The following slides are from Joe Miller’s presentation at the Diocese of Duluth’s Annual Assembly on October 14, 2017, in Duluth, Minnesota.

The slides have been modified from the original in the following ways:

Embedded videos have been replaced by video links.

Some image resolution has been reduced.
Discovering Transcendence
Our Path to God

Joseph G. Miller
October 14, 2017
My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his Name.

Hail Mary…

Does belief in God even make sense today?

Get clear and credible responses to the vexing questions raised by science and modern life.

Type anything to start searching.

2000 years old. Never outdated.

Christianity’s core beliefs don’t change, but every century has its key questions— the driving themes that shape people’s attitudes about God, the human person, and Jesus Christ.
Presentation Objectives

1. Diagnose the current cultural moment
   • Acknowledge the challenges
   • Recognize opportunities for evangelization

2. Examine two of the key issues
   • Faith and science
   • The human person

3. Learn how happiness/purpose can provide a roadmap to authenticity, fullness, and freedom

4. Acknowledge the reality of evil and the spiritual battle
Presented in Five Parts
I. A Secular Age
II. Faith and Science
III. Embodied Spirits
IV. Happiness and Purpose
V. The Cosmic Battle
Part I – A Secular Age
"Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in say, 1500 in our western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy but even inescapable?" – A Secular Age
What does it mean that we live in a secular age?
Defining Secular

1. Public spaces emptied of God or of any reference to ultimate reality
2. General falling away from religious belief and practice
3. A move away from a society where belief in God is unchallenged to one in which it is understood to be one option among others
Key Concepts
1. Transcendence
2. Disenchantment
3. Plausibility
4. Authenticity
5. Fullness
Decline in Belief in Transcendence

TRANSCESSIONCE

Theism → Deism → Humanism → Materialism

IMMANENCE*

1500 → 1600 → 1700 → 1800 → 1900 → 2000

*In Charles Taylor’s A Secular Age, immanent describes a closed system that encompasses all of reality.
The Middle Ages = An Enchanted World

- God
- Angels/Demons
- Saints
- Relics
- Ghosts
- Witches

Personal Agency
500 Years of Disenchantment

- Reformation
- Advances in Science
- Urbanization
- Democracy/Egalitarianism
- Pluralism
Plausibility and The Nova Effect (Cross Pressures)
“Sometimes I believe in God, sometimes I don’t. I think it’s 50/50 maybe. But ever since I’ve had cancer, I’ve been thinking about him more, and I find myself believing a bit more. Maybe it’s because I want to believe in an afterlife, that when you die, it doesn’t just all disappear...the wisdom you’ve accumulated, somehow it lives on.”

Then he paused for a second and then said: “Yeah, but sometimes I think its just like an On/Off switch. Click, and you’re gone.” He paused again, “And that’s why I don’t like putting On/Off switches on Apple devices.”

Biographer Walter Isaacson recounted in an interview with CBS' "60 Minutes"
Longing for Transcendence

nothing
to be frightened of

Julian Barnes

“I don’t believe in God but I miss him.”
Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go of who we think we're supposed to be and embracing who we are.

~ Brene Brown

“Be yourself and you can be anything”

- Katy Perry

“ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH IS JUST BEING YOURSELF.”

THE ROCK
Listening to Our Cultural Moment - Longing for Fullness

There's more to life than being happy

Emily Esfahani Smith - April 2017 at TED2017
Fullness Without God?
Baptizing Desire

- Transcendence
- Authenticity
- Fullness
- Freedom

JN 12:24-26
Jesus said to his disciples:
“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.”
Part II – Faith and Science
Leap of Faith

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-JlfjNnnMA
Faith And Science Come Together At Conference For Society Of Catholic Scientists

Many Catholic scientists told me this past weekend in Chicago that the hyped 'clash' between science and religion is getting old. And one of the goals of the new organization they had gathered to launch, is to counter the myth that science and faith are incompatible.
The Society of Catholic Scientists exists:

1. To foster fellowship among Catholic scientists.

2. To witness to the harmony between the vocation of scientist and the life of faith.

3. To be a forum for reflection upon and discussion of questions concerning the relation of science and the Catholic faith.

