

# Touchstone

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VOLUME 25

SEPTEMBER, 2007

NUMBER 3

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## Guest Editorial

### PICTURING THE COSMOS: Scientists and Theologians at Work

One of the exercises the students in our “Early Christian Scriptures” course tackle is a comparison of four different approaches available to first-century CE readers of the opening chapter of Genesis — as a way of appreciating the variety of interpretations already operating at Christianity’s very beginning. Together we read: the *Targum on Genesis*, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew story of creation;<sup>1</sup> the *Book of Jubilees*, a Hebrew “expansion” of the Genesis narratives;<sup>2</sup> the opening of Josephus’s great defense of his people’s traditions, *Jewish Antiquities*;<sup>3</sup> and the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo’s exegesis of the Bible’s first chapter from his work *On Creation*.

One year the students in the class decided to condense their comparison of the four re-readings of Genesis into a set of distinctive “job titles” for the Creator they thought appropriate to the texts. The Lord God portrayed in *Jubilees*, for example, the students called “the Accountant”, because of the book’s careful enumeration of the kinds of things brought into being, from seven on day one to four on day six, for a perfectly appropriate total of 22 kinds of creature in all.<sup>4</sup>

Philo’s Maker, on the other hand, was their “Architect”, dedicating the whole of the first day purely to meditating on what “sky”, “earth”, “water”, “air”, “light”, etc., would each “ideally” look like.

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Editor’s Note: The focus of this issue of the journal is the old question of science and religion. Following this Guest Editorial are two articles on the subject, and then in the section at the back readers will find a review of a new book by John Polkinghorne, who is a theoretical physicist and an Anglican priest. We hope readers will find this material helpful.

<sup>1</sup>Such *Targumim* were used in Jewish communities wherever Aramaic had replaced Hebrew as the vernacular.

<sup>2</sup>*Jubilees* has only survived in Ethiopic translation, though Dead Sea Scroll finds do include fragments of an original Hebrew version.

<sup>3</sup>Josephus was the Galilean commander who survived the great first-century revolt against Roman rule.

<sup>4</sup>There are, not incidentally, 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet; *Jubilees*’ account of creation thus covers everything from A to T.

Josephus portrays a “Contractor” God, readier to “get down and dirty”, whatever the task at hand: casting the footings on which the cosmos would stand; decorating the firmament with stars; pouring out waters to fill earth’s sea-shaped hollows.

Finally, the *Targum*, the students decided, shows us a “Playground Co-ordinator” who, with attentive enthusiasm, assigns the mutually beneficial roles that each creature has to play in the unfolding world. Even the great sea-monster Leviathan will eventually get his turn in the great scheme of things, at the end of time.<sup>5</sup>

The students’ set of divine job titles for our first-century readings of Genesis came back to mind when I began considering the variety of creative work involved in contemporary science. Here too is the Accountant’s work of cataloguing phenomena, data, processes; the Architect’s work of conceptualizing and designing; the Contractor’s work of constructing instruments and experiments for closer observation and understanding; the Co-ordinator’s work of discerning relationships and interdependencies. Critical appreciation of the variety of labour in what modern scientists do, I believe, can open us Christian believers, beyond understanding matters specific to particular fields of study, to some of the elegance and nobility in the shared ethos that this area of human curiosity has constructed around its questioning.

An important part of that shared ethos is accountability. I knew that dedication in the Canadian astronomer, Bill Wehlau (1926-1995). He taught us graduate students that all our work involves an answerability — which meant, among other things, that our research schedules in the department always had to include a turn at the observatory’s “public nights”. There Bill expected us to be open, not only to explaining our own particular projects, but also to fielding whatever “larger question” those attending might raise (“Is there life on other planets?” “What is life?”).

Perhaps surprisingly, intimacy is also part of that shared ethos, ably articulated by the Belgian sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-). While much of his work involved plumbing the *unconscious* structures of human societies, Levi-Strauss never lost sight of the complex web of personal relationship built up in the course of doing his work:

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<sup>5</sup>Which the *Targum* significantly labels “day of consolation”, rather than “day of wrath”.

Caduveo, Bororo, Nambicuara, Mundé, Tupi-Cawahib, Mogh, and Kuki ... each name reminds me of a place on earth and a moment of my history and that of all the world ... with men and women of whom I have been fond, whom I have respected, whose faces remain in my memory. They remind me of joys and hardships, weariness, and, sometimes, dangers. These are my witnesses, the living link between my theoretical views and reality.<sup>6</sup>

Though these comments come from a discussion of method in sociology, Levi-Strauss's description points to the intimate interdependence involved in the work of any science.

Courage is also an important part of the shared ethos. Here the scientist whose life and work haunts me comes from further back in history, the Alexandrian natural philosopher Hypatia (370-415). Although her initial studies were in mathematics, Hypatia's move to explore the politically more dangerous questions of cosmology and ethics reflects the personal bravery that scientific inquiry often requires, especially in a time and place as volatile as fourth-century CE Alexandria. Two Christian bishops play important but contrasting appreciations of her activities, emblematic of the tragic tensions *among* theologians in the face of the work scientists do. One, Synesius, was her pupil.<sup>7</sup> The other, Cyril, was her murderer.<sup>8</sup>

Hypatia's example reminds us that the scientific work of "picturing the cosmos" combines the delightful with the dangerous. At its best it demands of itself a willingness to be publicly accountable, a readiness for the intimacy of learning together, and a courage to face questions openly and honestly. If theologians are willing to appreciate that shared ethos, they may find a course of human inquiry more worthy of celebration than anxiety.

– Bill Richards

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<sup>6</sup>Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963): 332.

<sup>7</sup>In fact, the correspondence Synesius continued with Hypatia, asking her counsel and advice, forms an important part of the archive that has kept her memory alive.

<sup>8</sup>It was Cyril's verbal attack on the "pagan" teacher Hypatia that incited the "Christian" mob who dragged her from her home as she taught and savagely murdered her in the public square, a victim of her century's dangerous religious politics.

# SCIENTIFIC ORTHODOXIES

by Michael Behe<sup>1</sup>

Back in the 1970s, when my wife Celeste was in the seventh grade at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in the Bronx, her teacher, a Holy Cross Brother, tried to start one science class with a bang. Brandishing a textbook picture of nearly identical-looking embryos of different kinds of vertebrates — fish, amphibians, pigs, humans, and more — he announced with a flourish, “Evolution is true. Get used to it.”

He didn’t get the reaction he wanted. Celeste tells me she and the other kids in the class shrugged. What’s the bid deal? My own experience was similar. I learned about the spectacular power of Darwinian evolution at St. Margaret Mary Alacoque grade school and Bishop McDevitt high school in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We were told that God could make life in any way He saw fit, and if He wanted to use secondary causes like natural selection rather than some special action, well, who were we to tell Him otherwise? It arguably shows even more power, the lesson went, for God to create relatively simple matter and laws which in the fullness of time would give rise to living creatures, including men and women who could respond with a free will to His love. It sounded fine to me.

My wife’s classmates, and mine, didn’t know it, but our indifference to evolution was shaped by our religious upbringing. Catholics have always been rather blasé about evolution. In our living room we have a copy of the 1907 edition of *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (which Celeste rescued from the shredder at a local library’s discarded book sale) — complete with the imprimatur of John Cardinal Farley of New York, and published “under the auspices of the Knights of Columbus Catholic Truth Committee”. The encyclopedia carries a scholarly twenty-thousand-word article

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<sup>1</sup> This article first appeared in the December, 2005, issue of *First Things*, and is carried here with permission. The subscription address of *First Things* is P.O. Box 401, Mt. Morris, IL, 61054-8090. The web site is [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com).

on evolution written by two Jesuits, one of whom was a professor of biology.

“What is to be thought of the theory of evolution? Is it to be rejected as unfounded and inimical to Christianity, or is it to be accepted as an established theory altogether compatible with the principles of a Christian conception of the universe”? The encyclopedia article asks. And it answers, “We must carefully distinguish between the different meanings of the words theory of evolution in order to give a clear and correct answer to this question.” Distinctions abound, but the gist of the article is that Christians should be thoughtful and follow the evidence where it leads, confident that the truth of nature does not contradict the truth of God. Reading the old Encyclopedia entry reminded me of G.K. Chesterton’s observations in *Orthodoxy* that “The Christian is quite free to believe that there is a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle.” Unlike materialists, Christians can serenely evaluate the physical evidence. If the universe unfolded completely through the regularities of God’s laws, fine. If it unfolded mostly by law but also by irregularities or special actions of some sort, that’s fine too.

