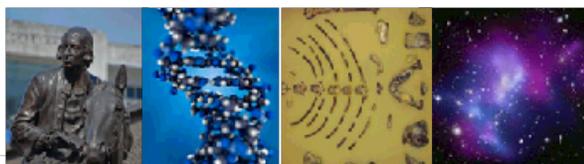


WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition



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June 25, 2015

Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

I suspect that most who read this newsletter will recognize the 1940 quotation by Einstein which states that “Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind” and judge that this insight is essentially correct. To be wise and productive, we need both the knowledge gained through scientific investigation and the wisdom derived from the religious experience of humanity. Recently I came across a very old used book by Thomas Vernon Smith, professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago from 1923 – 1948. He was also a lieutenant colonel in the Army during World War II where he was the director of education of the Allied Control Commission in Italy. When he returned from the war he went back to teaching, this time at Syracuse University until his retirement in 1959. The book I discovered, [The Philosophic Way of Life](#), reflects similar sentiments toward science and religion in the preface:

“To the left and in front is despair, to the right and in front is illusion, behind is the pressure men call evolution, ahead is life – ahead. Who dares to lift the veil that hangs before us, the veil of despair and illusion? Lift it or not, the march is forward. Advance in the name of science alone and be menaced with despair. Advance in the name of religion alone and be lulled by illusion. Advance cautiously in the name of philosophy and perchance, a passageway may be opened at the rift where in front, far in front, despair and illusion meet. Knowledge is not enough for life so precariously beset; faith is not enough for life so perilously begirded; wisdom alone can suffice when knowledge and faith are not enough.”

I have always thought that the science and religion dialogue is really a philosophic enterprise, but one that is both practical and of great importance. Smith’s book focuses on America’s premier practical philosophers of his time, Josiah Royce, William James, John Dewy and George Santayana, all of whom viewed critical reflection at the nexus of science and religion as a necessary activity for all citizens to live a mature, thoughtful, purpose driven life. The book itself is an example of an intellectual taking the wisdom of America’s greatest minds to the people – kind of a TED talk without the technology.

Likewise, those of us engaged in the current science and religion dialogue are called to think critically and engage in reflection on how we wisely can bring these two aspects of our collective and individual spirits together. As Professor Smith points out, no one has a monopoly on wisdom – neither philosophers, nor scientists, nor theologians, nor engineers, nor teachers nor scholars. WesleyNexus invites all to participate and provide some tools for the journey. This month’s selections contain diverse materials which I hope you will enjoy and find thought-provoking. We hope you share with others those that you find particularly relevant to your interest and invite others to join WesleyNexus. For in times such as these, we need as much wisdom as we can muster and as much creativity as we can achieve to address the challenges of our time.

As we at WesleyNexus look forward to our programs for the coming year, and as we mentioned last month, 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 Barr, WesleyNexus

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

“Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization” was 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 was planned as a huge Festschrift to honor the 75 years of Dr. John B. Cobb's ministry. Though not all the presentations will be available in video format or even as audio clips, Dr. Gary Herstein, one of the presenters, has informed me that some materials are already available on Youtube and can be found [here](#).

A few reflections on the conference can be found [here](#):

Follow-up to the conference has mushroomed with many new participants who could not attend in person now joining the continuing dialogue. As was announced at the Conference, there is an on-line platform for discussion and collaborative action: **Pando Populus** now exists as a platform for connection and education going forward. There are continuing conversations on Facebook Others are posting entries on PandoPopulus.com. The post-conference discussion is easily accessible from the [home page](#). Threaded discussions on particular topics can also be launched.

Pando Populus will be successful to the extent that the community now developing around it contributes to its liveliness and health. They greatly welcome contributions – the first of which are conference-related notes and media materials.

