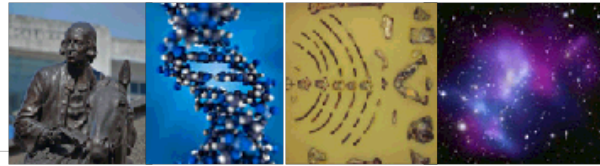


WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition



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Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

December 21, 2016

We at WesleyNexus are pleased to include in this month's newsletter an article by Dr. Tom Oord, a member of the WesleyNexus Advisory Board and a long time contributor in the science and religion dialogue. His focus could not be more fitting for an advent season, love in light of religion, science and philosophy. To preface his article, what could be more fitting than to remember the poem by Christina Rossetti, Love Came Down at Christmas, written in 1893. To contrast Rossetti's sentiment, we should also remember that the manger leads to the suffering and injustice of the cross, I have included a link to a post by Debra Dean Murphy.

We at WesleyNexus thank you all for your support over the past year and hope you will continue to help us promote science and religion dialogue. Have a very, merry and spirit filled Christmas.

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

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Love Came Down At Christmas by Christina Rossetti

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.
Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?
Love shall be our token,

Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

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Advent Despair by Debra Dean Murphy

<https://debradeanmurphy.wordpress.com/2013/12/19/advent-despair/>



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Love in Light of religion, science and philosophy By Tom Oord

(You can find more of Tom's reflections on his blog at <http://thomasjavoord.com/index.php/blog>)

Research in science and religion captivates me. The endeavor to make sense of life using these prominent fields of inquiry – with help from philosophy – fascinates so many of us eager to learn, integrate knowledge, and become wise.



Answering the big questions of life requires drawing from these fields. We wonder, “Why is there something rather than nothing?” “How did we get here?” “How do things work?” As I see it, ignoring religion, science, or philosophy when seeking to answer these questions leads to unsatisfying results.

For some time, I've been pondering love in light of religion, science, and philosophy. Other scholars have done some work in this area, but this work has not yet been well coordinated and raised to the general awareness in society. Various theologians explore love, of course, and they offer theological theories to account for it. Scientists explore aspects of love, although they rarely use the word. And a few philosophers address the topic.

At a recent International Society for Science and Religion (ISSR) meeting in San Antonio, I gave a paper on love research in science, theology and philosophy. To my knowledge, no one else has framed the research as triadology, in part because “philosophy” often participates unnamed in the conversation.

I argued at the ISSR meeting that progress in love research requires scholarly consensus about what love is. In particular, we need a definition of love if work is to make headway and be conceptually coordinated. After all, without some consensus on what love is, how will we gauge the adequacy or importance of love research?

A good definition of love must be broad enough to account for its various dimensions and forms. Too narrow a definition will leave out what most of us intuitively if not consciously assume love to be.

But a good love definition must not be too broad. Too broad a definition would become virtually meaningless in its all-inclusiveness. A good love definition requires some specificity.

In my presentation, I offered the following definition of love to ISSR scholars: “To love is to act intentionally, in response to others (which, as I see it, includes God), to promote overall well-being.” (I also offer and explain this in my book,

[Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement.](#))

Scholarly literature reveals that most definitions of love are too narrow. For instance, some philosophers think of love as desire. But love simply as desire fails to identify the element of goodness, positivity, or well-being we typically associate with love. Associating love with goodness is especially prominent in sacred texts (see its connection with shalom, blessedness, abundant life, or salvation).

Some social scientists also define love too narrowly. They adopt popular love language and speak of love as romance or sex. This is especially common in the positive psychology literature. But this view of love fails to account for the way romantically or sexually-based activity sometimes undermines positivity and goodness. Ask rape victims or victims of stalkers if they feel loved!

Some theological definitions are also too narrow. Anders Nygren's influential 20th century work on agape, for instance, defined genuine love entirely in terms of divine action. The result is a theological determinism that neither fits well the biblical witness but also fails to attribute genuine love to creaturely action.

My definition has the advantage of accounting for a wide swath of research pertaining to love, even research not explicitly so identified. Sociobiological work on altruism, for instance, can be understood, incorporated, and even critiqued by my definition of love. Psychological studies on attachment can be illuminated by the "in response to others" aspect of my definition and my emphasis upon well-being. Most theological work done on the meaning of grace and human responsibility also fits well. Philosophical work on virtue theory, ethics, and even metaphysics have a place.