Unfortunately, there’s a large obstacle in the path of Christians who want to exercise their freedom to follow the evidence wherever it leads. Christians may have more freedom than materialists in deciding on the best explanation for nature, but overwhelmingly it is materialists — or practical materialists — who tell Christians the story of nature. So information about the way the universe works almost invariably passes through a rigid materialistic filter before it reaches the general public.

Although the good brother at Mount Carmel undoubtedly thought he was giving his seventh-grade students the straight dope about the evidence for evolution, the picture of vertebrate embryos he flaunted was utterly bogus. As has been widely reported in the past few years, Ernst Haeckel, the nineteenth-century embryologist and Darwin booster who first drew the embryos, took extensive

liberties with the representations, apparently to make them meet evolutionary expectations more closely. The drawings were widely featured in high-school biology textbooks for most of the twentieth century.

The false drawings had the full weight of the scientific magisterium behind them, explicitly endorsed by such luminaries as Nobel laureate James Watson and Bruce Alberts, a recent president of the elite National Academy of Sciences, 90% of whose self-selected members are avowed materialists. Watson, Alberts, or others of that company surely could have discovered the drawings doubtful providence if they'd cared to. Yet there's no reason to think the scientific elite was actively conspiring to mislead the public about evidence for evolution. Rather, the embryos drawn by Haeckel were what materialists expected Darwinian evolution to show.

Of course, the problem isn't usually fake evidence being passed off as fact. But when the evidence vouched for by experts is skewed or pre-filtered through an alien philosophy, in what sense is a Christian free to follow the evidence of nature? I was told in Catholic high school that it looked strongly as though God must have used natural law to begin life — because scientists were making substantial progress in understanding how simple chemicals could combine to make the molecules of life. What they had in mind was the work of the chemist Stanley Miller, who back in the 1950s sparked a mixture of gases and saw that some chemicals were made that also occur in life.

Looking back, I don't recall what evidence was presented in our high-school textbook, other than a picture of Miller standing beside his distillation apparatus. But I wrote the conclusion in the my notebook without a second thought. Today, when I'm in a much better position to render a judgment, this claim based on Miller's evidence strikes me as ludicrously inadequate. Now it looks to me — from the physical evidence — that God did something rather unusual to bring about the first life. Yet with the formation I received in science class in Catholic schools, it didn't surprise me at the secular universities I later attended that the topic of how life

started was not even a subject for discussion. Of course it was by simple physical laws of some sort — everybody knew that. The only question was by what route material processes produced life.

As a postdoctoral associate at the National Institutes of Health in the early 1980s, I shared a lab with a woman named Joanne, a fellow postdoc and a serious Catholic. One slow afternoon she and I were gabbing about the Big Questions, including the origin of life. “What would be needed to get the first cell?” she asked. “You’d need a membrane for use,” I said. “And metabolism.” “Can’t do without a genetic code,” she added, “and proteins.” We stopped, stared at each other, and both shouted, “Naaaaaahh!” Then we laughed and got back to work. Even though we quickly realized that there were brick walls everywhere one looked, our only reaction was to chuckle. What we didn’t do was to question seriously whether the unfolding of physical laws could adequately explain the very start of life. I guess we vaguely thought that even if we didn’t know, somebody else must. Or, even if no one knew, somebody would figure it out soon. Or eventually. There we were, two young, well-educated Catholic scientists, as free as the wind to come to our own conclusions, and we punted.

I hate to imagine what Chesterton would say about such fine specimens of free Christian thinking as Joanne and me. Yet a practical problem arises from a Christian’s freedom to find “a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development” in nature: In a scientific culture dominated by materialism, social pressure will push Christians to concede whatever is possible to concede as “inevitable”. At first, the concession might simply be irenic, to avoid conflict with materialists in areas that are cloudy and are thought to be unimportant. But as science progresses and claims more questions as legitimate fields of inquiry, the habit of not making waves can become dangerous, as the precedent of conceding the interpretation of material reality to materialists becomes firmly established. In the end, the ability of a Christian to see the hand of God in nature — not in some gauzy, emotional sense, but as a deduction from the physical data — is finally considered illegitimate. One day it was just the evolution of species

that was unapproachable. The next day, the origin of life and the universe. Today even the origin of the mind falls under the materialist program.

Worse, Christian schools that pass on the latest materialistic thinking in science without clear warnings risk quashing the freedom of their students. It was in Catholic schools that Joanne and I had both been taught the scientifically correct attitude that the National Academy of Sciences later described in its 1999 booklet *Science and Creationism*. Although admitting the problem of the origin of life was “seemingly intractable” (in other words, no one has a clue), the academy chirpily kept the discussion firmly within a materialistic framework: “For those who are studying the origin of life, the question is no longer whether life could have originated by chemical processes involving nonbiological components. The question instead has become which of many pathways might have been followed to produce the first cells.” In other words, it doesn’t matter what the evidence is — the only conceivable conclusion is a materialistic one. Christians who unconsciously acquiesce in this line of thought have lost a significant chunk of their freedom.

As it happens, materialist scientists themselves are often as clueless as I was about the narrowness of their vision of reality. In a recent book titled *Lessons From the Living Cell*, a California biologist named Stephen Rothman demonstrates, both intentionally and unintentionally, the consequences of an impoverished metaphysics on even brilliant minds. He claims that for decades scientists labouring in Rothman’s own abstruse field of cellular protein transport ignored data that didn’t square with a favoured hypothesis called vesicle theory: “Whether they thought the evidence convincing or weak, or were ignorant of it, many biologists soon came to believe that the vesicle model was not a model at all, but a description of an actual mechanism,” Rothman notes.

The scientific literature reflected this sense of understanding. Papers commonly talked about the model, either in general or regarding particular aspects of it, as known and secure events of

nature. Textbooks followed suit by communicating this comprehension to students. Such descriptions did not highlight, or commonly even mention, the immense lacunae of ignorance, the unanswered questions about the model's fidelity to nature. Instead they gave the impression that it was all known, or at least almost all known, a certified product of laboratory research.... When evidence was reported that did not seem to fit the theory, it, not the theory, became suspect.

As with any other group, when a bevy of scientists gets a bee in its collective bonnet, the buzz can be hard to silence. And, as Rothman writes, the factors that decide which theories will be taken for granted can be decidedly non-rational. "Prejudice about ideas and people; personality; the power of authority and prior belief; raw political power; who controlled journals, organizations, and funds; the depth of commitment to an idea; and any and every other human and social attribute and foible that one can imagine are also at play."

As a longtime sceptic of Darwinian evolution, I was buoyed by Rothman's analysis. This guy gets it. He knows the difference between a theory and evidence, knows that in science popularity doesn't determine truth. Surely he'd also understand that if scientists can be influenced by non-rational factors in a recondite area such as cellular protein transport, they can be even more strongly influenced on deeply controversial topics such as evolution. But then, on page 78, I was brought up short. As an antidote for the "strong microreductionism" that he disdains (defined as the view that "we can come to understand all phenomena completely from knowledge of their underlying structures, their constituent parts") Rothman prescribes not open-mindedness but orthodox Darwinianism! In a long, charming dialogue between two archetypal characters, Rothman's alter ego Eudoxus lectures the reductionist Epistemon:

What is missing, what you have ignored or forgotten, is nothing less than the fundamental driving force of evolution — natural selection. It was by means of natural selection that the molecules you talk of became the material embodiment of the life forms that populate this planet. It was natural selection

that connected them to life; that took their steel and cement and constructed life's edifice. And it is here that strong microreductionism ultimately fails. It is in natural selection that we see that the parts do not entail the whole.

“Took their steel and cement”? Why did we switch to the language of heroic mythology? Here is a fellow who has spent scores of pages scolding co-workers for reaching conclusions based on inadequate or imagined evidence, and now he suddenly begins to lead the parade. For his grand claim that natural selection explains all of evolution — and therefore all of life — Rothman fails to present the rigorous evidence he demands of those simply trying to explain the workings of protein transport. In fact, he presents no evidence. With a shrug of their archetypal shoulders, Epistemon and Eudoxus simply agree to agree that unknown material processes must have started life and that natural selection must explain everything thereafter. Darwinism is not judged the winner among competing explanations — it's the only conceivable answer.

