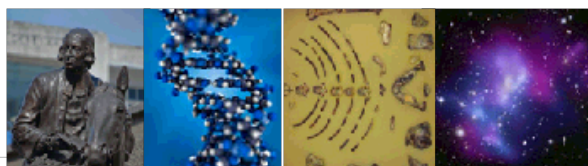


WesleyNexus

Science and Religion within the Wesleyan Tradition



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Dear WesleyNexus Colleague:

January 22, 2017

By the time you read this newsletter, the inauguration of Donald Trump as President of the United States will be over and his term of office beginning. For many this is a time of celebration and triumph. For just as many, perhaps even more, this is a time of anxiety and concern. One cannot listen to broadcast news, read social media or read message tweets without being bombarded by conflicting comments about the direction that our country, our society and even our culture might be headed. Responding to this deeply disorienting situation, Christian Century published a reflection with the simple title “Living Truthfully” where they focus on a new adjective that has penetrated our lexicon: “post-truth.” Are we living in a time where our society is so ideologically fractured that we can no longer agree on what the facts are, who is the authority to adjudicate what claims are factual – or even if facts matter at all. At WesleyNexus, we strongly affirm that facts do matter and that there are sources of expert knowledge that should be given extra weight in any scientific-oriented discussion. Concerning the facts of the natural world, science, even with all its limitations, should be our guide. In the realm of social facts, while claims may be less precise than in the natural sciences, data in the social sciences should likewise be listened to. As people of faith, our inherited traditions likewise should provide a framework of understanding these natural and social facts. This is where the commitment to truth comes in. “Truth is more than a matter of thinking hard or having access to reliable information. It is also a matter of being a certain kind of person. The virtue of truth-telling is intertwined with the exercise of other moral virtues. In particular, truth-telling involves having the humility to be corrected and the humility to join in a shared public world of argument and debate”. (Christian Century, January 4, 2017)

On February 12, 2017, WesleyNexus will sponsor its 5th Evolution Weekend where specialists in the fields of food security, climate change and racial bias will have an opportunity to converse with the newly appointed bishop of the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, Bishop LaTrelle Easterling. During this program, we will ask what is in store for our future in these three areas and what should be our response theologically. Are our children at risk? What do we know? What are we called to do? Micah 6:8 comes to mind for each of these discussion areas, demanding that we approach these questions with a demand to do justice, to love kindness and to recognize with humility that our knowledge is only partial. Even if our future is at risk, we are challenged to find grounds for hope. Please join us on February 12th in person or via the web. Information on how to register is shown below.

This month, the newsletter is short. We are focusing our attention on planning the February 12th program so you will find only a few items below. The Christian Century article is available. Of special note is the link to H. Richard Niebuhr’s classic essay “Radical Monotheism”. Written in 1943, in the midst of worldwide conflict, Niebuhr asks us to reflect on faith in its most demanding form, radical monotheism, and contrasts it with other forms of faith. This analysis applies as well to this period of “post-truth” as it did when it was written and also provides a context for our coming together in February.

WesleyNexus is an all-volunteer organization and relies on our participants to continue our presence on the web and to develop in-person programs. This year in particular, we committed to Evolution Weekend

program without having the cash on hand to cover the projected expenses. We are grateful to those who responded to our request to contribute and are happy to say that we now have the needed funds needed to pay for the February 12 program – but the event will deplete our current budget. **THANK YOU TO THOSE OF YOU WHO ALREADY 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. While we have met our current needs, please consider contributing so we can continue our mission. **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

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Reminder

**WesleyNexus again sponsors Evolution Weekend Maryland in 2017
Registration is now open!**

Please go to our webpage [here](#) and click on the registration button. We appreciate you letting us know if you will attend in person or via the web and how many will be attending with you.

To register: <http://www.wesnex.org/EvolutionWeekend2017MainT.html>

WesleyNexus looks forward to the fifth consecutive Evolution Weekend on **February 12** – Evolution Weekend which is recognized across the country with sermons, 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! As always, those attending the event in person will benefit from a variety of door prizes, and six persons this year will have their names drawn to participate in a tour scheduled at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) in Gaithersburg, Maryland, with an in-person visit with **Nobel Laureate in Physics, Dr. William Phillips**, who is also, by the way, a significant lay leader in the Fairhaven United Methodist Church. This event will be superior in many ways.

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 to participate as well.

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IRAS Conference, 2017

**THE INSTITUTE ON RELIGION IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE
THE “WICKED PROBLEM” OF CLIMATE CHANGE: WHAT IS IT DOING TO US AND FOR US?**

**63rd Summer Conference of the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science
In Partnership with the Parliament of the World’s Religions
June 24—July 1, 2017 Star Island off Portsmouth, NH**



Climate change is a “wicked problem” with overlapping causes and consequences in economic, ecological, ethical, and technological realms. As climate change continues to alter our planet, how can we use this monumental change as an opportunity for societal and spiritual transformation?

