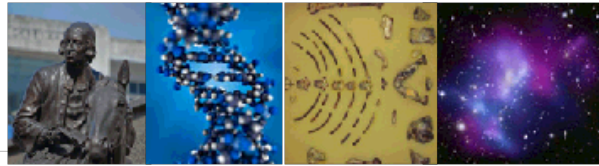


WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition



Home

Back

Links

Contact Us

May 25, 2015

Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

Please join us in extending our congratulations to our WesleyNexus Board Secretary Rick Barr, who, after months months of combining study with work, received his MA in Systematic Theology from Wesley Theological Seminary on May 11. Rick has been intimately involved in the Science and Religion dialogue for more than 15 years, and is a founding Board member of our organization. He convened one of our first discussion groups in Montgomery County for some twelve years, and is a mainstay in our continuing efforts to promote this important dialogue within the broader Wesleyan tradition. We celebrate with Rick this achievement. When asked,

“Now that formal studies are complete, what are you reading these days?” Rick replied:

I find myself in the middle of three fascinating books. I have nearly finished Philip Clayton’s and Steven Knapp’s well written critical book on faith: **The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy and Faith** asks what beliefs within the wide range of Christian options to a skeptical, critical culture provide the most justifiable, coherent response.

Along the same vein, but now over one hundred years old, is the classic book on philosophy of religion, **Sources of Religious Insights** by Josiah Royce. I read this book a number of years ago but since that time have made some significant shifts in my own perspective and am revisiting the book to see how this new perspective affects how I interpret this book.

Finally, not one to shy away from a challenge, I have picked up Roberto Unger and Lee Smolin’s massive tome **The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time**. Two books that I will add to my list for this summer have been recommended by friends through Facebook. The first, also over one hundred years old, is **How to Know Higher Worlds** by Rudolf Steiner. Though I have encountered Steiner on occasion through my readings on mysticism, I have never read anything authored by him. It doesn’t hurt that it is only a buck to download. Finally, I plan to read Reza Aslan’s **Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth**. A best seller from 2013, it is one of those books that I intended to get to but never did.

Other members of the Board share these titles with recommendations: Maynard replies:

Evolution and Ethics: Human Morality in Biological & Religious Perspective, edited by Philip Clayton and Jeffrey Schloss. Published in 2004, this volume presents a significant dialogue between world-class scientists, philosophers and theologians, as they explore the central features of biological accounts of human morality, identifying leading theories and locating key points of contention.

The New Universe and the Human Future: How a Shared Cosmology Could Transform Our World by Nancy Ellen Abrams and Joel E. Primack. This is a very readable book chock full of the latest Hubble images as well as diagrams that open up the mind to an entirely new worldview to show our central place in the cosmos and the web of meaning.

Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind by Yuval Noah Harari. Newly published in English (2015) by HarperCollins, this is one of the most impactful books I have read in a decade. It deals with our cognitive beginnings, proceeds through the Agricultural and Industrial revolutions, and ends with fascinating references to what is already emerging in the future for homo sapiens.

Board member Rev. Angela Maves writes this:

Nondual Perspectives on Quantum Physics by Tomaj Javidtash. A slender 80 pages, the publisher calls it "a mind-expanding look at three schools of thought from the worlds of science (quantum physics), religion (Advaita Vedanta) and philosophy (transcendental phenomenology). Their common thread? The idea of a "noonday reality where there is no separation between thoughts and matter, where unity exists between all things."

And Board member Jennifer Secki Shields is preparing, once again, for a summer of faith-and-science for the children of Christ Crossman UMC (Falls Church, VA). This summer they'll be using the story of Noah and the Flood to explore the interface between faith and science. Jennifer is currently reading Ian Wilson's **Before the Flood** (St. Martin's Press, Griffin, New York), which considers the scientific and archaeological evidence for the Flood as a real event and how it changed the course of human history. Says Wilson of Noah's Flood: it was "so massive and devastating that it arguably spawned not only the 'Noah' flood story, but also the Flood Stories that have been preserved in a number of other cultures besides." Jennifer wonders, IF this event, thought to have occurred in or about 5600 BCE, spawned multiple flood narratives that survive today, what might this story be saying to us, a generation of humans once again faced with the potential consequences of rising seas? P.S. Jennifer does NOT think the story's message is : Build some boats."

