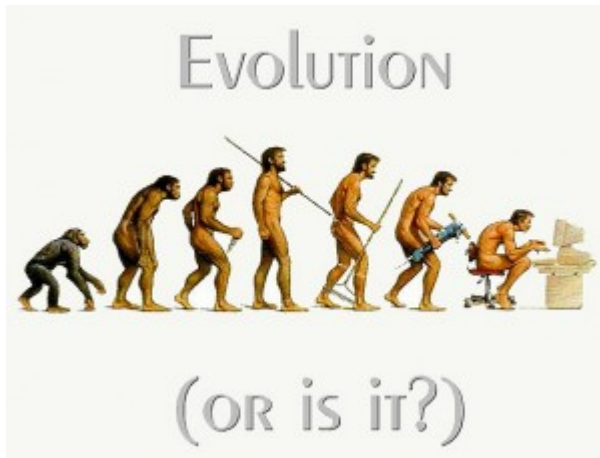


# Putting the Progress Back In Progressive Christianity



"Little round planet in a big universe."

Sometimes you look blessed, some times you look cursed.

It depends on what you look at, obviously.

Even more it depends on the way that you see."

*Child of the Wind*, Bruce Cockburn.

I read a [review](#) in the *Christian Century* this week which trashed Steve Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, a book I happen to think is important. My suspicion is that what the reviewer objected to more than anything was the notion that violence could be shown empirically to have decreased. Put another way, the objection was to the evidence-based possibility that the human species had actually made some progress. Steve Pinker is an atheist. He wasn't associating progress with G\_d. But this wasn't the reviewer's problem. It was, I suspect, the very notion of progress itself.

## **A Very Brief History of Progress:**

Progress has fallen into disrepute in postmodernist philosophy and in progressive Christian circles. Postmodernist thought

emerged, in part, to solve the problems of the modernist worldview. Modernism itself was a response to the traditional worldview. It was rightfully giddy about the power of reason and science to break the chains that shackled progress to the authority of priests and superstitions of the church. Who can deny that this severing has been liberating? We are the beneficiaries of advances in medicine, standard of living, educational opportunities, democratic process, and according to Steve Pinker's evidence, a significant decline in violence. Evidence of an increase in empathic intelligence has also empirically demonstrated by [Jeremy Rifkin](#).

Unfortunately social progress got attached in a grotesque way to Darwin's discovery of evolution, first by the philosopher Herbert Spencer in the mid-19th century. This wedding of social progress to evolution was used in the service of Victorian England's (and other European nations) ethnocentric assumption of cultural superiority. Evolution, the thinking went, had been aiming at *our* nation, justifying imperialist expansion and an ethic of power-as-domination. And we all know what Hitler did with the idea. "Social Darwinism" was the name given to this exploitation of evolution by ethnocentric tribalism. Two world wars in the first half of the 20th century, and the "myth of progress" ("myth" used here in the sense of a lie) became the ideological bedrock of progressive culture.



The paradox for liberal or progressive Christians has fascinated me for some time. We won't go back to traditionalist Christianity with its claims of scriptural inerrancy and a supernatural God who intervenes episodically to save us from ourselves. As well, most progressive Christians reflect the postmodernist suspicion of the "grand narrative", even our own—because it smacks of traditionalist

Truth claims. And, as we've seen we must dissociate ourselves any idea that hints of historical progress. (Ironically, many progressives want to return to a golden pre-modern age that is imagined to have been gentler and kinder.) Many historians have kiboshed this idea, including Matt Ridley in his book [The Rational Optimist](#).



Where does this leave the progressive Christian? Pretty much in the wilderness I fear, which is fine for a season, but you want to have a pretty clear sense that there is a way forward—a felt sense of a destination that is animating the present. Especially

if you a preacher trying to muster up some inspiration Sunday after Sunday. For years, I endured for years a kind of ennui, grounded in profound doubt about the whole enterprise. But you can only preach so many sermons about doubt as spiritual practice before the folks start looking around for some inspiration elsewhere. Atheist philosopher Daniel Dennett conducted a now famous [research project](#), focused on a relatively small sample of progressive clergy who were trying to lead their congregations out of the wilderness, but lacking any sense of direction or conviction. Though it was a small sample, I recognized myself at one point in my faith journey in their stories and felt deep compassion and I have a strong sense, based on conversations with colleagues that these men and women faithfully represent a much larger cohort.

