

# CWRmagazine

April 2023  
Volume 14, Number 2

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



The Phantom Galaxy — M74  
Across the electromagnetic spectrum

## Logos, Light & Lamb

by Brad Jersak page 2

Also in this issue

Everything Happens for a Reason? | Greg Albrecht 4

Nailmarks, Scars & Doubts | Greg Albrecht 7



# Logos, Light & Lamb

Brad Jersak

## THE LOGOS (WORD) OF GOD

**I**n the beginning was the Word [Logos]. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. All things came into existence through him; not one thing that exists came into existence without him (John 1:1-3, NTE).

John the Beloved opens his beautiful Gospel with an echo of the Jewish creation story: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). It’s important to note that “beginning” here means far more than “first” or “at the start.” This *beginning* is like laying a foundation on which everything is built and remains, or like an overture that recurs through an entire musical score.

Early Christian teachers would proclaim that this beginning, this foundation, this overture is (not just was) the very Word of God (Jesus Christ) by whom God spoke and speaks all things into being. Origen, for example, paraphrased the first verse of Genesis,

**...the one true Creator God speaks all that is into being, by his Word (Logos), and that Word is none other than Jesus Christ.**

*“In Christ, God created the invisible and visible universe.”* He had learned this from the prologue of John’s Gospel—the *Logos* (the divine Word), the Son of God, Jesus Christ founded and fashions all of existence. Everything that exists—including you and me—lives and exists *in Christ*. To call Jesus “the Word of God” is to say (a) Jesus is what God has to say about himself, and (b) this same Christ is the Word who said in Genesis 1 (and says today), “Let there be Light...”

The key point here is that the one true Creator God speaks all that is into being by his Word (*Logos*), and that Word is none other than our Lord Jesus

Christ. Of course, the apostle Paul concurs:

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Colossians 1:15-17, NIV).

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*Life was in him, and this life was the Light of the human race. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

*There was a man called John, who was sent from God. He came as evidence, to be a witness for the Light, so that everyone might believe through him.*

*He was not himself the Light, but he came to give evidence about the Light.*

*The true Light, which gives light to every human being, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him* (John 1:4-10, NTE).

Many religions conceive of the Creator as transcendent, outside of creation, beyond time and space—and this is true. Later in John 1, we read that

*“no one has seen God at any time”* (verse 18). So too, Paul writes that God *“lives in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see”* (1 Timothy 6:16, NIV).

But these truths are *not* true by themselves, for *“the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with (lit., in the bosom of) the Father, has made him known”* (John 1:18). In Christ, God the Word “pitched his tent” with us and we beheld his glory (John 1:14, see 1 John 1:1-4).

Yes, God is *transcendent*, but in Christ, he is also *immanent*. God’s *immanence* means that he is not far and, in fact, he’s even *much more than near!*

God is *everywhere present and fills all things*. God-in-Christ-by-the-Spirit (the Holy Trinity) is both *beyond* creation and *united* to it, and actually *permeates* it with his infinite loving presence.

To impress this upon the reader, John describes Jesus Christ as *LIGHT*. Let's imagine it this way: the Sun is 96 million miles away from the earth (incredibly far) but at the speed of light, it's just over eight minutes away (surprisingly close). Despite its vast distance, we can experience the light and heat of the sun directly, even burning our skin, blinding our eyes, or charging the cells of our body.

How much more has God (the unapproachable Light) *entered* our world (John 1:9), *overcome* the darkness (vs. 5), and *shone* his Love on every last one of us (vs. 9). His "*life was the Light of the human race*" (vs. 4), including those not ready to receive him (vs. 10). Jesus Christ truly is "*the Light of the world,*" and not just a human subset of well-behaved Christians.

Just as Jesus the *Logos* (Word) shows us God the Creator, so Jesus the visible Light shows us God the invisible Light, revealing that God the Father is not at all distant. We might use the James Webb telescope by way of limited analogy. The Webb telescope has been generating beautiful images of galaxies and nebulae, transposing frequencies of invisible light into photographs—it is making visible what is truly there, but beyond the spectrum of human vision. If the limited vision of our eyes can't see it, is the image still "real"? Absolutely.

How much more is Christ the true "*image of the invisible God,*" unveiling God before the eyes of those who could never otherwise see who God is or what God is like!