If you have books you plan to read this summer that would be of interest to our WesleyNexus participants, please send us an email: wesleynexus@aol.com. We would love to share the titles.

As we at WesleyNexus look forward to our programs for the coming year, we find our goals exceed the funds needed to support them. So, we continue to ask for your support. THANK YOU TO THOSE OF YOU WHO ACTUALLY SENT RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS. We want to stress that all funds that we collect are spent on maintaining our web presence, sponsoring programs, distributing the newsletter and promoting activities of other organizations within the science and religion space. **All contributions are acknowledged for tax reporting purposes either through PayPal receipt or by letter.** Please consider supporting us with a contribution either through the PayPal DONATE link below, or, by sending a check to:

WesleyNexus, Inc.
24500 Fossen Road
Damascus, MD 20872



Thanks in advance for your support.

God Bless,

Rick, Maynard, and the rest of the
WesleyNexus Board of Directors

* * * * *

Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization June 4-7, 2015, Pomona College

“Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization” is an international conference that focuses on the big ideas that matter for a thriving ecosphere, featuring some seven hundred presenters and more than eighty areas of specialty. This is planned as a huge Festschrift to **honor the 75 years of Dr. John B. Cobb's ministry.**



Seizing an Alternative
Toward an **ECOLOGICAL** Civilization
June 4-7, 2015
Pomona College

The Keynote Address will be given by Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org and a leader in the movement to battle climate change. Additional Plenary speakers will be Indian physicist Vandana Shiva, Chinese environmental activist Sheri Liao, philosopher/theologian John Cobb, Economist Herman Daly, and Wes Jackson, founder of The Land Institute and specialist in Natural Systems Agriculture.

Leading scholars and activists, including David Ray Griffin, Harvey Cox, Mary Elizabeth Moore, Catherine Keller, William Connolly and others will explore questions like:

What would business and finance look like if the aim of creating a thriving exosphere becomes the goal of the economy?

How would the university be reshaped if it accepted responsibility for the future of the Earth rather than attempt to be value-free?

What would religion be like if it were to focus on world loyalty as opposed to sectarian or national loyalty or escapism?

There will be twelve sections and 82 tracks open for conference participation. You can check out the entire program [here](#).

While most of us on the East Coast will not be able to attend this conference in person, there are significant background materials, including the Foundational Paper by John Cobb available on their website. The materials can be found [here](#).

For more information go to <https://www.ctr4process.org/whitehead2015/about/>

“Hearing God's Voice in Nature: Natural Science and Natural Theology” the 70th Annual Meeting of the American Scientific Affiliation, July 24 – 27, 2015, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The keynote address on July 25 will be a presentation on the Conference theme by Dr. Allistair McGrath, noted author and Professor of Science and Religion at Oxford University. The roster of additional speakers and leaders include Dr. Esther Meek of Geneva College, Mr. Amos Yong of Fuller Theological Seminary, Dr. Edward B. (Ted) Davis of Messiah College, and Dr. Robert John Russell, founder and Director of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley. The schedule includes a variety of pre-conference guided field trips, including a tour of the Tulsa Air and Space Museum, and the huge Boston



Avenue United Methodist Church, the largest and one of the most vibrant congregations (8,000 members) in the United States, sponsored by ASA affiliate group Christian Women in Science. Early registration rates apply through June 15, 2015; all registrations on-line at <http://network.asa3.org>.

Reminder of Upcoming Events:

Transhumanism Conference, Conference Dates: July 26-31, 2015; Location: Juniata College. Chaired by: Don Braxton, J Omar Good Professor of Religious Studies, Juniata College, Huntingdon, PA
We are accepting proposals in many domains. Visit the webpage <https://sites.google.com/site/transjuniata/>.