The more I ponder the love-related work already done in science, religion, and philosophy and the more I envision the work that could be done, the more excited I get about the future of love research. If the present work fascinates me, the work I imagine allures and inspires! It adds meaning to a biblical phrase that already motivates me: "Live a life of love!" (Eph. 5:1b)

Feeling blessed to be part of this eminent enterprise,
Thomas Jay Oord

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Science & Religion events at SBL/AAR, San Antonio, November 19-22, 2016

Dr. Thomas Jay Oord was a prominent participant at several academic sessions during the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion in San Antonio last month. Dr. E. Maynard Moore, President of WesleyNexus, participated as well, as did several members of our Advisory Board, including Dr. Philip Clayton of Claremont Lincoln University, and colleagues from the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, including Dr. Paul H. Carr and Dr. Whitney Bauman. One session focused on "Revelations of Love: The Politics and Flesh of Religion," in which Dr. Oord and several panelists reflected on love within perspectives of nonviolence, queer theory, interreligious dialogue and constructive theology. The content of Dr. Oord's recent book, *The Uncontrolling Love of God* (InterVarsity Press, 2015) was the subject of another session, with Dr. William Andrew Schwartz of the Center for Process Studies presiding. As always during the SBL/AAR meetings, the International Society for Science and Religion sponsored several sessions, this time under the theme "Science, Theology, and Morality: Engaging Research, Generating Proposals." These sessions are coordinated by Dr. Ron Cole-Turner, professor in Theology and Ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Particularly interesting was the question: "Creations Human and Divine: Can "Anthropic Analogies" Help us think about human creativity in an Age of Technology?" In one final ISSR session on Monday morning, the topic was "What Religious Leaders should know about science: New strategies from Sweden, England and the U.S." Prominent on this panel was Rev. Dr. David Wilkinson, theoretical astrophysicist and Principal at St. John's

College, Durham University, UK. Dr. Wilkinson outlined efforts based at Durham to explicate several foundational questions for clergy in the science/religion dialogue, approaches that easily could be a model for us in the U.S. as well.

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NOTICE circulating to Ban the Teaching of Evolution

The following note has just been received from our colleague, Dr. Michael Zimmerman, founder of The Clergy Letter, and while we don't want to give wide attention to this petition, it is indicative of the kind of battles likely to shape up in 2017. Michael writes:

“Not surprisingly, the results of the presidential election have brought new attacks on the teaching of evolution. As I explain in my latest [Huffington Post piece](#), a petition has just been posted on the Web asking the federal government to ban the teaching of evolution in public schools.

While it's difficult to take this particular petition seriously, it is emblematic of a big problem. I hope you enjoy the essay and share it as you see fit.

Michael

Michael Zimmerman
Founder and Executive Director
The Clergy Letter Project
www.theclergyletterproject.org
mz@theclergyletterproject.org



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**Event: Biomedical Ethics:
Just Because We Can do it, Should We? Presentation/Discussion by Dr. Ted Peters**

Sunday, January 15, 2017 at 4:00 p.m
Reisterstown United Methodist Church
246 Main Street
Reisterstown, MD 21136
410-833-5440
rumcoffice1777@gmail.com



Interlocutor for this event will be **Dr. Jennifer Wiseman**, a member of the WesleyNexus Advisory Board, and Director of the AAAS-sponsored Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion (DoSER).
Dr. Wiseman also serves as Senior Project Scientist for NASA's Hubble Telescope

Flyer: <http://www.wesnex.org/TedPetersatRUMC2017.pdf>
Short Biography: <http://www.wesnex.org/TedPetersBiosketch.pdf>

Ted Peters is an author, professor, and pastor. He is Research Professor Emeritus in Systematic Theology and Ethics at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS), the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS), and the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California. He offers a theological analysis of culture, analyzing especially the role of science in culture. He co-edits the journal Theology and Science. His blog can be found here. <http://tedstimelytake.com/teds-timely-take/>

WesleyNexus can now confirm a second presentation by Dr. Peters, scheduled for **Hood College in Frederick, Maryland on Sunday January 22, at 4:00 p.m.** This event is co-sponsored by Trinity United Methodist Church in Frederick and the Dean of the Chapel at Hood, Rev. Beth O'Malley. The presentation will take place in the Whitaker Center Commons Room – directions will be posted on our website. Interlocutor for this event will be Dr. Ann Boyd, PhD, who teaches Biomedical Ethics at Hood, and is an ordained Episcopal priest. Both events featuring Dr. Peters in Maryland are open to the public. Additional details will be posted shortly on our website.

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IRAS Summer Conference and Winter Meeting at AAAS

IRAS, the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, has announced the subject matter for its 62nd annual Summer Conference, again being scheduled for Star Island off the coast of New Hampshire. See the full announcement here and on the website www.iras.org. IRAS is also seeking Partners/Sponsors for the event, and WesleyNexus again will be lining up support... Any of our WesleyNexus participants will qualify for a registration discount. The Call for Papers is also linked here and can be found on the IRAS website. Note that the deadline in the Call for Papers has been moved from January 15 to January 31, because we are getting this notice out later than planned. Please share these with any organizations you are connected with that may be interested.... e.g local churches and schools, colleges and universities) as well as national and worldwide affinity organizations. Also, take note that IRAS will sponsor a special panel on the topic of Climate Change at the 2017 Boston Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, scheduled February 17-21.