4. To act as a resource for Catholic educators, pastors, and lay people, and for journalists and members of the general public who have questions about the significance of scientific theories and discoveries and about the relation of science and faith.
1. Science cannot prove or disprove the existence of God.
2. Science can provide evidence for belief in God.
3. People of faith should not fear science.
Saturday, April 22:
Welcoming remarks --- Prof. Stephen M. Barr (University of Delaware, President of the SCS)
"The Origin and Evolution of Universes" --- Prof. John D. Barrow (University of Cambridge)
"The Origin and Evolution of Habitable Worlds" --- Prof. Karin I. Öberg (Harvard University)
"Medieval Ideas of the Multiverse" --- Prof. J. Christopher Clemens (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)
“The Origin of Evolution: The Interplay of Order and Contingency" --- Prof. Daniel Kuebler (Franciscan University of Steubenville)
"Process Information: A Novel Communication Theory with Applications to Evolutionary Biology" --- Dr. Erick Chastain (Rutgers University)
"Why Only Us: the Origin of Human Language" --- Prof. Robert Berwick (MIT)
"Science in the Light of the Christian View of the Human Person” --- Fr. Joachim Ostermann, O.F.M., Ph.D. (Franciscan Friars of Canada)
"The Catholic Scientist in the Secular World” --- Dr. Marisa March (University of Pennsylvania)
"To Find God in All Things: Grandeur in an Evolutionary View of Life" --- Prof. Kenneth R. Miller (Brown University)
“Why do we Look at the Heavens” --- Br. Guy Consolmagno, Director of the Vatican Observatory

Sunday, April 23:
"Georges Lemaitre’s Contributions to Cosmology" --- Prof. Robert Scherrer (Vanderbilt University)
"Are Probabilities Essential to Inferring Design?” --- Prof. Robert C. Koons (University of Texas at Austin)
Origins

Universe

Life

Human Person
Origins

Universe
16th Century Radical Shift in Understanding of the Cosmos

Galileo Galilei
1564 - 1642
20th Century Radical Shift
John D. Barrow FRS is Professor of Mathematical Sciences at Cambridge University.

His research is in cosmology and astrophysics.

He has received many awards, including the Templeton Prize, the Royal Society’s Faraday Prize, the Kelvin Medal, the Zeeman Medal, the Dirac Medal, and the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society.

He has written 520 scientific papers, and 22 books.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=138&v=uebCOzdUlZk
Video clip - 2:19 to 6:12
Monsignor Georges Lemaître

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhLQ_b3bKdI
Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPalHdzsImc
Fine Tuning

John Polkinghorne
Physicist and Anglican Priest

https://www.magiscenter.com/series/cosmic-origins/
Video segments from Cosmic Origins video.
Origins

Life
Important Cosmological Events (from our perspective)

The Earth – 4.54B
- Oldest meteorites
- Oldest earth rocks
- Oldest fossils

Our Sun – 4.6B
- Inferred from evidence for age of earth

The Universe – 13.8B
- Big bang
- Speeds & distances of galaxies
- Age of oldest stars
Evolutionary Timescale
Dating Geological and Biological Events

- Absolute dating
- Relative dating

Dr. Roger C. Wiens

Life on Earth – Bizarre Fluke or Necessity?

“The universe is not pregnant with life... Man at last knows that he is alone in the unfeeling immensity of the universe, out of which he emerged only by chance.”

Jacque Monod
Nobel awarded biochemist
Quoted in 1970
Is there Life Elsewhere in the Cosmos?

by Magis Center of Reason and Faith
Filed under Cosmology

248 Comments
The Origins and Prevalence of Habitable Worlds

Prof. Karin I. Öberg
Harvard University
Enceladus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nzaFDkDU7c
Paul Davies - Physicist, cosmologist, astrobiologist and best-selling author.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilw2qz2C3fI
Video clip - 26:30 to 35:07
Recurring theme:

Personal agency versus impersonal forces
Supernatural versus natural causes
Part III – Embodied Spirits
Origins

Human Person
Anatomically Modern Humans

- Oldest modern fossils are the Omo remains, found in modern-day East Africa, which date to 195,000 years ago.
- Y-Chromosome Adam and Mitochondrial Eve are in reference to biology not rationality.