In my experience most scientists are not even as aware as Rothman of how underlying philosophical assumptions shape their conclusions and limit their choices: materialism is the water they swim in, the tent whose falsity is literally unimaginable.

Yet there are some who are aware of the role materialism plays, and they actively embrace it. Several years ago, marking the death of astronomer Carl Sagan, the distinguished biologist Richard Lewontin wrote in the *New York Review of Books*: “Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs,... in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.”

Meanwhile, in the introduction to his 1996 book *Vital Dust*, the Belgian Nobelist Christian de Duve forthrightly declared, “A warning: All through this book, I have tried to conform to the overriding rule that life be treated as a natural process, its origin, evolution, and manifestations, up to and including the human

species, as governed by the same laws as nonliving processes.” And even while acknowledging that Darwinian evolution has no answers, the biochemist Franklin Howard in his 2001 *The Way of the Cell* peremptorily bans the idea that intelligence is necessary to explain some aspects of life: “We should reject, as a matter of principle, the substitution of intelligent design for the dialogue of chance and necessity; but we must concede that there are presently no detailed Darwinian accounts of the evolution of any biochemical system, only a variety of wishful speculations.”

Even more chilling are passages such as this: “The greatest scientific advance of the last 1000 years was providing the evidence to prove that human beings are independent agents whose lives on earth are neither conferred nor controlled by celestial forces. Although it may be more conventional to measure scientific progress in terms of specific technological developments, nothing was more important than providing the means to release men and women from the hegemony of the supernatural.” This isn’t from a book or magazine article, or even from an editorial in a science journal. It’s the beginning of a review article in the journal *Cell*, concerning the regulation of molecules entering and exiting various compartments of the cell — a technical review of a technical topic in a technical journal. The fact that the “hegemony of the supernatural” is offhandedly denounced reflects not only on the authors, but on the mindset of the scientific community that would find it unremarkable.

Let me pull together a few threads to bring the dilemma into clear focus. In the 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II points out: “It is not too much to claim that the development of a good part of modern philosophy has seen it move further and further away from Christian Revelation, to the point of setting itself quite explicitly in opposition.” A major tenet of the explicitly antagonistic philosophy, he observes, is scientism, which “relegates religious, theological, ethical and aesthetic knowledge to the realm of mere fantasy.” A big problem is that “the undeniable triumphs of scientific research and contemporary technology have helped to propagate a scientific outlook, which now seems boundless, given

its inroads into different cultures and the radical changes it has brought.” And here is the rub: “There are in the life of a human being many more truths which are simply believed than truths which are acquired by way of personal verification. Who, for instance, could assess critically the countless scientific findings upon which modern life is based?”

Who indeed? Everyone, including scientists, relies on others for the overwhelming majority of information they accept about the way nature works. For just this reason, I had been surprised to find out Haeckel’s embryo drawings were false, surprised to discover what I was taught in high school about the origin of life and evolution didn’t square with the scientific literature I later read. Yet if for “truths which are simply believed” about the natural world Christians must rely on those with a “scientific outlook” — who regard religious knowledge as “mere fantasy”, who are “quite explicitly in opposition” to Christian Revelation, who “have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism”, who will vouch for “patent absurdity”, and who want “to release men and women from the hegemony of the supernatural” — well, then, Christians are in a lot of trouble.

In 1998 Larson and Witham published a survey in the journal *Nature* of members of the National Academy of Sciences; it showed that, overall, 90% of the members were materialists (and therefore atheists), with the number rising to 95% for biologists. Although the figures are lower (around 60%) for “ordinary” scientists, and lower still for other scientifically knowledgeable groups such as physicians and engineers, the tone is set at the top. Might the academy members’ materialistic views colour the data? Might the academy recommend that science be taught in ways that restrict a Christian student’s intellectual freedom?

Of course, people are allowed to be materialists if they choose. Thoughtful persons such as, say, Richard Lewontin, who consciously choose materialism over theism, are well within their rights. They are also within their rights to argue strongly for the correctness of their views. But the problem is not such explicit

and deliberate materialism. The problem is rather socially contagious materialism, spread more by social pressure than by rational argument. The social pressure doesn't have to be overt; it doesn't have to involve ridicule or arm-twisting. It is often just an intellectual climate in which most people do not recognize that their theoretical options have been artificially limited.

Socially acquired materialism often manifests itself by an emotional reaction when challenged. When I lecture in favour of the idea that intelligence is explicitly needed to explain some aspects of biology, the response is not typically, "Gee, that's interesting, but I disagree." Instead people become angry, denouncing the mildest of challenges to materialism as unspeakable heresy. Once after a lecture in Virginia a student declared she was going to dedicate her life demonstrating I was wrong. In Canada an academic ran after me with a loaded rat trap, inviting me to stick my finger in it to see if it worked. (I use a mousetrap as an example of the sort of system that can't be made by Darwinian processes). After a lecture to the biochemistry department of a major west-coast university, a group of students I spoke with sullenly agreed that the evidence for Darwinism wasn't there. Nevertheless, they viewed the alternative with contempt and passionately swore to seek a materialistic answer. At a debate before the Royal Society of Medicine in London, I argued for the incontestable position that science doesn't yet objectively know whether Darwinian processes can explain the human mind, simply because philosophers and neurobiologists don't yet even know what constitutes the human mind. After all, I said, one can't contend that science knows how an undefined entity could be produced by an unspecified process. By a show of hands, about 95% of the assembled scientists disagreed. Of course science already "knows" natural selection can explain the human mind — because science already "knows" Darwinian processes explain everything.

With such a uniformity of prejudice in the scientific community, how can we ensure that children consciously realize from an early age the extent of their freedom to interpret nature?

Should Christian scientists simply point out for Christian students and nonscientists where the data end and materialistic presumptions begin?

Unfortunately, Christian scientists suffer from the same baleful influences as everyone else, including the influence of materialistic presumptions. As a young man I was happy as a clam with my theistic-Darwinian view of nature. As a Christian I was free to assume a “considerable amount of settled order”. In my mushy mind, this meant accepting claims that were based on materialism and scorning the benighted Christians who didn’t accept them. Even now, I am sometimes singled out by Darwinists as the most “reasonable” Intelligent Design proponent, because I’ve written that I think common descent is true. I’m embarrassed to admit that I derive some odd, involuntary pleasure from being thought the “best” of the lot. My reaction is especially irrational because some of my Intelligent Design colleagues who disagree with me on common descent have greater familiarity with the relevant science than I do.

We all desire to be admired as much, and scorned as little, as possible. So unless we have a stronger reason to anchor us, we tend to drift away from the contempt and toward the applause. In a profession dominated by materialism, social pressure pushed one to accept as many materialistic premises as one can. Since Christian intellectual freedom is compatible with near-complete agreement, that’s the boundary toward which one floats, whether it is true or not. Other things being equal, a Christian scientist is no more reliable than anyone else at drawing lines between evidence and speculation.

I think it is much more important for a Christian to be fully aware of his intellectual freedom than to be correct on any particular scientific matter. But in order to preserve that freedom, Christian students must be explicitly instructed in it. One way to make the topic more realistic to students might be to have read excerpts of works by folks such as Richard Lewontin, Richard Dawkins, and other scientists who have consciously chosen materialism over against theism. Students should be told about polls showing that

most top scientists are materialists. Most effective, I think, would be to teach them past examples, such as Haeckel's embryo drawings, where materialistic presuppositions drove the acceptance of a false or questionable theory.

If more Christian students were so instructed, and if their mature thoughts eventually leavened the scientific community, maybe some future Holy Cross brother in the Bronx could hold up a drawing of a human embryo and announce to his science class with a flourish, "You're fearfully and wonderfully made. Get used to it."

# SCIENCE AND RELIGION: Evolution and Design

## Michael Bourgeois

### Intelligent Design in the News

Since the final years of the 20th century, one of the recurring features in public discussion about the relationship between science and religion in North America has been the controversy about “intelligent design” theory. Proponents of intelligent design maintain that evolutionary science has not been able to account for the development of certain “irreducibly complex” features of biological life, and therefore that such features can only be explained as the work of an intelligent “Designer”. While many are explicit about their own religious convictions, intelligent design advocates maintain that their arguments and conclusions are scientific rather than religious in nature. Critics of intelligent design theory, some of whom are also Christians, reply that intelligent design is in fact primarily religious in its aims and is, in at least some of its forms, simply creationism in a new form.

