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*Amending the Christian Story: The Natural Sciences as a Window into  
Grounded Faith and Sustainable Living*

by Ron Rude

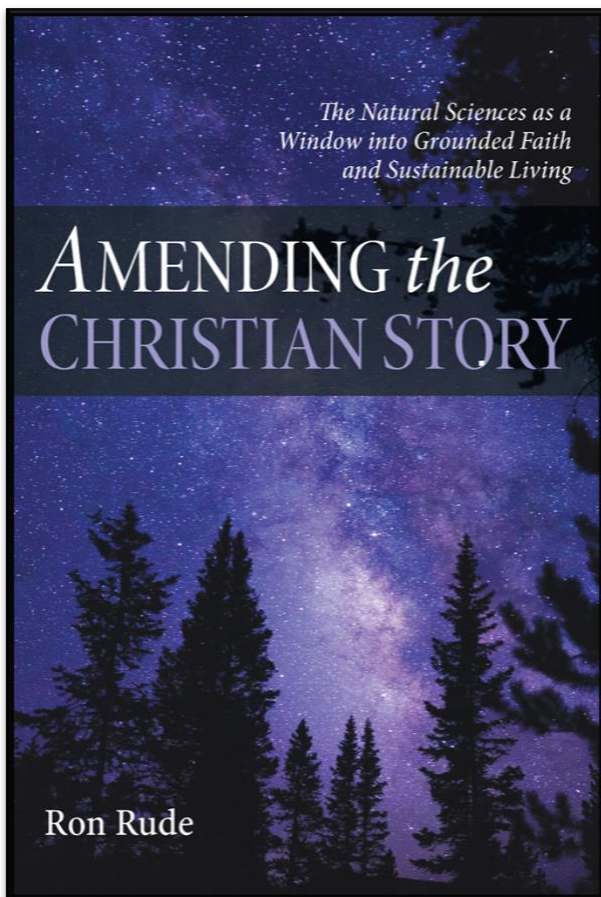
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## New Title from Ron Rude

### *Amending the Christian Story: The Natural Sciences as a Window into Grounded Faith and Sustainable Living*



Why has Christianity been around for a mere 2,000 years when Earth life has abounded for 3.8 billion years and even humans for nearly 300,000 years? What was God doing all this time? And what if humans are not the center of God’s universe? In *Amending the Christian Story*, Ron Rude asserts that current versions of the Christian faith are inadequate, and more than this, are fueling humanity’s assault on Earth’s biosphere. Through the window of nature’s natural sciences—especially astronomy, geology, evolutionary biology, paleoanthropology—Rude provides a fuller and more expansive view of God’s story of life and God’s story of Jesus. Can humans continue the lived-out assumption that we are separate from, superior to, the reason for, and the rulers of everything? With new perspectives into ancient stories and current narratives, Rude compels us to urgently shift Christianity’s claim and conduct in order to unite with God’s more sustainable and just world.

After seventeen years as Lutheran campus pastor (ELCA) at the University of Arizona, **Ron Rude** recently retired to teaching and writing. He loves hiking, travel, music, and history. Previous books include *Abel Emerging* (2010) and *(Re)Considering Christianity* (2012). His passion is exploring the hard and soft intersections between Christian faith and Nature’s natural sciences, and their effect of these intersections on sustainable and faithful living.



**Regarding the book title, where does the Christian Story need mending and amending?**

Major Christian doctrines need amending. These include original sin, dominion-ism, the atonement theories, and eschatology (end times). Along with this, the historic and current harm done by these errant ideologies to God's creation, including humanity, needs deep mending.

**What insights do Nature's natural sciences (astronomy, geology, evolutionary biology, paleoanthropology) offer Christians and others in understanding the implications of God's story of life and God's story of Jesus?**

The universe is vast. The universe is ancient. Humans are tiny. Humans are recent. Even on planet Earth, the species *Homo sapiens* is just one out of about 20 million other species in God's household. This raises an important ecological and ethical question: what kind of housemates are we being?

