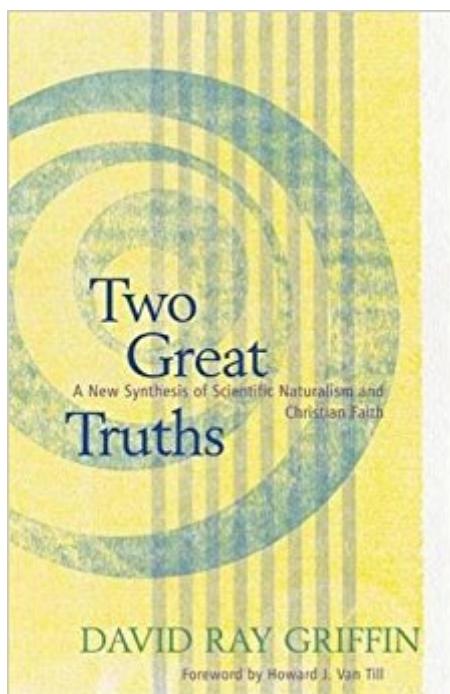


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# Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis Of Scientific Naturalism And Christian Faith



## **Synopsis**

Furthering his contribution to the science and religion debate, David Ray Griffin draws upon the cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead and proposes a radical synthesis between two worldviews sometimes thought wholly incompatible. He argues that the traditions designated by the names "scientific naturalism" and "Christian faith" both embody a great truth--a truth of universal validity and importance--but that both of these truths have been distorted, fueling the conflict between the visions of the scientific and Christian communities. Griffin contends, however, that there is no inherent conflict between science, or even the kind of naturalism that it properly presupposes, and the Christian faith, understood in terms of the primary doctrines of the Christian good news.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"A concise and lucid summary of Griffin's influential theological synthesis. Those interested would do well to start with this work." -- John F. Haught, Thomas Healey Professor of Theology, Georgetown University, and author of *Deeper Than Darwin*"A magisterial theological work. With stunning force, Griffin reconstructs such key doctrines as divine power, creation, love, trinity, and resurrection." -- Catherine Keller, Professor of Theology, Drew University, and author of *Face of the Deep*"A rewarding overview. With characteristic sureness of hand, Griffin outlines a process theology that embraces both naturalism and Christianity." -- Philip Clayton, Ingraham Professor of Theology, Claremont School of Theology, and author of *God and Contemporary Science*"A superb work of religious scholarship. David Griffin has achieved a fusion that is both lucid and engaging."

--Charles Birch, Emeritus Professor of Biology, University of Sydney, and winner of the 1990 Templeton Prize

David Ray Griffin is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Theology at Claremont School of Theology, Professor Emeritus of Religion at Claremont Graduate University, and Co-Founder of the Center for Process Studies. He is the author of *Two Great Truths: A New Synthesis of Scientific Naturalism and Christian Faith*, and coauthor, with John B. Cobb Jr., of *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. Author of numerous books in philosophy of religion, he has also published two popular books on the World Trade Center attacks: *The New Pearl Harbor: Distubing Questions About the Bush Administration and 9/11* and *The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions and Distortions*.

a little boring at times but overall, a clear and concise explanation of how science can relate to religious faith in a complementary way.

I actually bought this book for Howard Van Til's very substantial foreword. I wanted to know where Van Til stood, theologically, since his departure from Calvin College, and since being so strongly rejected by many conservative evangelicals because of his belief in theistic evolution. Reading Griffin was an eye-opener (as it was for Van Til, when he first encountered Griffin's criticisms of his position). Even though this is meant to be introductory, it is dry in terms of style, by dynamite in terms of content. Griffin offers a critique of naturalism. But wait. Although Christians loosely critique something they call "naturalism," and while more sophisticated thinkers might go so far as to distinguish between "methodological naturalism" and "metaphysical naturalism," Griffin shows those are too imprecise, and more than a little shallow. He really digs into what philosophers have thought about naturalism, and what assumptions they got wrong. It led me to Griffin's much larger works, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, which I would highly recommend.