In late 2005, three incidents generated particular attention. In July, Christoph Schönborn, Cardinal Archbishop of Vienna, published an “Op-Ed” article in the *New York Times* criticizing those who cite the work of Pope John Paul II as indicating that the Catholic Church, and Pope Benedict XVI, regard evolution and Christianity as compatible. Schönborn also maintained that “[e]volution in the sense of common ancestry might be true, but evolution in the neo-Darwinian sense – an unguided, unplanned process of random variation and natural selection – is not. Any system of thought that denies or seeks to explain away the overwhelming evidence for design in biology is ideology, not science.”<sup>1</sup> Schönborn’s essay prompted a flurry of responses from

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<sup>1</sup>Christoph Schönborn, “Finding Design in Nature,” *The New York Times*, 7 July 2005, A23. For some responses to Schönborn, see Constance Holden, “Vatican Astronomer Rebuts Cardinal’s Attack on Darwinism,” *Science*, Vol. 309 (12 August 2005), 996; John F. Haught, “Darwin and the Cardinal,” *Commonweal*, Vol. 132 (12 August 2005), 39; and Robert John Russell, “A Critical Response to Cardinal Schönborn’s Concern over Evolution,” *Theology and Science* Vol. 4 (July 2006): 193-98.

scientists and theologians, especially among Roman Catholics. In August, in response to a question from a reporter, President Bush suggested that schools should teach “both sides” of the debate between evolution and “intelligent design” – a suggestion that generated considerable discussion about the place of religion in American public education and Bush’s own religious beliefs and understanding of science.<sup>2</sup> And in September, the case of *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* began in federal court, the first American case to test the constitutionality of teaching intelligent design in public schools. Witnesses for the plaintiffs included biologist Kenneth Miller and theologian John Haught, and for the defense sociologist Stephen Fuller and biochemist and intelligent design proponent Michael Behe. News media extensively reported both the testimony in the six-week case, and the December 2005 ruling of Judge John Jones, who concluded that, because intelligent design is religious and not scientific in nature, the school district’s policy violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution.<sup>3</sup>

The debate about evolution and intelligent design is also present in Canada, although less widespread or heated. In early 2006, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) rejected a grant application from Brian Alters, director of McGill University’s Evolution and Education Research Centre, and a witness for the plaintiffs against the Dover School District. Alters had proposed to study the influence of intelligent design theory in Canadian science education. As Alters later explained, “At McGill’s Evolution Education Research Centre, we get calls from teachers across Canada about anti-evolution problems. We sense a de-emphasizing of evolution by teachers because of

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<sup>2</sup>“Mired,” *The New Yorker*, 22 August 2005, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>See H. Allen Orr, “Devolution - Why Intelligent Design Isn’t,” *The New Yorker*, 30 May 2005, pp. 40-52; Shawn McCarthy, “Darwin v. Intelligent Design,” *The Globe and Mail*, 28 September 2005, A1, A20; Larry Witham, “Intelligent Design on Trial,” *The Christian Century*, 29 November 2005, pp. 8,9; and Matthew Chapman, “God or Gorilla: A Darwin Descendent at the Dover Monkey Trial,” *Harper’s Magazine*, February 2006, pp. 54-63.

pressures they are experiencing or believe they may receive. A recent poll by the *Globe and Mail* indicated that about one in four Canadians feel intelligent design should be taught in public schools.”<sup>4</sup>

SSHRC, in explaining its rejection of his application, indicated that Alters had not provided “adequate justification for the assumption in the proposal that the theory of evolution, and not intelligent-design theory, was correct.”<sup>5</sup> Alters and others found this explanation alarming because it suggested that SSHRC, contrary to the broad consensus in contemporary science, did not acknowledge that Darwinian evolutionary theory has been well established. Alters and McGill appealed the decision, and SSHRC representatives subsequently acknowledged that the letter to Alters had been poorly worded and had not been intended to cast doubt on evolution. Some also noted, however, that evolutionary theory should be as subject to critical examination as any other theory, and that Alters’ proposed “research framework was flawed and would have yielded predictable results that ‘dump on the religious right’.”<sup>6</sup>

### **God, Design, and Darwin’s Challenge**

With roots in the work of classical philosophers such as Aristotle and Cicero, and sometimes referred to as the teleological argument, the “argument from design” has a long history in western philosophical and theological reflection on the relation between God and the world. In the 1st century B.C.E., Cicero had suggested that design in the universe points to purpose and intelligence in the

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<sup>4</sup>*McGill Headway*, Vol. 1 (Spring 2006), 1, [www.mcgill.ca/headway/spring2006/firstperson/](http://www.mcgill.ca/headway/spring2006/firstperson/) accessed 29 June 2007. For an example of intelligent design in a Canadian classroom, see Michael Valpy, “Putting God’s Fingerprints on High-School Biology,” *The Globe and Mail*, 8 October 2005, M1-M2.

<sup>5</sup>Randy Boswell, “Professor Denied Federal Research Funds for Assuming Evolution to be Scientific Fact,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 April 2006, 1. <sup>6</sup>Randy Boswell, “‘Intelligent Design’ Debate Crosses the Border,” *Ottawa Citizen*,

<sup>6</sup> April 2006, 8; see also Hannah Hoag, “Darwin at Risk in Canada,” *The Globe and Mail*, 8 April 2006, F8.

same way that the design of a sundial points to its designer. Versions of the teleological argument later appeared in the work of the Christian theologian Augustine in the early 5th century C.E., and was passed on through the work of the Muslim philosopher Averroes in the late 12th century. In the following century, Thomas Aquinas proposed the teleological argument as the fifth of his five proofs for the existence of God. According to Aquinas:

An orderedness of actions to an end is observed in all bodies obeying natural laws, even when they lack awareness. . . . Nothing however that lacks awareness tends to a goal, except under the direction of someone with awareness and with understanding; the arrow, for example, requires an archer. Everything in nature, therefore, is directed to its goal by someone with understanding, and this we call "God."<sup>7</sup>

Aquinas' enumeration of proofs for the existence of God was part of his discussion of what one can know of God apart from faith. Such knowledge, for Aquinas, was incomplete and imperfect, but was nevertheless true knowledge, and it helped prepare a person for the more perfect and complete knowledge through revelation. The argument from design, then, was one of several ways by which one might come to belief in God's existence, and from there proceed to belief in God as creator and in Jesus Christ as redeemer. It presumed that one could derive true, but limited knowledge of God from observation of the world.

The teleological argument, however, eventually became less persuasive for many, in part for theological reasons and in part for philosophical ones. Like the rest of Aquinas' theological system, the argument from design continued to influence Catholic thinking for generations. Luther, Calvin, and other Protestant theologians of the 16th century, however, had less confidence in what human reason, unaided by grace, could know about anything, and placed considerably less value on what humans might know about God apart from revelation. That theological legacy, then, greatly

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<sup>7</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, Qu. 2, Art. 3 (Oxford: Blackfriars, 1964) p. 17.

diminished the importance of the argument of design. For Anglicans, however, natural theology and the argument from design remained influential. In the 17th century many English writers – including the emerging generation of scientists or “natural philosophers” who were also Christians – continued to affirm some version of the argument from design. But in the 18th century it came under attack by philosophers such as Hume and Kant. As Hans Schwarz notes, Kant “severely criticized the notion that human reason can extrapolate from the phenomena of the natural world to something or someone beyond that world. . . . From thereon it was clear on the Protestant side that there is no direct and rectilinear continuation from the world of phenomena to the spiritual realm.”<sup>8</sup>

While Hume and Kant’s critiques were taken as definitive by many later philosophers and theologians, the design argument retained considerable appeal well into the 19th century. Its best known exponent was the Anglican minister and philosopher William Paley. His 1802 book *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity collected from the Appearances of Nature*, echoing and updating Cicero’s sundial analogy, famously appealed to the analogy of a watch and watchmaker to argue from the reality of design in nature to the existence of God. *Natural Theology*, and Paley’s other works, were widely influential in English education, notably at Cambridge University when Charles Darwin studied there from 1827 to 1831. At the start of the 19th century, discoveries in biology and astronomy made it possible (but not, as Hume had shown, inevitable) for Paley and his contemporaries to argue from the complexity and functionality of design in nature to the existence of a creating and purposeful Designer. As Ian Barbour explains, they regarded the “gradations of complexity among living forms, which were coming