“New Conversations in Science and Religion: What Difference Might Critical Realist Philosophy Make?”

An Interdisciplinary Conference, July 30-31, 2015, University of Notre Dame, IN
Center for the Study of Religion and Society, Christian Smith, Prof of Sociology, Director
<http://csrs.nd.edu/events/newconversations/>

61st Annual meeting of the Institute for Religion in an Age of Science (IRAS) –

Star Island (off Portsmouth), New Hampshire, August 8-15, 2015

Call for Papers, deadline February 1, 2015; website: www.iras.org

Confirmed keynote speakers include: Carol Wayne White, Karen Barad, Fern Feldman, Billy Grassie, Catherine Keller, Laurel Schneider, Emilie Townes, Claudia Schippert, Whitney Bauman, Lisa Stenmark, and Chapel Speaker, Donna Schaper.

* * * * *

WesleyNexus Board Meeting Opening Prayer

WesleyNexus begins every Board of Directors meeting with an opening prayer. Our March meeting was no exception. This month we would like to share the prayer written by Kent Weaver, a prayer that reflect a commitment to follow Jesus as our guide for living even as we ask hard questions about what that means. The prayer can be found [here](#).



The Brain’s Empathy Gap by Jeneen Interlandi, NY Times, March 15, 2015

In this recent NY Times Magazine article, the research of Emile Bruneau at the Brain and Cognitive Sciences Department at M.I.T. comes into focus as the author covers Bruneau’s work on the neuroscience of conflict and empathy. This article highlights research that has significant impact on how we understand ourselves as empathetic and compassionate human beings and when and how those become limited. Bruneau’s current research targets the Roma settlements or “Gypsy ghettos” in the eastern part of Hungary. Focusing on the trials and tribulations of this ancient marginalized minority, Bruneau has identified neurological and social-psychological dynamics that identify why conflict is so complex and intractable. For those involved in conflict, it is not that there is no empathy but that there is an “empathy



gap” towards the enemy where the signals in the brain associated with empathy are muted. To read this fascinating article go to http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/magazine/the-brains-empathy-gap.html?_r=0

* * * * *

Finally, but perhaps most important of all, we have concerns about the upcoming annual conferences in the United Methodist Church. We are here immersed in preparation for the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference that takes place May 27-30 at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel in downtown Baltimore. Most all of the annual conferences this year will be electing their delegates to the quadrennial General Conference, which meets in Portland, Oregon in April 2016. Among our concerns and the many resolutions being put forward are three petitions that will be sent to General Conference, if we can get these passed by the Baltimore-Washington Conference. **Comparable resolutions are being presented for endorsement at other Annual Conference this month. We ask that you share these with us so that we can post these on our website as well, and then let us know what actions are taken at the several Conference which you attend. The Resolutions can be found [here](#):**

(1) Resolution 1027. God’s Creation and the Church

This resolution affirms our responsibilities to address the perils of environmental degradation, calls for specific endorsements of efforts beyond the church to address environmental stewardship, and adds a number of affirmations (with internet links) to resources on science & religion.

(2) Social Principles ¶164. V. THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY C)

This resolution confirms & renews the existing resolution (which is due to expire in 2016) affirming the United Methodist stance opposing the teaching of creationism and intelligent design, in public schools and in the school science curriculum, and moves forward to General Conference the resolution passed by the Baltimore-Washington Conference last year encouraging pastors and congregations to engage in scientific evolutionary thinking.

(3) Social Principles ¶160. I. THE NATURAL WORLD F) Science and Technology

This resolution recognizes the hodge-podge of statements in the current “Science and Technology” Section 160, and rearranges language so that the generalized defining relationships between science and religion are in the first paragraph. The second paragraph lifts up three of the most controversial and misunderstood findings of science to define their specific relationship with religion. The third paragraph is unchanged. All three of these resolutions in full may be found on our website by clicking [here](#). During pre-Conference sessions last week, several questions were asked of the presenters, Dr. Gary Sherman and Dr. Maynard Moore. These questions and the several responses to each (now posted on the Baltimore-Washington Conference [website](#)), are presented below.