“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:

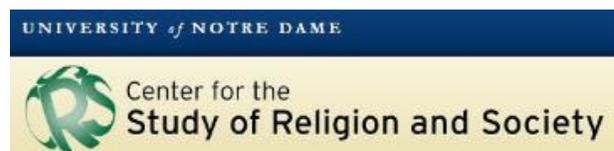
Transhumanism Conference, Conference Dates: July 26-31, 2015
Location: Juniata College.
Chaired by: Don Braxton,
J Omar Good Professor of Religious Studies, Juniata College,
Huntingdon, PA



'Our Transhuman Futures ' brings together people from all over the world who are pioneering the edges of these realities. It will be four days of exciting presentations, demos, theater pieces, and art exhibits of our transhuman futures. Consider what projects you might present at this exciting event. Network with others working in these fields. Registration is now open and we are accepting proposals in many domains. Visit their webpage at <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

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.



Evolution & Christian Faith: A BioLogos Conference: June 30 - July 2, 2015, The Eberhard

Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan

From their website:

BioLogos invites the church and the world to see the harmony between science and biblical faith as we present an evolutionary understanding of God's creation. To help fulfill this mission, BioLogos gave three-year grants to over three-dozen individuals and teams of scholars, teachers, and church leaders, all working on questions at the intersection of evolution and Christian faith. We are grateful for the support of The John Templeton Foundation along with partial funding secured with the help of The Issachar Fund.



This conference is the culmination of the Evolution and Christian Faith grant program, and many of our grant recipients will be sharing the fruit of their work.

For more information go to their website at <http://biologos.org/ecf/2015#content-top>

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Pope Francis and the Encyclical 'Laudato Si'

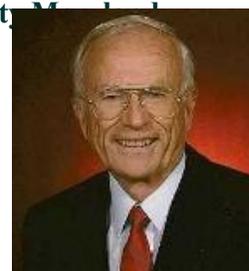
On June 18 the Vatican officially released the long awaited and greatly anticipated encyclical on climate change, a document that is already drawing strong criticism from conservative detractors, since it clearly identifies human factors as the primary cause for global warming. Citing the precipitous rise of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxide among others) as documented in numerous scientific studies, the Pope also addresses issues such as air pollution, water quality, population density, and the loss of biodiversity as matters of critical concern. Importantly, the Pope addresses not just those in the Roman Catholic community, but he calls on all the peoples of the world to join in forging global strategies to alter the course we are on. Most importantly the Pope highlights the impact on the world's poorest people: Experts have long argued that deforestation, biodiversity loss, water shortages and poor water quality, loss of traditional lands and any number of climate change effects have disproportionate impacts on developing countries and the world's poorest people. This constellation of factors is what lies behind the diminishing quality of human life, social degradation and planetary inequalities. We at WesleyNexus welcome the advent of 'Laudato Si' and urge that our colleagues in congregational discussion groups give the text extended attention to mobilize influences on public policy. For a summary of the ten key points in the encyclical that can serve as a framework for discussion, click [here](#).



For the full text in English of the 192 page document, including its 172 footnotes, click [here](#):

33rd Annual Cosmos and Creation Conference, at Loyola University, Maryland

On June 12-14, Loyola University hosted the 33rd Cosmos and Creation Conference, founded by Father James Salmon, bringing together working scientists and theologians, discussing and sharing a common vision of God and the natural creation. In 2015, the featured keynote was Professor Emeritus Robert E. Ulanowitz, formerly with the University of Maryland Chesapeake Biological Laboratory and



now, in retirement, Courtesy Professor in the Department of Biology at the University of Florida. His two lectures, “Science and Belief in a Contingent Universe,” and “Ecological Metaphysics: Room for a Creator,” stimulated extensive discussion, most of which centered around issues of determinism and free will. The Saturday afternoon lecturer, Professor of Anatomy Daryl Domning, at the Laboratory of Evolutionary Biology at Howard University, addressed “Exploring Theology with Charles Darwin,” showing how careful attention to the mechanisms of natural selection helps us with solutions to classic problems such as theodicy, evil, and original sin. Professor Ulanowitz laid the foundation for the entire week-end discussion by drawing on information theory to show how ecological “systems of networks” operate within the rules of “natural law” but guided by the contingent constraints in any environment. Within this framework of contingency (the natural world), trophic processes, autocatalytic principles, and a pervasive, dynamic centripetality combine to overcome the dissipative forces that drive thinking in classical physics. Ulanowitz argued for a “new metaphysics” that might best be characterized by three complementary axioms: contingency, feedback, and history. The operation of these axioms lead to corollary notions that processes function as agencies for change, and the dynamics of creation are dialectical. This scheme yields what Ulanowitz has called a “process ecology” and a “revised science” that allows for freedom, creativity and diversity to flourish on our planet. The full text of the lectures and the services of worship at the Conference may be viewed on the website: <http://www.loyola.edu/cosmosandcreation>

