. But what of the creator's creator? In other words, positing a creator can lead to an infinite regress: God made the universe, but who made God and who made God's maker, and so on. The answer 'an uncaused cause' is merely a statement. Some scientists, recognising the need to address what came before the Big Bang, suggest a quantum vacuum or an infinite number of universes (the multiverse) but these are no more likely. Therefore, science, here cosmology, does not invalidate questions about whether there is an ultimate Agency or Creator, questions which until quite recently would have been dismissed as too 'spiritual' to be of interest to science. Even more striking is that the universe is comprehensible to us at all. Such a puzzle appears not to be crucial for evolution yet is rich in theological speculation. Even if God created the universe, does God intervene thereafter? A wealth of evidence from the earth sciences shows that the processes which crafted our planet are now understood and do not rely on external input: a favourable position in the solar system; a tilt of 23 degrees giving seasons; a moon for tides; an iron core generating a magnetosphere to ward off harmful solar rays; attempts by those of faith to produce a 'knock down' argument against naturalistic processes moulding our existence have not been successful. For example 'irreducible' complexity cited by Intelligent Design can be countered by the new field of 'emergence' showing that complexity may arise naturally.

A popular view among conservative Christians is typified by the scientist Edgar Andrews who argues that God can over-ride the natural laws for revelatory spiritual purposes, resulting in miraculous interventions, including the dead rising. But he asserts this without considering how the known physical laws which he enlists to prove his 'God hypothesis' can accommodate completely different, unknown laws within the same space and time and be deployed to reverse complex cell biology. Problems like this arise because of the conservatives' reluctance to cede authority to any source other than the Bible.

Moving away from the cosmic to the personal, the insights of cognitive sciences are a mixed bag. Negatively, there a lot of what might be called pop-psychology based on colourful images from brain scanners purporting to 'explain' our motivations and desires. The philosopher and medic Raymond Tallis (2011) argues eloquently that these reductionist methods will never explain consciousness, nor will they demote our felt experience of being 'agents' within the world, capable of choice.

An important development from psychology is 'theory of mind' - knowing that others have minds and being able to interpret what is going on in them. Some atheist thinkers, uses theory of mind to argue that religion is hard-wired and of adaptive value, a very different view from Richard Dawkins. As Robert Burns so perceptively noted, being able to see ourselves as others see us and to see others as they see themselves, which is what a theory of mind gives us, must also be the biological substratum of compassion and empathy and therefore our ability to experience that Another cares about us.

Our felt experience of God includes profound emotional and intuitive elements, often with a deep sense of coherence. Developmental psychology shows how we form emotional attachments and internalise representations of the self and others. Though a simplification, we can see how this might make sense of an internalised personal Jesus becoming present to the Christian as a guiding inner presence. Science cannot judge whether this is human-made or God- given.

What of intercessory prayer? Such prayer expresses our deepest yearnings and if our deepest yearning is to ask God to help another then compassion invites us to do so without intellectual analysis. It is part of being human. Hope-filled compassion is different though from believing God will abandon physics and biology in order to perform supernatural healings.

In summary, although science does not support supernatural interventions in the material world, modern knowledge of the universe often leads us to respond as to a transcendent force, with profound thankfulness and humility. Our evolved brain lends itself to an inner mental sphere in which God or Jesus can become present to us shaping (intervening in?) what we do.

Do I think that science undermines faith? No.

Do I think that it alters how we believe? Yes.

This is the essence of what it is to wrestle with these things and to celebrate the wrestling, which is what the Science Festival is surely all about.

#### Prayer

We are invited now to focus our minds on the concerns of the world,

Before creation there was God. Through love creation came into being, through divine generosity we are a part of it,

Through divine wisdom creation will find its end.

we pray for creation and our place within it.

Through Jesus teaching and invitation to follow the way of God the Church came into being. He calls us to live as God's people. Calls us to love one another. Calls us to love the world. we pray to grow in love for each other and for the world.

Communities have come into being and have a history,

Communities live their life in the here and now

Communities have a future life.

We pray for communities to be enlivened by love and justice. In particular the scientific community in all it's diverse parts that it may continue to discover the wonders of the universe it all its complexity while enhancing the human community in its relationships with creation.

Family and friends bring the wisdom of former generations,

They support us in the ups and downs of today's life,

And in the younger generations we see hope for the future.

we pray to be attentive to the wisdom of the older, to share generously with our own generation, and to be supportive to those who follow on after us.

### Blessing

Time has now come for us to go our separate ways.

May we embrace the challenges of our lives and our world...

May we be sensitive to the cries of creation and the songs of our kin.

We will celebrate life!

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his Spirit this day and always.