Q: In Para. 164 V. The Political Community, reference is made to “evolutionary theory.” Would true “inclusiveness” mean that other theories (e.g. creationism, intelligent design and theistic evolution) also be presented in schools, etc?

A: No, Three court cases have clarified that creationism, intelligent design, etc. are not science, but rather are religious beliefs and have no place in public schools or in the science curriculum. Every scientific body in the United States supports this view. Many theologians and two United Methodist bishops also stand in

support of this position. One of those, Bishop Kenneth Hicks in Little Rock, said in a presentation sponsored by WesleyNexus in 2013, that people are often deceived into thinking they must choose between evolution and the story in Genesis, but it is not an “either/or” question at all. And Bishop Kenneth Carder, a native of Tennessee, a graduate of Wesley Theological Seminary, and now a faculty member at Duke University Divinity School, has written extensively concerning the need for modern Christians to reconcile their religious beliefs with the scientific facts in the world about us, including the great epic of evolution. The evidence in support of evolution is overwhelming, and as a theory supports every advancement in genetic research, interstellar observations, and treatments that we take for granted in modern medicine. On the other hand, creationism, intelligent design, etc do not rise to the level of theory at all. Such claims are beliefs and should be recognized as such. In contrast, a claim based on science must be verifiable by experiment, consistent with objective observations and research, open to falsification with new evidence, and universal in its application across cultures and time. Importantly, one must often “sort out” charges by detractors about evolution that have no place in the theory or scientific literature. That being said, it is important to take a nuanced approach with an accurate presentation of the evidence concerning both the history of life on earth and the unfolding story of our universe. The evidence for evolution is now indisputable, and we do a disservice to our faith when we reify scriptural interpretations to a level of absolute truth.

Q: Does the BWC intend to support development and use of GMOs, as opposed to encouraging and supporting the gradual transition to sustainable and organic agriculture? Can we actually revise the Social Principle in Para. 160G through this resolution?

Most in food and agricultural science reject the notion that organic agriculture is consistent with the overall goal of sustainable agriculture. Indeed, the opposite is true. Some objectives of the organic movement are laudable, for example conservation of water and soil, though such goals long predate the organic movement. However, many of the movement’s tenets, including prohibition of genetic engineering as a means to sustainably ensure global food security, food safety, affordability, nutritional value, and environmental preservation, are ill conceived. Fears of so-called GMO foods are not science-based. Many times these fears are knee-jerk rejection of precisely the technology that offers mankind the best chance to SUSTAINABLY produce sufficient wholesome food to feed 2 billion more people, i.e., 9 billion souls, by 2050, in the face of decreasing arable land, fixed quantities of fresh water, and climate change. The risks of this technology are no greater than (and many scientists believe less than) those employed for centuries to produce genetically enhanced foods by traditional selective breeding. The paradox is that traditional selective breeding has introduced thousands of mutations into what we now, ironically, call natural or organic foods. Yet, none of these mutations, as they were permanently incorporated into our crops and livestock genomes, were characterized for food or environmental safety. They were all assumed, for no logical reason, to be harmless. In fact, there is no reason to assume that traditional selective breeding to produce, e.g., corn varieties which, compared to the meager ancestral maize plant, 1) are far more disease resistant, 2) have greatly improved standability to resist toppling in high winds, and 3) are far more fecund (kernel-laden), are without impact on food and environmental safety. There surely are impacts of these copious mutant genetic sequences, and corresponding translated proteins, and there is no reason to believe them all to be harmless much less ‘superior because they are natural’. By contrast, millions of dollars are spent to produce and safety-test promising genetically engineered foods which are intentionally modified to achieve greater food safety (human pathogen resistance), greater nutritional value (golden rice to prevent vitamin-A deficient blindness), greater environmental friendliness (lessened use of chemical pesticides), and greater production efficiency (less conversion of natural lands farmland, to feed the same number of people). These are just a few of the reasons that all national academies of sciences in the developed world strongly support the judicious use of genetic engineering technology to produce enough wholesome food to feed all of God’s children.