Full information on the AAAS conference can be found at www.AAAS.org.

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Divine Action: Naturalism and Incarnation by Christopher Knight

Christopher Knight is also a member of the WesleyNexus Advisory Board and has written extensively on nature, incarnation and divine action. He recently penned an article for Biologos defending a strong version of theistic naturalism. Dr. Knight is Executive Secretary of the International Society for Science and Religion and a Research Associate of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies in Cambridge, England. He is the author of many theological articles and has written two books, Wrestling With the Divine: Religion, Science and Revelation (2001) and The God of Nature: Incarnation and Contemporary Science (2007).



In this article, “Christopher Knight defends a version of “strong theistic naturalism” as a way of understanding how God interacts with the world. He is careful to distinguish his version from others that collapse into deism. Some people may be concerned that he is even using the word “naturalism” to characterize his view, but notice the intimate connection between God and the world on Knight’s view that is achieved through the Logos, and the way this removes the difficulty of God acting on a “natural” system from the outside.” (Jim Stump, Biologos)

The article can be found [here](#).

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David Bentley Hart and Rowan Williams: The Cold Heart of Secularism vs. The Warmth and Love of Christmas from Journey Towards Easter

“As Christmas draws nearer, and we patiently listen to the usual range of tiresome voices calling for a reduction in the use of any overtly Christian imagery in association with celebrating this time of year (e.g.; that Nativity plays have their points of central import either obscured or removed; the insistence on ‘playing down’ religious language when talking about Christmas to colleagues), it is perhaps worth considering what our society might look like if it were as thoroughly secularized as some seemingly wish it to be. One can never predict such things with perfect accuracy of course, but it is surely possible to gain some idea of probable outcomes based on precedent and the core principles of a given movement.” The full article can be found [here](#).

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Elaine Ecklund on Science and Religion Conflict.

Elaine Ecklund is a sociologist, and the director of Rice University’s Religion and Public Life Program. She is interested in the attitudes of actual scientists about religion and she uses accepted methods of sociological research, such as in depth interviews, to reach her conclusions. She and colleagues have recently published a paper showing that most scientists (biologists and physicists), whether themselves theists or atheists, do not agree with Richard Dawkins’ framing of the conflict between science and faith. It appears (not surprisingly) that the majority of scientists feel that Dawkins’ views on the subject are distortions of the reality of science and what science can and cannot do. The article can be found [here](#).



Also see an article [here](#).

Professor Ecklund has previously shown that most scientists are not hostile to religion and most evangelicals are not hostile to science. This debunking of the warfare model between science and faith, at least in the minds of those who would be in the front lines, if such a was actually real, is extremely important. Hopefully this work will be recognized and reported by the media.

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/16/evangelicals-religion-science_n_6880356.html

Thanks to Sy Garte for pointing out these articles.

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Reminder

WesleyNexus again sponsors Evolution Weekend Maryland in 2017

WesleyNexus looks forward to the fifth consecutive **Evolution Weekend** on February 12 – Evolution Weekend which is recognized across the country with sermon, lectures and other programs by a wide spectrum of faith communities. As mentioned last month, our program this year will be “**Are Our Children at Risk? Food Insecurity, Climate Change, Racial Bias.**” It will be live-streamed and available to individuals and groups across the world! For United Methodists in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, we are particularly excited in having **Bishop LaTrelle Easterling**, newly appointed this year as the Episcopal leader in the National Capitol Area, as an active participant in the conversation. Many of us have had an opportunity to welcome Bishop Easterling in a series of district meetings where we have experienced her energy, intelligence and commitment to the Wesleyan way of living out the Christian faith. For those who have not experienced her presence yet, we invite you to attend for she is truly an inspiring leader, even



for those who are not Methodist!

We have available now a flyer with the essential information on the program which can be found [here](#). We hope you will plan to attend and invite your friends and neighbors.

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Welcome to Discovery and Faith!

The Discovery & Faith program is still in the early stages but continues to make progress. As Jennifer Secki Shields posts: “our mission is to help children grow as biblically and scientifically literate followers of Jesus so that they can know the joy and well-being of living faithfully and spiritually in a culture increasingly shaped by science.



We are dedicated to developing resources for use in the church and at home to explore the connections between God's world and Word. Our first set of lessons—Towers Talking Trouble!—will be available in January 2017.”

For more information on Discovery and Faith go to:
Welcome to Discovery and Faith!

For more information on Discovery and Faith go to:
<http://www.discoveryandfaith.org>