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<sup>8</sup>David Steinmetz, “Creator God: The Debate on Intelligent Design,” *Christian Century* 122 (27 December 2005) pp. 28-30; Hans Schwarz, “The Intelligent Design Tradition: A Response to Robert John Russell,” *Theology and Science* 5 (March 2007) pp. 101-02; and Ian Barbour, *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997) pp. 17-23, 51, 58-59.

to light in great profusion . . . as steps in the ordained hierarchy of life, the immutable ‘chain of being,’ of which humankind was the highest step and final end.” The problem, as Barbour also notes, was that “[n]atural theology was here cast in a form that was to prove particularly vulnerable to the concept of evolution.”<sup>9</sup>

Although Darwin did not publish *On the Origin of Species* until 1859, he had begun to formulate his theory of evolution by natural selection as a result of observations he made while serving as naturalist aboard the H.M.S. *Beagle* in 1832-37. “Evolution” and related terms were already common in western culture, in both the natural and social sciences, and typically implied improvement of an organism or organization from its earlier stages to its later stages. Darwin did not want to suggest that changes in organisms were necessarily improvements (he preferred the phrase “descent with modification” to “evolution”), but did want to explain how such variations occurred. He did so by suggesting, first, that random variations in an organism produced traits that were transmitted to their offspring; and second, that the struggle for survival among organisms worked by natural means to select for transmission to their progeny those traits that best suited them for survival. Complex structures such as eyes and wings, so admirably well suited for vision and flight, could thereby emerge incrementally as a result of accumulated variations. Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, then, challenged the argument from design, as famously formulated by Paley, by showing that adaptations that enhanced the survival of an organism or species could arise not as a product of purposeful design but rather, over a long period of time, as a product of natural processes.<sup>10</sup>

In the decades following the publication of *Origin of Species*, both scientists and Christian theologians responded to Darwin in diverse ways. Among both, some welcomed it, some rejected it, and some offered qualified support. The scientific support for Darwin did not coalesce until the early 20th century, due in part to

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<sup>9</sup>Schwarz, pp. 102-03; Barbour, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup>Barbour, pp. 52-59.

work in genetics and geology, and did not achieve broad consensus until the formulation of the “Modern Synthesis” in evolutionary science in the 1930s. Christian preachers and theologians who questioned evolution regarded it as challenging traditional Christian teaching in four main areas: the truth of the Bible, especially the Genesis accounts of the creation of life and of humans; the dignity and status of humanity in creation; divine providence and action in the world; and the argument from design.

By the early 20th century, however, the rise of Protestant fundamentalism, and the consequent clash over the biblical and scientific accounts of human origins, overshadowed in the popular mind all other reservations that Christians had held about evolution. The 1925 Scopes trial in the U.S. reinforced this view of Christian attitudes toward evolution, and many American states and school districts successfully resisted teaching evolution in school science classes into the 1960s. When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957, it launched the space race with the U.S, but it also brought about a reinvigation of American scientific research and science education. As the Modern Synthesis was by then well established, public school science curricula renewed teaching in Darwinian evolutionary thought. The conflict with anti-evolutionary Christianity was also thereby revived. In 1961, engineer Henry Morris and biblical scholar John Whitcomb published *The Genesis Flood*. Marking the beginning of “scientific creationism”, the book argued that the earth’s geological strata had been deposited all at once in the aftermath of “the great flood” and that geological evidence demonstrated the earth’s young age. While many North American evangelicals adopted “young earth creationism”, as this view came to be known, diverse views emerged among creationists. One of the more significant variations was “old earth creationism”, which did not insist that the earth was only several thousand years old, as indicated by some interpretations of Genesis, but rather accepted that the earth is as old as scientists suggest. “Old earth creationism”, however, did continue to affirm a direct role for God in the creation of life, especially human life, and therefore also

opposed many of the tenets of Darwinian evolutionary theory.<sup>11</sup>

Whether of the young earth or old earth variety, “creation science” had become important for the struggle against evolution. As in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1968 ruling in *Epperson v. Arkansas*, American courts had begun overturning laws against teaching evolution on the grounds that they violated the constitutional prohibition of the state establishment of religion. Since the effort to keep evolution out of science education was failing, proponents of “creation science” hoped to establish “scientific creationism” as equally credible as evolution on scientific grounds, and thereby to assure a place for creationism alongside evolution in science education. By the 1980s, however, this effort was also failing, and the question of what counts as science came to the foreground of the debate. In 1982, in his ruling in *McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education*, Judge William Overton invalidated the state’s “Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act” because “creation science” fails to meet the criteria for science. When the U. S. Supreme Court overturned Louisiana’s “Creationism Act” in its 1987 ruling in *Edwards v. Aguillard*, it effectively ended the effort to have creationism regarded as science, and taught as science, in American public schools. During this same period, in 1985, the Academy of Science of the Royal Society of Canada issued a statement to provincial education ministers saying that “‘scientific creationism’ has nothing to do with science or the scientific method” and that it “should have no place in a science curriculum.”<sup>12</sup> By the late 1980s, the strategy of seeking “balanced

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<sup>11</sup>Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creation to Intelligent Design*, expanded edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) pp. 208-67; Margaret Talbot, “Darwin in the Dock”, *The New Yorker*, 5 December 2005, pp. 66-76; and John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1978).

<sup>12</sup>Talbot, “Darwin in the Dock,” 66, 76; “The TalkOrigins Archive”, [www.talkorigins.org/faqs/mclean-v-arkansas.html](http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/mclean-v-arkansas.html) and [www.talkorigins.org/faqs/edwards-v-aguillard.html](http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/edwards-v-aguillard.html), accessed 29 June 2007; and “Voices for Evolution,” [www.don-lindsay-archive.org/creation/voices/Science/CANADA.htm](http://www.don-lindsay-archive.org/creation/voices/Science/CANADA.htm), accessed 3 July 2007.

treatment” for creationism and evolution in public schools had failed. Opponents of evolution, then, needed a new strategy.

### **Intelligent Design**

Starting in the mid-1980s with the publication of books questioning the adequacy of contemporary neo-Darwinian evolutionary science, a new strategy began to emerge. One of these books, intended as a supplement to standard biology textbooks and called *Of Pandas and People*, was the first to use the phrase “intelligent design”, but law professor Phillip Johnson’s 1991 book *Darwin on Trial* is sometimes regarded as the start of the recent intelligent design movement.<sup>13</sup> The following year, in Johnson’s own words, the “new movement made its public debut at a conference of scientists and philosophers held at Southern Methodist University in March 1992 . . . to discuss this proposition: ‘Darwinism and neo-Darwinism, as generally held in our society, carry with them an a priori commitment to metaphysical naturalism, which is essential to making a convincing case on their behalf.’”<sup>14</sup> The focus of that conference reflected a significant shift in the argument against evolution. Like earlier creationists, proponents of the new intelligent design were attempting to broaden the definition of “science”. Unlike the young earth creationists, however, they do not defend biblical inerrancy in geology and biology but rather aim to demonstrate the inadequacies of contemporary neo-Darwinian science’s naturalistic presuppositions and explanations. They hope thereby to make room in public

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<sup>13</sup>Numbers, *The Creationists*, 373-79, discusses Charles B. Thaxton, Walter L. Bradley, and Roger L. Olsen, *The Mystery of Life’s Origin: Reassessing Current Theories* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984). Michael Denton, *Evolution: Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986), Dean H. Kenyon and Percival Davis, *Of Pandas and People, The Central Question of Biological Origins* (Richardson, TX: Foundation for Thought and Ethics, 1989), and Philip Johnson, *Darwinism on Trial* (Washington: Regnery Gateway Publishing, 1991).