**Define the differences you describe between Smartness, Intelligence, and Wisdom.**

- Smartness is the ability to manipulate information, people, and events—literally, to get what one wants. There are plenty of smart people in the world, some honorable and others nefarious.
- Intelligence is less common. Intelligence understands multiple layers of complexity. It embraces nuance. It thinks and acts beyond instant gratification. An intelligent person (or community or nation) can stand on the outside and both comprehend and fairly articulate viewpoints and perspectives other than their own.
- Wisdom is the rarest character trait of all; and the most important. Wisdom perceives the bigger picture and the longer term. It strives for the common good and the well-being of all God's creation. Wisdom is capable of appreciating perspectives beyond the merely human. More importantly, wisdom is grounded in ethics. As such, the search for what is moral and ethical is not relegated to the afterthought or side-bar elective invoked in the service of convenience. Rather it is the piercing center and circumference of every individual and collective thought, word, and deed. Wisdom knows and acts on bigger truths.

My contention is that while smartness continues to wax (increase) within our species, intelligence and wisdom and ethics have been on a waning (declining) course for some time.

## **What is anthropocentrism? What have been its harmful effects?**

“Anthropocentrism” is an ideology that positions humans at the head of the class, the front of the line, the top of the topeest. It renders the needs and desires of humans as supreme. Also called “human exceptionalism” and even “diva theology,” to function from this I-centered worldview/narrative (as individuals, nations, and as a species) is sin. It will always produce behavior that is contrary to the common good of all God’s creation.

## **Have all human cultures in history seen the human species as separate from, superior to, the reason for, and the rulers of the world? Can this Narrative be changed?**

After 3.8 billion years of thriving life on Earth, and nearly 300,000 years of *Homo sapiens* living, humans have only recently started to see themselves as separate *from*, superior *to*, the reason *for*, and the rulers *of* the world. I argue that this harmful ideology is a recent aberration, and not fundamental to our deeper character. So, yes, it can be changed.

## **Describe ways in which humans have broken off deep relationship with neighbor, Nature, self, and God.**

Dominion-ist worldviews have produced sinful conditions of marginalization and oppression: men over women (patriarchy); Whites over Blacks (racism); heterosexuals over LGBTQ couples, individuals, and their families; citizens over immigrants; and especially, humans over Nature. Dominion-ist attitudes and behaviors reside in individuals and in systems/structures. The predictable result is deep-seated relationship impairment with our human neighbors (racism, warfare), with Nature (pollution), with our own inner soul/spirit/self (self-abuse), and with God (alienation from the Creator).

## **How might an amended and mended Christian story heal these broken relationships?**

The book is my attempt to carve out a non-anthropocentric version of God’s story of life, and within this vast and ancient context, of God’s story of Jesus. Using the Genesis 4 story as a background template, I call it “Abel Christianity.” This version is offered as an alternative to the dominant and anthropocentric “Cain Christianity” of our time, which, among other shortfalls, is ecologically irresponsible.

**Given God's ancient story of the universe, why do you think Judaism and Christianity are such recent, infant religions?**

After nearly 300,000 years of *Homo sapiens* living, these religions emerged only recently (3,500 years and 2,000 years respectively). I argue that they arose as a healing response to humanity's recent fall into the destructive ideologies of anthropocentrism and dominion-ism. Unfortunately, early on in Church history the Christian community also succumbed to these powerful ideologies and its message became usurped. Since then we have been proclaiming and living a distorted "gospel."

**Describe America's 3 original crimes/sins.**

America's 3 original crimes and sins are slavery/racism; land theft and cultural/language/bodily genocide against native families; and ecocide/biocide. These underbelly currents have been and will always be part of our national character and DNA. Wise leaders know this and do everything in their power to disarm and suppress such dispositions. Demagogues also know this and dedicate themselves to inciting, rallying, and harvesting these potent flaws for personal and national gain.