## THE LAMB OF GOD

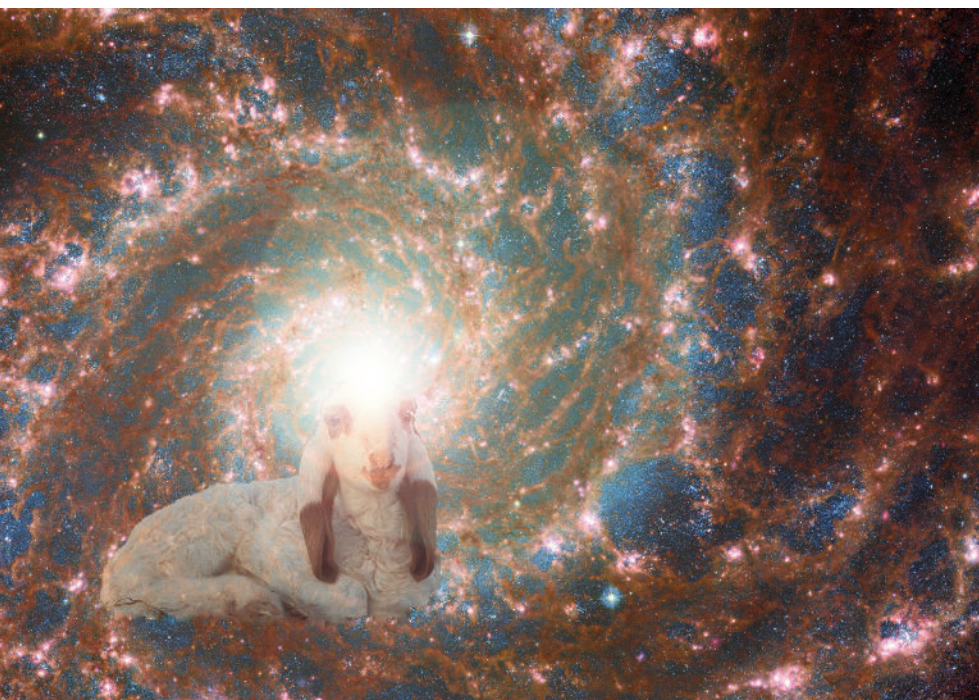
When Christ tore back the veil to reveal God's true nature, we saw a new kind of glory that not one person ever expected (despite the prophetic hints). Here was God—not the roaring lion or soaring eagle or charging stallion, but a Lamb. A slain Lamb! The baby sheep, killed and eaten at Passover.

Ah, but what a Lamb! The Lamb of Exodus whose blood was more powerful than death, whose presence meant deliverance from slavery—"*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29, 36). *This same Logos and Light is also the Lamb.*

- This Lamb has appeared in space-time history.
- This Lamb designates the Word enfleshed in a real human body.
- This Lamb was crucified under Pontius Pilate, buried and resurrected.
- This Lamb takes away the sin of the world.

Note that the Lamb does not merely *offer* to take away the sin of the world. The Lamb does not merely take away the sin of the church or the elect or the righteous. Nor does this Lamb merely take away sins (plural)—but rather, the "*sin*" (singular) of the world. The disease of alienation itself is healed

*Continued on page 8*



### COVER PHOTO: PHANTOM GALAXY

M74 shines its brightest in this combined optical/infrared image, featuring data from both the Hubble and James Webb space telescopes, capturing a range of wavelengths and galactic features. Red and yellow colors show dust threaded through the arms of the galaxy. Young stars are highlight in blue. Older stars toward the galaxy's center are shown in cyan and green, projecting a glow from the core of the Phantom Galaxy. Bubbles of star formation are visible in pink across the arms.

Credit: ESA/Webb, NASA & CSA, J. Lee and the PHANGS-JWST Team; ESA/Hubble & NASA, R. Chandar Acknowledgement: J. Schmidt



Greg Albrecht

# 1+1=3 Everything Happens for a Reason?

**E***verything happens for a reason* is a pious and noble-sounding platitude often uttered by well-intentioned people searching for significance in the darkness of seemingly meaningless suffering. However, *Everything happens for a reason* is a noble lie and a pious fraud, a fallacy wrapped in assurances that there is a beneficial and perhaps divine reason behind *everything*.

As a belief system, it is best categorized as superstitious folklore, because it offers a simplistic, one-size-fits-all answer for things that are at best mysterious, incomprehensible and unfathomable.