David Ray Griffin's book "Two Great Truths" is well-written and understandable for those who are not conversant in the academic discussions revolving around Process Theology. The book aims to be a new synthesis between scientific naturalism and Christian faith. The problem in my view is that Griffin's understanding of Christianity is so far afield as to make it scarcely Christian. Griffin strips away supernaturalism, the divinity of Christ, a traditional understanding of the Trinity, creation ex nihilo, belief in hell and many other truths which have been held by Christians down through the

centuries. Griffin and others would argue that these truths were established at the Church Councils and are secondary beliefs but I take the view that these views were in the lifeblood of the earliest churches and were coming together in the centuries leading to the Councils. The Councils were a matter of affirmation, not creation, of doctrine.. Griffin's summary of the essentials of the Christian faith on pages 29-31 is so general that it is hardly Christian. There is nothing distinctively Christian about it. And this is where we part ways, for at the heart of the Christian faith must be the person of Jesus Christ. That He came to earth from God and lived without sin and died an atoning death and was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven and will return, these are fundamental truths, not secondary truths as Griffin asserts. To say and believe less than this is to be less than Christian. That these beliefs may raise difficult questions about the problem of evil or the connection of science to faith are the real secondary issues. The only thing that matters at the end of the day is whether Jesus was who He said He was and whether He did what He said He did. There are evidences to explore and reasons to believe. Whether one embraces faith in Jesus is not a matter of a blind leap but of an assured trust in the uniqueness and veracity of His life. With this settled in one's mind and heart, there are still questions to be addressed to be sure and some of them may indeed be exacerbated by faith in Christ as I have described it. Humility is a necessity not only on the front end of faith but on the back end. Our inability to make all the pieces fit at this time does not mean we should move in the direction of Griffin, jettisoning core truths about Jesus for the sake of a synthesis which so dilutes Christian faith as to make it unrecognizable.

Given that today real harm that can be done by the traditional teachings of many faith communities it is refreshing to find a book that allows thoughtful and compassionate people to affirm both what they know about the world and the possibility of that world being an environment of peace and caring for everyone. In a small book, Two Great Truths, David Ray Griffin, shares the richness of a lifetime spent in contemplating and writing about how we understand God. And most importantly he offers an affirming vision of both reality (science) and the Christian faith. Dr. Griffin's work is based on a view of the world that sees all things as interconnected and interrelated in the way in which quantum physics' sub-atomic basis of reality operates. Everything participates in an ongoing process of creativity. God is "what makes things make themselves". There is therefore no need to see God as supernatural. Griffin argues that this idea was a distortion in the early church when God was seen as creating out of nothing and as determining everything that happened in the world. He says that it is good news that we do literally, live and move and have our being in God and that we are free to make our own response to life. However that means that the responsibility for the kind of

world in which we live is ours. God provides the best possibilities for any given situation. It is our choice whether what happens is for good or for evil. God's aim for the world is goodness, beauty, harmony and peace. We are never out of the presence of God because the creating Spirit of the Universe animates all of life. For 2000 years the church has operated with an inadequate image of God as a sovereign ruler whereas the God about whom Jesus of Nazareth taught was a God who used persuasion not coercion. Griffin asks us to take seriously what we know about the world through science; the truth of which he points out has also been distorted. Science does not need to be materialistic or embrace mechanical causation. He asks us to give up the idea of supernaturalism and see this world and the universe as the only reality there is. His ideas are applicable to any of the world's religions. Every Christian especially should read chapter 2. It asks us to look at the implications of some traditional doctrines. Many people in the church today know that Christianity must change. Griffin offers a very positive possibility for that change and that because of such a change, history could be changed too. Griffin can also in the light of his understanding of reality affirm a continuing existence after death. For anyone who has or is near to giving up on any faith system today this book could be life changing. Dr. Helen Goggin Professor Emeritus Toronto School of Theology

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