<sup>14</sup>Phillip E. Johnson, “The Intelligent Design Movement: Challenging the Modernist Monopoly on Science” in William A. Dembski and James M. Kushiner, eds., *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001) p. 25.

discourse for non-naturalistic, or theistic, presuppositions and explanations. These concerns are readily apparent in publications and other activities of the Seattle-based Discovery Institute, especially its Center for Science and Culture, which for several years has championed intelligent design theory.<sup>15</sup>

Intelligent design theory, then, reflects not only a debate between religious and scientific interpretations of natural phenomena but also a broader “culture war” about the place of religious belief in western secular society. Some proponents of evolution have, since Darwin’s time, seen it as confirming an atheistic view of reality by eliminating the need for recourse to divine action to explain the features of nature. (Darwin himself seems to have ended as an agnostic.) Since the development of the “Modern Synthesis” in the 1930s, evolutionary science has continued to expand its success in explaining natural phenomena. Some Darwinian thinkers, such as biologist Richard Dawkins and philosopher Daniel Dennett, have reasserted the view that evolution confirms atheism and materialism, the latter a “belief that the only reality that exists is material. Nothing like spirit exists. Neither does God. Since the only reality is material, science that studies the material world is the only source of knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> For religious believers, then, it is the supposed inextricable alliance between atheistic materialism and Darwinian evolutionary science that make the latter objectionable. By challenging evolution, they challenge atheism.

Intelligent design theory is characterized by two other important features: first, undermining the hegemony of evolutionary science and its materialistic presuppositions by calling attention to “gaps” in its explanations for the occurrence of certain complex biological systems and features; and second, expanding the definition and methods of science to consider not only “necessity”

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<sup>15</sup>Discovery Institute, Center for Science and Culture, [www.discovery.org/csc/](http://www.discovery.org/csc/), accessed 6 July 2007.

<sup>16</sup>Martinez Hewlett and Ted Peters, “Why Darwin’s Theory of Evolution Deserves Theological Support,” *Theology and Science* 4 (July 2006) pp. 177-80.

and “chance” but also “design” as explanations for the occurrence of natural phenomena. Opponents of evolution have claimed that there are “gaps” in neo-Darwinian science (e.g., the supposed lack of fossil evidence for transitional forms between species) at least since the mid-1980s. The version of that claim that has received most attention has been advanced by biochemist Michael Behe, notably in his 1996 book *Darwin’s Black Box*.<sup>17</sup> Behe argues that while Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection does account for small differences among organisms that share a common ancestor, “the sufficiency of Darwin’s mechanism to account for larger, more complex changes in organisms remains in question.” Behe’s work focuses especially on biochemical systems (e.g., blood clotting) that are “irreducibly complex,” that is, systems that are “composed of several interacting parts, where the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to cease functioning.” Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection, Behe maintains, not only *has* not accounted for the development of such systems, it *can* not. Therefore, these systems “show strong evidence of design – purposeful, intentional design by an intelligent agent” because they display “the ordering of separate components to achieve an identifiable function that depends sharply on the components.”<sup>18</sup>

Treating “design” as a scientific explanation for natural phenomena is another key feature of intelligent design theory, one which has been especially addressed by mathematician and theologian William Dembski. The western philosophical tradition, Dembski points out, has variously valued the relative roles of necessity, chance, and design as explanations for anything that happens or exists. As late as the 17th century, scientists such as Isaac Newton could see the universe as the product of design and necessity. Even before Newton, however, Francis Bacon had argued that consideration of final causes (that is, the end or purpose for

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York and Toronto: Free Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup>Michael Behe, “Darwin’s Breakdown: Irreducible Complexity and Design at the Foundation of Life”, in Dembski and Kushiner, eds., 91-99.

which something was created) should be excluded from scientific method because such considerations were metaphysical rather than scientific. By the 19th century, western science had largely rejected design and sought instead explanations that relied only on chance and necessity. Dembski argues, nevertheless, that “design is a legitimate and fundamental mode of scientific explanation on a par with chance and necessity.” And while scientists have argued that science must exclude design because it cannot be observed by scientific methods, Dembski maintains that there is “a rigorous criterion for discriminating intelligently from unintelligently caused objects.” He calls it “the *complexity-specification criterion*” and defines it in this way: “When intelligent agents act, they leave behind a characteristic trademark or signature – what I call *specified complexity*. The complexity-specification criterion detects design by identifying this trademark of designed objects.” The full explanation of the complexity-specification criterion relies on probability and information theory and is, as Dembski himself admits, “technical”. Nevertheless, it is clear that by proposing that design once again be considered a possible mode of explanation for things that happen or exist, and by suggesting a method for detecting design, Dembski is recommending that the definition and methods of science be significantly revised.<sup>19</sup>

## Evaluating Design

What might intelligent design theory promise, and what might be its problems? The controversy about it should not be understood as a conflict between Christianity and science, as there are both Christians and scientists among both the proponents and critics of intelligent design. While some points in the debate about intelligent design are between theists and atheists, other points are among

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<sup>19</sup>William Dembski, “Signs of Intelligence: A Primer on the Discernment of Intelligent Design”, in Dembski and Kushiner, pp. 171-76, 191-92. Dembski is perhaps intelligent design’s most prolific proponent; his other publications include *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance through Small Probabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999).

theists themselves (whether Protestant or Catholic, evangelical or liberal). Among Christians, diverse understandings of God and God's relation to the world, and of the appropriate relationship between science and religion, are fundamental to the debate. What, for example, does one's theology of creation assume about the relative autonomy of creation from God and God's purposes, and therefore the extent to which humans can (whether aided by revelation or not) discern God's purposes from observation of nature? Are we to envision a selectively interventionist God? A constantly present and thoroughly, albeit mysteriously active God? And for what purpose is an argument from design advanced? To demonstrate the reality of a creating God who is at least partially discernible in creation? Or, as many Christians themselves have complained, to justify the existence of a social order, however much some may suffer under it?

On the relationship between Darwinism and atheism, it may have both promise and problems. Since Darwin's time many Christians – notably the Harvard botanist Asa Gray in the 19th century and the Roman Catholic theologian John Haught today – have seen little or no tension between evolutionary science and their religious belief. However much these and other proponents of “theistic evolution” have been criticized by atheistic evolutionists and theistic creationists alike, this view remains persuasive for many Protestants and Catholics. To the extent that proponents of intelligent design seek to disentangle evolutionary science from atheistic ideology, they may have some aims in common with those who subscribe to theistic evolution. If, however, intelligent design advocates presume that Darwinism and atheism are inextricably entangled, they risk obscuring the contribution of a century and a half of theological reflection on evolution and sidestep the question of the proper relationship between science and non-scientific convictions.

Complaining that neo-Darwinism has not adequately explained the development of certain complex biological structures and systems, and maintaining that the development of these complex structures and systems can therefore only be explained by appeal

to an intelligent Designer, leaves intelligent design theory vulnerable to possible future advances in evolutionary science. Even though biologists and other scientists may not have fully explained the development of such structures and systems to date, they may yet. After all, from the beginning Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection had "gaps", some of which were not filled until the "Modern Synthesis" in the 1930s. There may well be biological structures and systems for which evolutionary science has yet to offer a satisfactory account, and it may well be necessary to challenge evolutionary scientists to further that work, but it seems both premature and unwise to maintain that it cannot provide satisfactory explanations. Alternative explanations may prove necessary, but they may come through modification rather than rejection of neo-Darwinism. Because some forms of Christian theology proved vulnerable to such a "God of the gaps" approach in the past, the value of reintroducing such an approach today is doubtful. Appealing to an intelligent Designer as a way of explaining certain features of nature also leaves one vulnerable to an old question in the problem of evil. As philosopher Michael Ruse pointedly asked in a review of Michael Behe's recent book *The Edge of Evolution*:

If God really does have to get involved in His creation every time something complex needs producing, why does He not get involved in His creation whenever something simple but awful needs avoiding? Many genetic diseases are the product of just one molecule gone wrong. Surely an all-powerful, all-loving God could have taken five minutes off from creating the irreducibly complex to tweak those rogue molecules back into line?<sup>20</sup>

Further, while proponents of intelligent design may be correct in wanting to make room for "design" as a form of causation in intellectual discourse, they may not be correct in seeking to do so in terms of *scientific* discourse. Of course, in modern and post-modern western culture science is the defining mode of public

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<sup>20</sup>Michael Ruse, "Design? Maybe. Intelligent? We Have Our Doubts": Review of Michael J. Behe, *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism*, Free Press," *The Globe and Mail*, 2 June 2007, D5.

discourse and the standard by which all truth claims are measured. It is understandable, then, that those who resist some of what has been claimed in the name of “science” might seek to redefine it. Historians of science have shown that what counts as “science” has shifted in at least some important ways since the time of Bacon, Galileo, and Newton. Moreover, feminist and postcolonial thinkers have provided persuasive critiques of the patriarchal and ethnocentric assumptions of modern western science. What we mean by “science” has changed in the past, and may yet again. Intelligent design theory may play an important role in this debate. By seeking to redefine “science”, however, intelligent design theory may be unwisely capitulating to science as the dominant mode of knowledge in western culture. Proponents of intelligent design (and other religious believers) may be better served by arguing for the legitimacy of philosophical, theological, and moral knowledge alongside of scientific knowledge, and developing means by which these different forms of knowledge may engage in interdisciplinary public conversation.