*Everything happens for a reason* is an attractive proposition because it seems to give certainty to uncertainty, comfort in the midst of chaos, and positive and divine direction in the face of seemingly random events. But in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the notion that there is a divine notion for *everything*, turning God into the

Creator and Author of a preordained script for all the details of the lives of *everyone* is an illogical absurdity. It's lazy thinking and an illogical, irrational gullible notion.

*Everything is going to be okay* is yet another equally misleading and illogical platitude. Given how one might define "everything" and "okay," in many tragedies *everything will NOT be nor will it ever be, okay*.

Share the simplistic fairy tale that *everything happens for a reason* and *everything will be okay* with a child who has been

The logical conclusion behind *everything happens for a reason* and *everything is going to be okay* is, for the victim—for the one who is suffering:

*"If everything happens for a reason and if everything is going to be okay, then something is wrong with me. Perhaps I deserve what has happened. Perhaps God wanted me to suffer to teach me a lesson. Perhaps I have no right to be as depressed as I am."*

Many things do not happen for a divinely intended purpose. We experience life as cause and effect, but a few trips around the block

in this world of heartache and pain can help us conclude that tragic effects are not directly caused or preordained by God.

*Everything happens for a reason?*

A child is abducted, abused and brutally murdered. The reason?

During a home invasion, a family is traumatized and emotionally scarred for the rest of their lives. The reason?

A worldwide pandemic (say, just

**"...our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."**

**—Romans 8:18.**

sexually abused—the person who was sexually trafficked—the soldier who returns home without his/her leg(s)—the spouse whose law enforcement husband or wife was just shot and killed by a drug-crazed criminal.

for conversational purposes, like COVID-19) indiscriminately causes premature deaths, leaving fatherless and motherless children, making spouses widows and widowers. The reason?

The cancer ward of the hospital is full—many of the individuals are terminal. Some propose there is a reason for all diseases and that God is ensuring these cancer patients to pay for their sins. Really? What about the seemingly good and virtuous people who suffer horribly and die from cancer and other diseases while people who seem to be living diabolical and monstrous lives of depravity and crime live long and enjoyable lives in the lap of luxury? ***Everything happens for a reason?***

Losing a child is a lasting trauma. Being betrayed by your closest friend or your marital partner is a pain that can only be carried and borne (by Jesus, who promises to take our burdens and give us rest) but may never in this life be healed. Personal tragedy and devastation can lead to growth and new opportunity, but it often does not.

Of course, it is true that good can come out of evil, that hope can triumph over defeat, and that “all things can work together for good” (Romans 8:28). ***Everything can be redeemed*** and transformed. Jesus told his disciples “... *with God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26).

The gospel of Jesus Christ promises a time when ***God will “restore everything”*** (Acts 3:21). The book of Revelation foretells a new heaven and new earth in which ***God makes everything new*** (Revelation 21:5).

God is in the business of taking lives that are devastated and overwhelmed, lives that are like old cars in a junkyard, with no future use other than scrap metal, and giving new life and goodness, creating light out of darkness, love from hate, peace in the ashes of war. It’s the Jesus Way. It’s a way of life Jesus teaches by saying “*love your enemies...*” (Matthew 5:44) and what Paul advises in saying “*Do not repay anyone evil for evil*” (Romans 12:17).

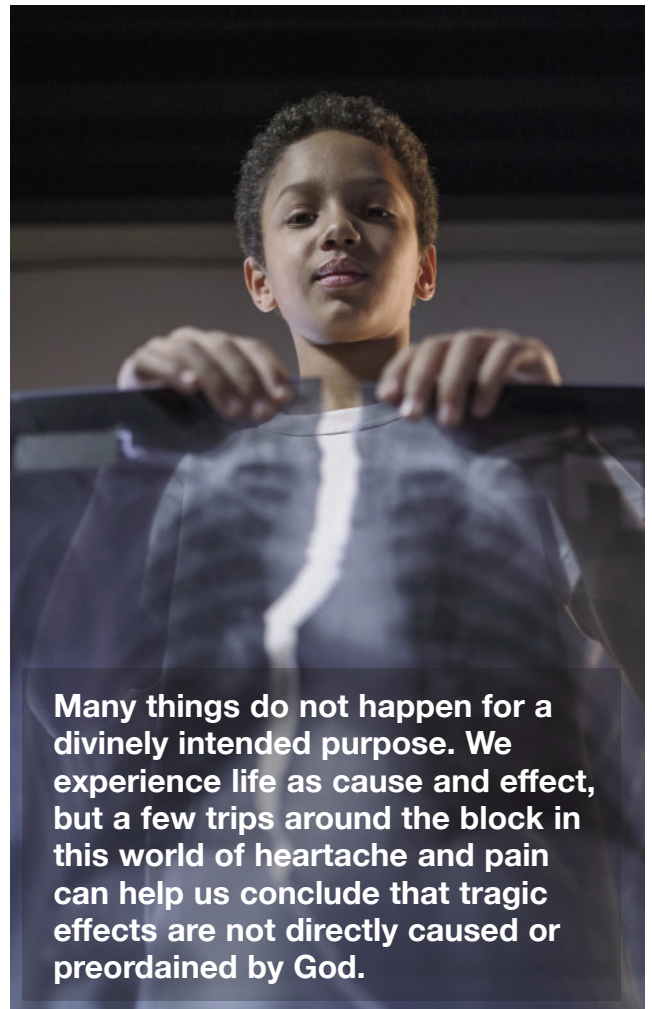
God is a good Father who never causes anyone to suffer. Evil and suffering exist because God, out of his love, gave humanity the freedom to make choices, and as soon as human agency was part of the equation here on earth, corruption, agony and pain became inevitable.