More on the conference can be found here. WesleyNexus participants (those of you who receive this monthly newsletter) are eligible for a 20% registration discount for the annual IRAS conference. We urge everyone in our WesleyNexus network to seriously consider participating in this important Summer event. And for everyone in the New England area, please note that IRAS will have a pre-conference seminar on the Wicked Problem on February 16th at the AAAS annual Conference in Boston. The event will have a panel of presenters with discussion, beginning at 8:30 a.m. on February 16th in the Sheraton Boston Hotel. Exact information can be found on the AAAS website and in the conference schedule.

IRAS is a financial sponsor of WesleyNexus' Evolution Weekend annual event. We are grateful for IRAS support.

Click [here](#) for more information.

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IRAS

**CALL FOR PAPERS/POSTERS ON THE “WICKED PROBLEM” OF CLIMATE CHANGE:
WHAT IS IT DOING TO US AND FOR US?**

Proposals for papers and poster presentations on the theme of the conference and on religion and science in general. Fellowships for full room and board will be offered for the best proposals. All proposals will be peer-reviewed.

More information about this year's conference (including information about the plenary speakers) can be found at <http://www.iras.org/2017-conference.html>

Proposals should include:

- A cover letter with your contact information that indicates whether your proposal is an individual paper or poster.
- An abstract of no more than 150 words
- A narrative of no more than 500 words (roughly two, double-spaced pages)

The Deadline for proposals is **February 5, 2017** and decisions will be made by March 15, 2017.

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

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Dr. Ted F. Peters on Biomedical; Ethics

Dr. Ted Peters has been engaged by Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary for a second time to teach during the special interim semester in 2017, and as is his custom, Dr. Peters always lets us know when he travels to the East Coast. When possible and if his schedule permits, WesleyNexus sponsors a talk on a timely topic with Dr. Peters presenting and leading the discussion. This year we have been successful in co-sponsoring two talks on Biomedical Ethics, under the topic: **“Just Because We Can Do it, Should We?”**



The first talk, on January 15th, was co-sponsored and hosted by Rev Vivian McCarthy, pastor at the Reisterstown United Methodist Church in the Suburban Baltimore UMC District in Maryland. The second was a collaboration between Pastor Eliezer Valentin-Castanon at Trinity United Methodist Church and Rev. Beth O'Malley, Chaplain at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. This was our first attempt to sponsor a local event on a campus, and over 60 persons responded with a high level of interest. At the Reisterstown event, Dr. Jennifer Wiseman, Senior NASA Scientist and Director of the program called Dialogue on Science, Ethics and Religion (DoSER) at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) served as moderator and interlocutor for the discussion, and at the Hood College event, Dr. Ann Boyd, professor of natural sciences and biomedical ethics, filled a similar role. The discussion in each case was enriched by their comments and participation.

Dr. Peters focused on three separate issues involving bio-medical decision-making in our society: cloning, stem cell research, and the growing technology called CRISPR. It is this third area that is very much unsettled and requires serious discussion in our churches and across our society generally. The advancing technique of gene-splicing raises a variety of decision-making challenges as the practice becomes more simplified, routine and widespread. Not only does it present the possibility of “designer babies,” but it allows for the alteration of the genetic sequence across the animal kingdom and our vegetarian food supply. What is most disturbing is the unknown impact on several generations downline: since we have no way of researching the long term effects, the question arises “should we” proceed with gene-splicing even when the short term effects can be clearly beneficial. Moreover, who is to decide? Do we want decisions like this left to our politicians? Do we allow the medical community to make these kind of decisions? Should the church have a role in the policy formation, and if so, would anybody listen to what the church might say (even assuming there might be agreement within the churches)? One thing is clear: we need much broader and deeper discussion in the immediate future, prior to the practice becoming more widespread in the years ahead.

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Living Truthfully: Christian Century, January 4, 2017, page 7
Click image below to get the .pdf.

Living truthfully

In order to describe a world in which widely available facts seem unable to dent the appeal of attractive falsehoods, political commentators have reached for a new adjective: *post-truth*. As in: “We live in a post-truth world.” The editors of the *Oxford English Dictionary* picked *post-truth* as the 2016 word of the year, defining it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”

There have always been instances of political propaganda, and of leaders (and publics) adjusting the truth to suit their perceived self-interest. In the 2016 presidential election, however, the blatant disregard of facts reached an unprecedented level. Also new was the capacity of the Internet to accelerate the spread of falsehoods, to cocoon people in communities of misinformation, and to dismantle old hierarchies of credibility.

The specter of a post-truth world calls for a renewed commitment to truth telling as essential to democracy. As the *New York Times* declared, “Media organizations that report facts without regard for partisanship, and citizens who think for themselves, will need to light the way.”

But if anything has become clear in recent months, it’s that telling the truth is more than a matter of thinking hard or having access to reliable information. It is also a matter of being a certain kind of person. The virtue of truth telling is intertwined with the exercise of other moral virtues.