## **CANADIAN MUSLIMS: Humour and Philosophy** by Sheila McDonough

I saw Zarqa Nawaz' satirical short film, *BBQ Muslims*, on the CBC several years ago. The plot was a take-off on the responses to the bombing of a government building in the American mid-west. At the time, one widespread knee jerk reaction was that the bombers must be Muslims. In the CBC film, the satire takes place in a Toronto suburb: a gas barbecue stove in a Muslim backyard explodes and hysteria erupts in the neighborhood. The police are called; the Muslim family panics. I remember the line of one of the young characters who frantically told the police – “you can't give me a police record, I am applying to medical school”. In an interview after the show, its producer, Zarqa Nawaz, an attractive hijab-wearing young Muslim woman, said that the best way for Muslims to make contact with their fellow Canadians is by developing a Canadian sense of humour. I think she is right that there is such a thing as a Canadian sense of humour, from Stephen Leacock onwards; it often involves making fun of what happens to us if we try to be like Americans.

Zarqa Nawaz possesses such a sense of humour in abundance. According to her biography on the web, she is 34 years old, and has four children. She worked as a researcher for Peter Gzowski, and played an active part of the Toronto film milieu. She developed her own company, and produced four films. But then her husband got a job in Regina, and she moved with him to the Prairies. The result we can all see for ourselves in the TV program she created: *Little Mosque on the Prairies*. The CBC co-operated by advertising the program widely across the country. It will be back with us in the fall.

The film company she founded stresses humour. In an interview she did for the CBC, she talks about the time she was in a hotel in Chicago and a bellhop – about six feet two — nervously asked her if the bulge in her pocket was a gun. “No, it is a cell phone,” she said, as she nervously produced it. She says she was smiling so

hard, trying to project an image of a friendly Muslim, that her face hurt. This kind of incident probably sums up much of the anxieties present among young second-generation Muslims. The large immigration of Muslims to Canada took place in the 1970s, so there is now a generation of Canadian-born Muslims who have flocked into our universities and professions. Most of them want to get good jobs, and to fit into the wider society.

The young man in the *BBQ Muslims* film, who was worried about his admission to medical school, typifies some of the worries of this generation. Some of them feel caught between their parents' generation, people still operating according to many of the customs of their home countries, and the demands of adapting successfully to Canadian life. One of the role models admired by many of the young Muslims who want to adapt is Tariq Ramadan, a contemporary Muslim philosopher, who has often addressed Canadian meetings of *The Islamic Society of North America* (ISNA). Zarqa Nawaz had been in Chicago to film an ISNA meeting when she had the encounter with the nervous bell-hop.

There is a Canadian branch of ISNA, which meets annually in different cities in Canada. The current president is a Canadian Muslim woman, Ingrid Mattson, who is a convert. She studied at the University of Waterloo. After becoming a Muslim, she spent a year in Pakistan working with Afghan refugees. She now has a doctorate in Islamic Studies from the University of Chicago, and teaches religion at the Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut, the oldest center for studies in Muslim-Christian dialogue in North America.

A recent article in the *Montreal Gazette* (May 19, 2007) quoted Tariq Ramadan as having said that Canada is more tolerant in relation to Muslims, and less obsessed by anxieties about terrorism than most other western countries. Tariq Ramadan was on his way to address about 3,000 Muslim young people at a ISNA meeting in Ottawa. His topic was to be "Shaping a Canadian Muslim Identity". Ramadan has been invited several times to address ISNA meetings, in both English and French, because many young Muslim students

and professionals find him their best guide on how to relate constructively to the Canadian milieu. Ramadan himself grew up in Switzerland, and became a professor of philosophy in a Swiss University. He now teaches at Oxford, and has been an adviser to Tony Blair on how to relate to Muslims.

I have twice heard Tariq Ramadan speaking in eloquent French to large groups of young Muslim students and professional people at ISNA meetings in Montreal. He is an exciting speaker who elicits immediate and warm responses from his hearers. He has a web site in both English and French where one can read his materials, listen to him, and join in dialogue. ISNA also has a web site. Ramadan has been welcome in Britain and Canada, but not in the United States. He recently was offered a position teaching in the Peace Studies graduate program at Notre Dame University in the United States, and was on his way to the job when his visa was denied. The reason given was that he had given money to a Palestinian charity several years ago. Many Muslims have problems like this; something in their names, or in past activities, or family connections, triggers a negative response from the American authorities.

In Tariq Ramadan's case, it is known that his family had been exiled from Egypt when he was a child because of his grandfather's activities. In the 1930s, in the context of the depression in Cairo, the grandfather had helped found *The Muslim Brotherhood*, an organization that tried to offer social services to the depressed people who were streaming into the big city from the rural areas. The organization later joined the nationalist struggle against King Farouk. But then they clashed with the army. President Nasser exiled many of them. The Brotherhood wanted a more religious government, but the army opposed this. Many in the Brotherhood have now become fundamentalists, although their social services continue.

Since I was doing research on the Muslims of Canada, I thought I should try to understand why young Canadian Muslims were finding Tariq Ramadan so stimulating and inspiring. I read two of his books, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (OUP, 2004)

and *Islam, the West, and the Challenges of Modernity* (Islamic Foundation, 2001). Tariq Ramadan argues explicitly against fundamentalism. He says that fundamentalists typically have a defensive response to modernity; they want to retreat to cultural ghettos. The fundamentalist idea of an Islamic state is a kind of utopian vision, based on an imaginary dream of an ideal Muslim past. Fundamentalists tend to appeal to emotion rather than reason. Instead of asking Muslims to use their minds to solve problems, they urge intense emotional commitment to following leaders with utopian visions. Ramadan, by contrast, as a good philosopher, appeals to reason. He tells young Muslims that they must use their minds to understand the challenges of the modern age, and to discover how to function effectively in our new industrialized societies. His ideas are all public, as expressed through his books, his public lectures, and his web site. He is a charismatic speaker, especially in French.

I found him to be a lucid contemporary philosopher of religion, one who is familiar with much of the anti-religious prejudice of our time. However, he is not discouraged by the contemporary antagonism to religion. He says that criticisms should not be reacted to defensively, but rather taken seriously. We often can learn a lot from our critics. He tells his young Muslim admirers that some of the best of contemporary philosophy of religion accepts the reality of religiousness as a widespread and legitimate human phenomenon. They do not need to fear that they will lose their faith if they start using their minds.

He warns young Muslim against retreating defensively into cultural ghettos. He knows that such retreat is a tempting option, but he opposes it strongly. Zarqa Nawaz has a similar perspective. She tells us about a conversation she had with another active Canadian Muslim woman writer, Rahat Kurd. They worried about the defensiveness that is widespread in the Muslim community in Canada. They have experienced criticism from their fellow Muslims because they have been innovative. The reformers among Muslims want to move away from medieval social ideas, whereas the

conservatives want to preserve a traditional way of life unchanged, and unchallenged. The Arabic word for a bad innovation is *Bida*.

Women like Zarqa Nawaz and Rahat Kurd receive criticism from the more conservative elements in their community, but they also get support from many other Muslims who applaud their activities. Zarqa Nawaz wears a head scarf (hijab), but her friend Rahat Kurd no longer does so. In her contribution to the volume, *The Muslim Veil in North America*, Rahat Kurd explains that when she was a university student, she was an activist for the cause of the hijab, and did much writing and speaking on the topic. However, she eventually tired of this attitude, and decided she would much rather talk to Canadian women about topics other than covering the head.