*God doesn’t impose himself or “his will”* (another term that is thrown around rather loosely and subjectively) on us. He allows us to make decisions, depicted so famously in the parable of the lost son/the prodigal. The father did not stand in the way of a disastrous decision his son was making, knowing full well that his adventure would not turn out well.

Declarations summarizing a recent event like “God intended that this happen” or “God told me to do a, b or c” can be adjunct platitudes to ***everything happens for a reason*** and ***everything is***

***going to be okay***. When something wonderful, inspiring and beautiful happens, some dogmatically inform others that God made it happen.

Instead of dogmatically announcing that God miraculously caused a beautiful thing to happen, I prefer to thank him *if* and *to the degree* he was involved in what happened, while acknowledging that his ways are above my ways, and his love, wisdom, mercy and grace beyond



**Many things do not happen for a divinely intended purpose. We experience life as cause and effect, but a few trips around the block in this world of heartache and pain can help us conclude that tragic effects are not directly caused or preordained by God.**

my ability to comprehend.

Dogmatically assigning a particular conclusion in life to have been *the will of God* is beyond our capacities. How can I triumphantly declare that God did something wonderful in my



life, or in that of my family, friends and loved ones while at the very same time, in a similar or virtually the same predicament or challenge, others did not receive an uplifting or positive result or answer from God?

Thank God *in case* and *to the degree* he was involved, but allow for the fact that God doesn't always intervene or interfere in every detail of your life.

Speaking of dogmatic declarations, when you find yourself at a loss for words, trying to comfort a loved one, avoid saying, ***"Everything happens for a reason,"*** because it is false, a religious illusion providing no real, consequential help. Instead, tell those you comfort that you have no idea about the pain they are enduring and that you are there for them and with them and will listen and pray and do your best to help.

Terrible things happen that have no logical, meaningful reason. The world is not fair, and God never pretended that it

would be. Time and chance happen to us all (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

In Christ, God takes ugliness and reprehensible, meaningless suffering and transforms every tragedy so that *"our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"* (Romans 8:18).

*Everything Happens for a Reason ... And Other Lies I've Loved*  
by Kate Bowler

Kate Bowler, a professor at Duke Divinity School was living a "blessed life." At thirty-five, she had a great job, a loving husband and a new baby. Then she was diagnosed with Stage IV colon cancer. Forced to face her mortality, she began to see the poverty of the prosperity gospel and its "can-do" spirit.

Is illness a moral failure? What does it mean to live in a society that insists everything happens for a reason?

Stripped of her certitude, Kate discovers that without it, life is hard... but also beautiful in a way she had never known before.

That's why the Cross of Christ is the center and focus of our faith. It's a truth more worthy of our confidence than misleading and vacuous slogans like ***"Everything happens for a reason."*** □

Greg Albrecht is president of Plain Truth Ministries.

## ***NEW Resource on our CWR Blog...***

***<https://www.ptm.org/cwr-blog>***



## ***Reflections Along the Jesus Way with Greg Albrecht***

***Christianity Without the Religion—Quote for the Day***



GREG ALBRECHT

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

## Nailmarks, Scars & Doubts

### QUESTION

It is really amazing to read the life of Jesus and the incredible pushback he received from, of all people, religious leaders. It seems the religious leaders were more inclined to doubt him. Of course, I know that I too doubt him all too often. What is his message for those of us who doubt him?