In particular, truth telling involves having the humility to be corrected and the humility to join in a shared public world of argument and debate. It also involves a fundamental openness to the world and to other people and a respect for their worth and perspectives. This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote (in his essay “What Is Meant by ‘Telling the Truth?’”) that “to speak truthfully, one’s gaze and one’s thought must be directed toward the way the real exists in God and through God and for God.” Rephrased in secular terms: there has to be a shared reality beyond self-interest for the concept of telling the truth to gain traction; otherwise speech is mere self-assertion.

The post-truth world bears within it a genuine insight: facts do come to us embedded in larger narratives about how the world is and what is worth our attention. Christians don’t pretend to operate without a larger narrative. Rather, we claim that the Christian narrative—which is about humans as both precious and flawed, and about the world as God’s good and ordered creation, meant for the flourishing of all creatures—is what provides the basis for humility, openness, correction, and argument. That, in turn, is what allows for a community of truth telling.

Liberal societies, knowingly or not, have long depended on such virtues to structure public life. Sustaining and reviving those virtues will be essential to living truthfully in a post-truth world.

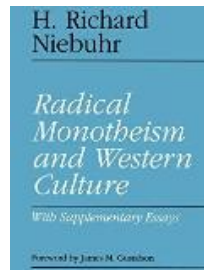
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Radical Monotheism by H. Richard Niebuhr

This link is to the book entire book which contains the essay “Radical Monotheism”

as chapter II. The essay stands well when read alone but supplemental essays provide additional insights on its application in understanding history, religion and politics. There is even an essay on radical faith and science. We invite you to read this essay understanding that the language is from another era, prior to the recognition of non-sexist language and the deep cultural biases that we now appreciate and are still grappling with. Niebuhr, through his own understanding of radical faith, would certainly affirm these insights were he alive today. You can read the article [here](#).



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The Ethics of Radical Monotheism by Gene Marshall

Gene Marshall is a founder of “Realistic Living”, a website dedicated to the essential Christian heritage and to promote and inspire its practice through small groups. They conduct research into the core ethical challenges of our times; by writing essays, books, journals, newsletters, and manuals; and by organizing training events and small circles which meet weekly. They are involved in inter-religious dialogue, promoting religious practice and leadership. In this essay Gene Marshall updates the themes originally presented by Niebuhr by focusing on the “vocation of living one’s whole life in a context of values that relativize every limited center of value and lives from this ultimately inclusive center of value: the real is the good and the good is the real.”



You can read the full article [here](#).

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Science, Religion and Religious Minimalism by Philip Clayton

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Belief is not the same thing as truth. Even in the sciences, there are significant difference beliefs, particularly at the boundaries where a hypothesis has not been adequately confirmed or when it radically challenges current understanding. Truth when it comes is hard fought and frequently comes in small doses with significant qualifications. The link between truth and belief in religion is even more tenuous. Philip Clayton points out in a 2011 article that no matter what we believe, we will find ourselves outside the belief networks of others. “And we are all outsiders. All of us, no matter what we believe, stand outside traditions to which the vast majority of other human beings belong. The lesson to draw from this inescapable fact of the human condition is the need for a profound humility about one’s own beliefs, especially when they are the kinds of beliefs that one cannot fully test in the company of others...these facts compel us to call for a “religious minimalism” across the world’s traditions. For example, those whose religious experiences and values give rise to inescapably Christian convictions become Christian minimalists when they learn to hold their beliefs with humility and a certain lightness of touch. We suggest that the humility of religious minimalism is the right stance for everyone, believers and non-believers alike, to adopt — especially in an age in which the rich plurality of human beliefs has never been more evident, more exciting... or more dangerous.



Read the full article [here](#).

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Popular Songs as Sacred Texts The Music Writer as Exploratory Theologian

“Theology may be dead in the university (temporarily or permanently) but it is alive in popular culture, especially in popular music. Popular music is a primary source for meaning-making for many people in East Asia, South Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, and North America...Academic theologians who neglect popular music are missing out on the very place where meaning-making now occurs for many people. Meaning-making is not occurring in books but rather in music and movies. And as this happens a new kind of theology is emerging. I will call it exploratory theology”. To read the whole article click [here](#).



Ann Powers @Mito Hade-Evans/NPR

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Reminder
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>

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Biologos



Biologos has posted a blog that summarizes their past year, by compiling a list of their 20 most popular blog posts of 2016. The list includes guest blogs from some very well respected theologians like Tremper Longman, Oliver Crisp, Wyatt Houtz, and scientists like Joel Duff, Deb Haarsma, April Maskiewicz and others (including WesleyNexus Board member, Sy Garte). Many areas of the science faith dialog are covered by these (and other) Biologos blog posts, and several controversial issues are discussed, ranging from challenges to real science from young earth creationism and Intelligent Design to student ministry, to the compatibility of evolution with Christian faith. There are many resources here for the followers of WesleyNexus.

<http://biologos.org/blogs/jim-stump-faith-and-science-seeking-understanding/our-top-20-blog-posts-of-2016>