**We know who we are not, but who are we?** Progressive Christianity is expressed almost exclusively in the negative as a critique of anything that smells of modern or traditional worldviews. We are not biblical literalists. We are not belief-based. We do not believe in the atonement. We do not exclude anyone from the table. We are not elitists. We speak truth *against* power structures. We do not pray to a

supernatural God. We are against all form of elitism, including corporatism, classism, species-ism, etc. we are not modernist rationalists and we are not traditionalist bible thumpers. There is much dignity in this stance and there is much about both modernism and traditionalism that needs to be purged. But at some point, we must ask ourselves, what are we *for*?

**We can come across as sour pusses.** After a certain point, the negativity and the criticism is enervating, bordering on misanthropic at times. Aren't we awful as a species? Perhaps the planet would be better off without us. Heard that one? Actually, it comes across at times as "aren't *they* awful", those people who just don't get it. We have the truth and they have the power—thus we "speak truth to power". Sunday after Sunday, progressive preachers speak truth to power, and secretly the people (while getting the point) are dying for a little inspiration. Our chosen bad guys for the week become caricatures, objects of our derision and not subjects of value. We claim a core value of inclusivity—but are we really?



All too often our critique lacks nuance and is not carefully researched enough. We just *know* that they are the bad guys. Paradoxically this view is not far from our fundamentalist friends who ground the evil of others in original sin. Ironically, because traditionalists deeply accept humanity's fallen nature, there is often more compassion for the unredeemed others than that shown by progressive Christians. We have a mean streak in other words. If humanity is not ontologically in a state of original sin, then those other guys must be *willfully* ignorant, greedy, and corrupt. Their punishment is not hell, rather it is our unrelenting critique, which we call "prophetic". You decide which is worse. I have long thought that the deepest crisis for progressive

Christians would be the advent of the Kin(g)dom of God, leaving us with nothing to rail against, and no clear purpose. I exaggerate (a little) for effect, I admit.

**Evolution puts the “progress” back in progressive.** But I do wonder what a new Christianity, imagined positively, would look like. You won't be surprised to hear my bias for an evolutionary worldview that sees G\_d as the animating power of the evolutionary process itself. G\_d is within the dialectic and dynamic unfolding of history, as the cosmos is re-imagined as a single, unified, and intelligent solver of problems—resulting in increasingly levels of beauty, truth, and goodness. (Or put in theological terms, more transparent reflections/incarnations of the divine heart and mind). The realm of history is the body of the cosmic Christ evolving. Everything, every body, and every system feels this pull toward an increase in value. Whether you call that alluring tug “Love” or “Goodness” is less important than that it is a matter of direct experience. As we interpret this transcendent urge toward the “More” as sacred, we come to realize that we are already in the Heart of G\_d.

**They are us.** In an evolutionary worldview, we're a little less quick to condemn, and a little more likely to identify with those we believe are holding up progress. They are us, in other words. We love our enemies, because our “enemies” are a necessary part of this sacred convergence in and toward the heart of G\_d. Together, sufficient creative friction is being generated in the slow and patient process of coming up with better solutions to living as a community of life on Earth.

(And sometimes, yes, the destructive side of the pole, does need to be critiqued and resisted). We take this sometimes frustrating process of living together with those who are radically different from us a little less personally (not passively) and adopt a meta-perspective that even what is standing in the way of our species is part of what will ultimately move us forward—as we engage with more compassion

and a little less knee-jerk trashing.



**We are the heart of Christ evolving.** When we drop into this desire to realize the felt Promise of the More as a real sign of the presence and activity of G\_d, and surrender to its pull, we truly do become the hands, heart, and feet of the divine—the cosmic body of Christ evolving.

Our core spiritual practice becomes a deepening of our felt sense of being the presence of the universe, consciously evolving, in, us, and through us. We orient from our heart centre, the heart of Christ, because we're all in this evolving adventure together.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has get increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get information that is reliable. You can find useful information fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile dysfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about "[levitra cost](#)". Did learned slightly about "[buy levitra online usa](#)"? Other question we are going to is "[buy generic levitra online](#)". In effect, a medic reviews found that up to three quarters of people on such drug

experiment side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your partner and physician. Today, there are many options for men who suffer from erectile dysfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this curing. Talk to your health care producer to see if it's sure to make the switch.