### RESPONSE

Immediately after Jesus was resurrected, some of his own disciples found it hard to believe that Jesus really had been resurrected. Most of the disciples who believed were those who saw him, and as a result, they believed that he was now alive again, resurrected from the dead. Most of those who did not believe he had been resurrected were those who had not personally seen him since his resurrection—so they remained unconvinced, even though their friends gave glowing reports of the resurrected Jesus they had seen and talked with.

When some of the disciples excitedly reported that they had seen their resurrected Lord, here's what Thomas said, as we read from John 20:25:

*"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

One week later (John 20:26), Jesus did just that! The scars of his torture, beating and crucifixion were the very evidence Jesus offered as he communicated hope to Thomas and the others. This was the sign—Jesus was the one they had seen brutalized—they had seen him die on his cross—they saw his lifeless body taken to a tomb.

In effect, Jesus said, *Here I am—I am alive, and I was*

*the one you saw die, and here are my scars to prove it.*

Jesus showed up to help them in their dark time of disbelief—and he shows up in the same way during the dark nights of our soul that we endure today.

Jesus comes into our lives at times when we don't know why something so terrible has happened to us and our family and our loved ones... and he says to you and me:

*Feel me. Put your fingers on my nail marks, in my hands and wrists—take your hand and feel the scars on my side. I know you—I love you. Here's proof. I will not take you away from the challenges you face, but I will stand with you as you deal with them. As God in the flesh, I suffered for you and I still suffer for you. My scars tell you that I know and I care. Come close to me—examine my body—discover for yourself that I am not immune to human suffering.*

*I know betrayal and I know abandonment.*

*Here are the scars in my wrists and hands where the spikes were driven in, and here's the scar where the spear was thrust into my side.*

*These scars assure you that I have overcome death and the grave—these scars tell you that one day I will wipe away all tears and there will be no more abuse.*

*I am with you right now—I will walk through this dark valley with you. You grieve the losses you have experienced, and believe me I grieve your grief—I hurt when you hurt.*

This is what Jesus says to you and me today:

*I am God who suffers with and for you—you are not alone. Here's the proof—take a look at the scars on my hands and wrists and in my side. My scars tell you where I've been, what I've been through and demonstrate my everlasting love for you. □*

***"I am God who suffers with and for you—you are not alone. Here's the proof—take a look at the scars on my hands and wrists and in my side."***

## Logos, Light & Lamb by Brad Jersak (Continued from page 3)

in the Lamb's union with humanity, *all humanity*.

Further, this same Lamb who died on a cross outside of Jerusalem in the first century was also "*slain from the foundation [lit. the throwing down] of the world*" (Revelation 13:8). That is, the "Lamb nature" of self-giving, sacrificial love IS the very nature of the eternal God. The Lamb of God reveals God as Lamb forever—the Servant-King, crowned by thorns and enthroned on a cross, forever reigns by love, mercy and peace.

*Thus, the "Lamb-ness" of God is not a brief episode in the life of God. This love is God's*

*essential and eternal nature.*

In closing, let's hear these themes John's overture gathered together: this Word (*Logos*) who was from the beginning, by whom all things were made, this same cosmic *Light* who said, "Let there be light" and shines his light on all, God's only begotten Son who unveils God as our loving Father—this same One is the *Lamb*, crucified and risen, who takes away the sin of the world. This cruciform *Lamb* is the Image of God's self-giving nature and unfailing love. □

*Brad Jersak gratefully writes and edits for CWR magazine.*

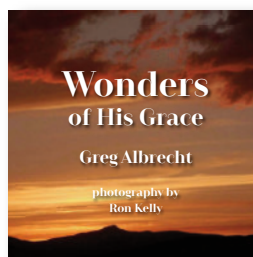
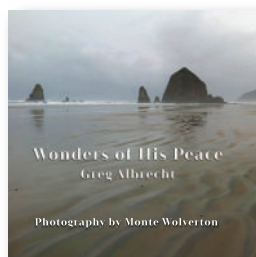
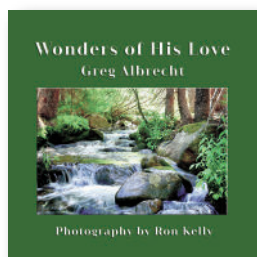
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