Homo sapiens idaltu skull

Behaviorally Modern Humans

- Behavior includes language, the capacity for abstract thought, and the use of symbolism to express cultural creativity.
- Inferred from advances in tools, weapons, jewelry, cave art and other artifacts.
- Most widely held perspective is that the first behaviorally modern humans lived in Africa 50,000 years ago.
Syntactical Language – “Merge”

The communications explosion.

- A new hierarchical approach to language that Berwick and Chomsky call “merge”.
- Universal grammar = same hierarchical language skills common globally.
- Small steps of evolution cannot explain the sudden appearance of merge.
- It is not simply cranial capacity (Neanderthals had bigger brains), but the capacity to grasp complex syntactical patterns.
- Not possible to attribute solely to some sort of genetic switch.
We walked down the path to the well-house ... Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten... somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that "w-a-t-e-r" meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object which I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with the strange, new sight that had come to me. On entering the door I remembered the doll I had broken. I felt my way to the hearth and picked up the pieces. I tried vainly to put them together. Then my eyes filled with tears; for I realized what I had done, and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow.

I learned a great many new words that day. ... I do know that mother, father, sister, teacher were among them- words that were to make the world blossom for me... It would have been difficult to find a happier child than I was as I lay in my crib at the close of that eventful day and lived over the joys it had brought me, and for the first time longed for a new day to come.

Subjective Aspect –> Self Awareness

The capacity for introspection and the ability to recognize oneself as an individual separate from the environment and other individuals.
The really hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience. When we think and perceive there is a whir of information processing, but there is also a subjective aspect.

*Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness* (1995)

David Chalmers
Near-Death Experiences

Recent Peer Reviewed Medical Studies

• Kenneth Ring, Ph. D., et al – NDEs and the Blind 1999
• Janice Holden, Ph.D., - Combined Veridical Study – 2007 Journal of Near Death Studies (International Association of Near Death Studies)
Near-Death Experiences

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-YjKkF2zwk
Big Deal

https://vimeo.com/107009116
Part IV - Perfect and Eternal Happiness
Metaphysical Concepts For Consideration

• Being is active
• Being is self-communicative
• Being is relational
• Essences limit participation in being
Personal Being is the Highest Mode of Existence

The person is self-possessing

• Self-conscious (can say “I”)
• Self-governing (has free will)
• Self-communicative and relational in a unique way (I-Thou-We)
• Self-transcending (decentering of consciousness from self to God, i.e., union)
Existence is Personal – “I AM”
Are You Happy?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SYzU2kT0lA
Impact of Nova Effect on Happiness

- Loss of purpose/meaning
- Diminished hope
- Sense of isolation
- Confusion
- Apathy
- Anxiety
- Depression

- See also http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/03/health/suicide-rate-rises-sharply-in-us.html?_r=0
The Four Levels of Happiness
Living for level 1 is hellish.
Living for level 2 can be almost as bad.
Competition at Level 2 can be fierce.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High School</th>
<th>Play D1 College</th>
<th>Play NBA/WNBA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Basketball</td>
<td>546,428</td>
<td>5,500</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Basketball</td>
<td>429,380</td>
<td>5,152</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Very few level 2 winners. (actually none)

Source: NCAA
The Comparison Game

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4KetTMfQKw
Nobody Wins the Comparison Game

All players worry about:
- Who’s achieving more, who’s achieving less?
- Who’s smarter, better looking, more popular, richer, etc.?
- Who’s a winner and who’s a loser?

But in addition

Winners worry about:
- Losing their edge.
- Not getting the respect and adulation that they deserve.