**What is "Abel Christianity"?**

"Abel Christianity" is a version of the Christian faith that embraces God's forgiveness, and then has the courage to follow Jesus into restored relationship with neighbor (especially the stranger, outcast, alien, enemy), with Nature, with our own inner soul/spirit/self, and with God.

**An Excerpt from *Amending the Christian Story: The Natural Sciences as a Window into  
Grounded Faith and Sustainable Living***

This book is an attempt to articulate a different take on God's story of life and God's story of Jesus. I am especially intrigued by the intersections between Christian theology and Nature's natural sciences. I believe the implications of these hard and soft intersections have a lot to teach our species, including Christians, about faithful and sustainable living . . . My assertion is this: historic Christianity, shortly after its inception, rapidly regressed into Cain Christianity. That is, in the church's theology and practice, Abel of Nazareth (Jesus) transmuted into Cain of Nazareth (less than Jesus). p. xii

. . . *Amending the Christian Story* provides a vehicle for honestly assessing our presence as a species. It offers a road to travel on as we face anew old challenges erupting from our past, tackle the present, and move on to the future.

Rather than fancying ourselves as squires of the Earth, distinct from and even above Nature, humans need to learn to live respectfully and deeply with and within the ecosystems and communities of life in God's household. In fact, if we neglect this endeavor, we will be evermore incapable of understanding what God is up to. In other words, it is not so much that we need to better understand what certain passages in the Bible have to say about creation and Nature and ecology as it is that we need to return to and be engage in Earth's ecosystems and species diversities in order to understand what the Bible (and Christian faith) has to say about anything. p. xiv, xv

Christians have much to learn from Nature's natural sciences regarding God's story. In fact, I believe that if we can become better schooled in the expansive and scientific depths of Article 1 of our Creeds (God as Creator), our interactions with Article 2 (Jesus) and Article 3 (Holy Spirit) will have the potential to be less anemic and more wholesome also. Could this additionally be a two-way street. Might an amended and mended Christian faith also have something to share with the natural sciences? It is indeed worldview altering to understand that a loving God undergirds all that is, seen and unseen. Such a perspective has the potential to countenance Nature with an even more profound value, integrity, and purpose. It can even affect how humans, including natural scientists, live in this world. Will their guiding narrative in daily life, in the laboratory, in studies out in the field, and in product development be grounded in Abel's values, worldview, and behavior, or in Cain-ism? p. 117

**Praise for *Amending the Christian Story: The Natural Sciences as a Window into Grounded Faith and Sustainable Living***

“As our world desperately seeks a more inclusive story, Rude invites us to reimagine the sacred text of nature and divine wonder as a map for the human journey. This book is for anyone looking to make sense of the biblical narrative in light of the natural sciences and their own experiences.”

—**Peg Carlson-Hoffman and Chuck Hoffman, former Executive Directors, Holden Village**

“In the face of the unprecedented environmental crisis, Rude challenges us to amend and mend the narrative dominating Christianity for centuries. . . . He effectively lays out the need for a ‘two-way street’ between the sciences and the Bible leading to a world-altering view of our relationship to Nature.”

—**Glenn Schrader, Professor of Chemical and Environmental Engineering (ret.), University of Arizona**

“Rude challenges us to amend theology through consequential integration of cosmic and evolutionary science. . . . Reimagining the Christian narrative through the lens of Abel and Cain, we must abandon broken symbols of original sin and atonement to recenter God’s mission on the sustainability of creation.”

—**Craig L. Nesson, Academic Dean and Professor of Contextual Theology, Wartburg Theological Seminary**

“Is there another way to live? . . . This book opens the imagination to question the stories that have shaped our species and set us on an unsustainable and destructive path. . . . Rude crafts an alternative story of God that ultimately responds with a definitive yes—there is another way to live. And not only that, but the call to live a different story is urgent for Christians who seek to be faithful to the Creator and creation.”

—**Jen Rude, University Pastor, Pacific Lutheran University**