Let's be clear: by supporting this resolution, we cannot expect that this language, as proposed, will actually appear in the Social Principles Para 160. We must keep in mind the process: by supporting this resolution, we are sending it to the General Conference organizers, who will assign this (along with all other resolutions) to one of the many working groups at General Conference, and this group will give it consideration along with all others on this subject, and if there is enough support for revising Para. 160, they are the ones who will "perfect" the language for clarity and (if any) new direction. Even then, it must go before the entire General Conference for vote. By supporting this petition, all we are saying is that this issue is important enough that we believe it should be prayerfully and deliberately considered by the delegates to General Conference. A "yes" vote does not mean that you agree with every word or phrase.

Q: Regarding the petition to revise Para. 160, on line 42, #3 seems in disagreement with the United Methodist position on GMOs, if not in direct conflict.

The UMC positions on GMO uses in agriculture, as stated in the Book of Resolutions (Social Principles), do not reject GMO technology to produce safe, nutritious, affordable food. The UMC does rightfully express concern for unfair commercial or trade policies that could result from protectionist practices that disadvantage small farmers unable to gain access to certain seed crop or livestock varieties due to unfair practices of larger agribusiness companies. However, this concern is not unique to GMOs as commercial agriculture has long been in the business of innovation, based on proprietary intellectual property, as a business model to advance food safety and production efficiency over the long term. Fair trade and ready access to improved agricultural technology by both smaller and larger scale farmers should continue to be supported by the UMC and this is not contrary to the goals of the present petition.

The Book of Resolutions of the UMC also supports labeling of GMO foods and adequate testing of all GMOs to protect the environment and other life on earth from unintended consequences. The current petition is silent on, but concurs with, these existing UMC positions. Careful analysis of the safety and wholesomeness of all food, whether genetically modified by traditional selective breeding or genetic engineering, should be encouraged. Paradoxically, and contrary to popular misunderstanding, heroic and costly efforts to demonstrate food and environmental safety are currently undertaken only with genetically engineered foods. This high regulatory science bar established by FDA for approval of genetically engineered foods is out of an abundance of caution and in deference to public concern, rather than any science-based rationale that the judicious application of these technologies carries any risks inherently greater than genetic modification by selective breeding.

Q: Concerning the Petition on Faith and Science and the Political Community, the current Board of Church and Society did not endorse this petition. Why does it seem to indicate it did?

A preamble to the final three petitions was inserted in the official pre-conference materials explaining the unique history of these petitions which began during the 2013-2014 petition submission cycle. The BWC Board on Church and Society, chaired by Ms. Sheri Koob in 2013-2014, voted concurrence with all three petitions. When it was realized at the subsequent March 2014 Connectional Table the intent was for these petitions to be submitted to General Conference (GC), the decision was made to table the petitions until the following year. This decision to delay processing was based on the BWC policy that the only time a petition intended for presentation at GC may be considered is at the AC one year prior to the quadrennial GC. For GC 2016, therefore, this corresponds to the 2014-2015 AC. During this period, Dr Michael Parker chaired the BWC Board on Church and Society. That Board reviewed and voted on revisions of the three petitions, but NONE of these revised petitions went forward for consideration at the March 2015 Connectional Table. The most recent Connectional Table only considered the older petition versions, all of which had been reviewed and concurred with by the prior-year's Board. The printed petitions in the pre-

conference materials are thus incorrect only in so far as they indicate the chair of the concurring BWC Board on Church and Society was Rev Parker when in fact it was Ms. Koob.

* * * * *