Losers worry about the worth of their life.

People stuck in between (sometimes a winner, sometimes a loser) get to worry about all of the above.
But Everyone Can Be an All-Star Contributor

Make an optimal positive difference to my:

• Family
• Friends
• School
• Workplace
• Community
• Church
• Country
• World
A Level 3 World Would be Amazing but Still Not Enough

- Not deep enough
- Not enduring enough
- Not pervasive enough
How Deep is Deep Enough?

The Five Transcendental Desires

We desire perfect and complete

- Truth
- Goodness
- Beauty
- Justice
- Home
Aids for Living the Four Levels
Why not just leap up to levels 3 and 4?

• Pleasure from lower levels:
  • Immediate
  • Intense
  • Can be effortless (level 1)

• Lower level behavior becomes habitual
• Just knowing about the four levels of happiness can be a catalyst for change.
• But internalizing and practicing them is required for growth.
Living at Level 3
#1 – Write down an annual Commitment-to-Contribute.

Where can I make a difference?
  • Separate out your various spheres of influence (e.g., family, community, workplace, church).

What do I have to contribute?
  • List your time, talents and material resources.

What specifically do I feel called to do?
  • Ask yourself (and the Holy Spirit) what specifically you should do.
Living at Level 3
#2 – Look for the good and the good potential in others

• Looking for the negative is the default drive at Level 2.
• Qualities and potential are overshadowed by faults and flaws.
• Focusing on a person's faults makes it nearly impossible to feel empathy and compassion.
• Fortunately the opposite is true. Look for the intrinsic goodness, lovability, and transcendent mystery of the other and see what can happen—as the following video evidences.
Look for the good and the good potential in others.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IM6bIsMhPRQ
Terrific News!
According to Lumen Gentium everyone is called to live at Level 4!

CHAPTER V

THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS IN THE CHURCH

39. The Church, whose mystery is being set forth by this Sacred Synod, is believed to be indefectibly holy. Indeed Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is praised as "uniquely holy," (1*) loved the Church as His bride, delivering Himself up for her. He did this that He might sanctify her.(214) He united her to Himself as His own body and brought it to perfection by the gift of the Holy Spirit for God's glory. Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification". (215) However, this holiness of the Church is unceasingly manifested, and must be manifested, in the fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many ways in individuals, who in their walk of life, tend toward the perfection of charity, thus causing the edification of others; in a very special way this (holiness) appears in the practice of the counsels, customarily called "evangelical." This practice of the counsels, under the impulsion of the Holy Spirit, undertaken by many Christians, either privately or in a Church-approved condition or state of life, gives and must give in the world an outstanding witness and example of this same holiness.

One Caveat – It’s a lifelong process.
Conversion → Self Transcendence → Authenticity, Fullness & Freedom
Living for Level 4

#2 – Fan the flames of holy desire.

Dante and Beatrice in Paradise
Living for Level 4

Suggestion #3 – Frequently remind yourself that you are surrounded by embodied spirits.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible Gods and Goddesses. To remember that the dullest, and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.

— C. S. Lewis —
Part V – The Cosmic Battle
The Power of Myth
Joseph Pearce - The Cosmic Struggle

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCYqS06Mebw
Dr. Mary Healy - Satan’s Opposition to God’s Plan

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-160vXNVNPU
Fr. Spitzer – Typical Way the Devil Works

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TuoZoX-ZEoY
Fr. Spitzer – Free Will

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqcySRwgSJ4
Final Thoughts

1. The culture is fragmented and all belief systems are challenged
2. Christian beliefs must be presented “plausibly”.
3. We can’t go back to 1500 (or even 1950!)
4. People still long for authenticity and fullness
5. Happiness/purpose can be a entrée into Christian fullness
6. Atheists/secularists are not the enemy. Christ died for them too.
Conversion can begin in any/all of these three ways.

- Religious
- Moral
- Intellectual

Self Transcendence
Discovering Transcendence
Our Path to God

Joseph G. Miller
October 14, 2017