Robert Ulanowitz



Daryl Domning

Perceptions Project at AAAS Comes to a Close

On June 13, at the Metropolitan Washington DC Section meeting of the American Scientific Association, Dr. Paul Arveson, who recently was serving as the staff director for the “Perceptions Project” at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, administered through the Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion (DoSER) in the Center of Science, Policy and Society, presented a summary report of some of the findings from the three year project.



The entire project was implemented with a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, and closed at the end of April 2015, with original objectives met and reported on. A major finding is that evangelical Christians in the United States are not as antagonistic to science as they are often portrayed. At a summary conference in March, Elaine Howard Ecklund, professor of sociology and director of Rice University’s Religion and Public Life Program, said that nearly 70 percent of self-identified evangelicals do not view religion and science as being in conflict, nearly half of them saying, in fact, that the two can exist with complementarity and even offer support for one another. But that leaves 30 percent who feel strongly that science is antagonistic to religious faith, confirming that there still exist real tensions, especially around hot-button issues like evolution. William D. Phillips, a Nobel Prize physicist and United Methodist layman (and a member of the WesleyNexus Advisory Board), had a prominent speech at the March 2015 conference, speaking about the importance of scientific understanding for faithful people. “Religious communities, particularly evangelicals, see the stewardship of the earth as a sacred duty,” he said. “Science has revealed a lot of present dangers,” along with the data needed to guide responses. “But the scientific community has often failed to generate traction for any action about the environmental problems they identify,” Phillips said. “The religious community, which represents a strong majority of the nation’s population, can make all the difference.” Arveson shared summary results from the dozens of workshops, focus groups, and small seminars conducted during 2013-2014 around the country, and reports that in spite of real differences that

should not be ignored, both scientists and religious leaders indicate a strong hope that dialogue between the two sectors will continue and expand. Work within the DoSER program and the broader Center of Science, Policy and Society is continuing with new objectives, and several other projects are on the drawing board awaiting funding. The work of the staff and participants in the Perceptions Project is now a valuable resource for any of us engaged in the local congregational dialogues. There are many workshop summaries and film clips from speeches and formal papers on the website www.perceptionsproject.org.

Stephen Barr's Review of God's Planet by Owen Gingerich



Stephen Barr is a professor of physics at the University of Delaware and a long time contributor to the science and religion discussion within the United States. In a recent issue of First Things, he reviews the new book by Owen Gingerich, emeritus professor at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and a renowned astronomer and historian of science. God's Planet was originally delivered in 2013 at Gordon College as the Herrmann Lectures on Faith and Science. While much of the book focuses on historical issues dating all the way back to the 16th century, Barr points out that from the beginning, scientific thought has always been about judgments that go beyond the evidence. They are philosophical, even theological. Barr closes the review with this thought. "Many of the most interesting and fundamental questions that science has stimulated are unlikely to be decidable by new data: Was there something before the Big Bang? Did the universe have a beginning? Do we live in a multiverse? Is the universe infinitely large? Are the laws of nature fine-tuned for life? Are there other intelligent species in the universe? How did the "transition to the spiritual" occur? Increasingly, one finds science lapping over its seawalls. Indeed, in some areas, the boundary between science and speculation has been entirely washed away. Science began with philosophical speculation twenty-five centuries ago, and it seems likely that it will end in the same place".

The article can be found here: <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2015/06/a-new-era>