In the book, seven Muslim women, some who cover their heads, and some who do not, explain their views and experiences. The research for this volume, which was published by the Women's Press, Toronto, in 2003, was done mainly in Montreal and Toronto. The seven authors, Muslim and non-Muslim, were all living in Montreal at the time. The research showed variety in Muslim ideas and practices with respect to covering the head as a religious duty. In addition, there are two chapters on the theological issues involved in trying to decide what the perspective is on feminine modesty in the Muslim primary sources, the Qur'an and the Hadith. All scriptures are necessarily subject to interpretation; for Muslims, one urgent question is whether or not the interpretations of the 9th and 10th centuries should still be accepted as authoritative. The reformers want to revise and rethink the interpretation of the primary sources.

Another Muslim female activist is Fatima Houda Pepin; she has been elected several times as a representative of the Liberal party to the National Assembly of Quebec. Yet some of the more conservative members of her own community get annoyed with her because she does not promote the causes they think important. She was one who vigorously opposed any suggestion of establishing Islamic law, the Shariah, in Quebec. The Quebec National Assembly

accepted her leadership on this matter. Fatima Houda Pepin supported the *Canadian Council of Muslim Women* (CCMW), which campaigned against the establishing of Shariah law in Ontario. The CCMW has a web site; they meet annually in different parts of Canada. As a result of their active campaigning, the government of Ontario finally agreed not to implement Shariah law.

The Canadian Muslim women who led the struggle against the setting up of Shariah law know that in their home countries, such as Egypt and Pakistan, it has been the organized women's movements that have convinced their governments to make changes in the laws on matters like polygamy, divorce, and custody. In modern Muslim countries, it is the parliament that makes the laws, not the religious leaders. The history of movements to change laws in Muslim countries in family law issues is similar to the history of women's movements to change laws in western countries. The male religious leadership in all countries, Muslim and non-Muslim, has almost always opposed changing laws to give more rights to women. The laws get changed when the women become organized and demand their rights.

In the book, *The Muslim Veil in North America*, I wrote a chapter explaining the history of women leaders in Canada, such as Nellie McClung and Therese Casgrain. I did this for the young Muslim Canadian readers so that they would understand that the opposition of male religious leaders to changes in the status of women happens across religious boundaries. It helps young Muslims understand their host country better if they can learn some of our history. Any Canadian who talks to Muslims about Canadian history is doing something useful.

Young Muslims, both male and female, who respond positively to Tariq Ramadan find in his approach a clear invitation to rethink their religious tradition. In his book, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, he calls on young people to be the fore-runners of a reformed Islamic vision for the Muslim world as a whole. He teaches what can be summed up as "text in context". This is also

the approach of one of the leading reformers in Iran, Abdul Karim Suroush. The idea is to take the basic principles from the Revelation, but to recognize that these principles have been expressed in a variety of different ways in differing social contexts.

Tariq Ramadan is well versed in the Islamic heritage of religious and philosophical thought. He is good at making sense of the elements of the tradition that he finds relevant to the young Muslims of today. Many of them turn to him for direction. The Qur'an repeatedly urges its hearers to observe the signs of God's presence everywhere in the external world, and in the lessons of history. Ramadan's thought can be considered an exegesis of the Qur'an intended to relate to the specific concerns of young Muslims living in the West. The first time I heard him, I was struck by the lucidity of his criticism of fundamentalist thinking. He explained to his young listeners that Muslim prayer urges Muslims every day to pray that God will lead them on the straight path (of virtue and righteousness) and help them not to be led astray by evil. The Qur'an portrays Satan as constantly standing near the ear of Muslims ready to tempt them into evil if they relax their vigilance. This is very similar to the Christian prayer "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil".

Ramadan's point was that, if we need every day to pray for protection against evil, it follows that we are not secure in whatever structure of goodness we might think we are living in. No matter how much we have done to make the world a good place, we can never rest content that all problems have been solved, and that humanity can rest safe in the nest it has built for itself. This means that no efforts to bring about an "Islamic revolution" or create "an Islamic State" will drive all evil from the world. Muslims have to keep trying to do better, but no state, or political order they create is going to be perfectly good. On-going reform will always be necessary.

With respect to social thought, he maintains that the Qur'an requires that humans use their minds to discover how to improve social life. He insists that modern Muslims must recognize that the

Qur'an first came into a specific social and political context. Since that context has disappeared, the present generation must do the work all over again of deriving both absolute and relative principles in order to implement better forms of social life in the present. In other words, we can acknowledge that God is good and just, but just what goodness and justice might mean in the context of the possibilities and limitations of our present cultural situation remains for human minds to work out. In his words:

Sustained by faith, strong in reasoning ability, and guided by ethical injunctions, a believing consciousness must live within his own time, and within the heart of his own society, among other human beings, and put his energy into this constant dialectical movement between the essential principles determined by Revelation, and actual circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

Tariq Ramadan argues for what he calls *the principle of integration*. This means that Muslims should adopt and be open to whatever customs, practices and values they find in western societies that do not oppose Islam. He argues that Muslims must think through the differences between basic religious awareness, and cultural practice. He maintains that many Muslims are confusing traditional cultural practice in their countries of origin with Islam. He approves the present day Muslim women who are going back to the sources of their tradition, and discovering imperatives there to working to change discrimination against women. The axis of reform, scripture in relation to the present context, has resulted in a new discourse. Ramadan applauds the Muslim women religious reformers,

firmly anchored in the Islamic sources but open to original female perspectives. What is particularly new is that this discourse is increasingly conducted by women themselves....They label themselves as Muslims, criticize erroneous interpretation, and use the scope provided by the texts and the various opinion of the ulema of the reformist tradition to construct a discourse on Muslim women that calls them to an active, intelligent and fair faithfulness.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, (OUP, 2004) p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid* pp. 141, 142.

With respect to thinking about the goals and practices of specific societies, Tariq Ramadan uses the traditional Muslim idea of the “common good”. The point is that creating structures that enhance the common good cannot be done by literalists clinging to outmoded social practice. To promote the common good requires considering the basic intention, the means used to elaborate that intention, and the relationship of the intention to the basic principles. He says that Muslims must work for justice, and against injustice, in all contexts. They should choose the best of the possibilities open to them. They should never forget ethics when evaluating what actions to take. He says that in all situations, Muslims have a responsibility to understand, master, choose and reform.

He tells Muslims that they need to develop a global view of problems, and to find partners to work with in seeking solutions. He gives as examples movements for fair trade, and Christian liberation theology. He wants Muslims to learn to co-operate with whatever groups and individuals perceive the dilemmas of the present in similar ways. This is an appeal to work with others in what James Luther Adams called ‘voluntary associations’. The idea is that people with similar ideas about problems, such as mothers against drunk driving for example, can work together even though they do not share all the same values.

The young Canadian Muslims, male and female, who are responding to this teaching are hopeful that better mutual understanding can develop between them and their fellow Canadians. Those who have designed the TV program about the Prairie Mosque are trusting that humour can help make us all more tolerant and accepting.

## **EMERGING SPIRIT?**

**by Janice Love**

The United Church of Canada, by its approval and then launch in November, 2006, of the \$10 million project, “Emerging Spirit”, has taken some decisive steps. The name of the project is both a reference to the collapse of “Christendom” by way of what is now emerging in its place, and a hope that the direction of the project is Spirit-led. Where might these steps take the United Church? What are the faithful possibilities and what might be the potential dangers?

The project consists of two parallel initiatives. One is an attempt, through a print-ad campaign, and provision of the Wondercafe web site for conversation, to raise awareness of the United Church in the Canadian public, and to offer an unobtrusive invitation, especially to those 30- to 45 years-old, to consider exploring a relationship with the United Church. The other initiative is directed to United Church congregations, offering training sessions and resources on the practice of welcoming people, especially those 30 to 45-years-old, to and into the church. Both initiatives received an almost equal share of the \$10 million set aside for the project. The former initiative, not surprisingly, generated some media coverage, including a front page article in the November 7, 2006 edition of *The Globe and Mail*. The latter initiative, again not surprisingly, generated little attention, though it is likely the more significant step of the two.

Why target especially 30- to 45-year-olds? Organizers point out that this is one of the first generations raised outside the church, and many of them have little or no knowledge, or an entrenched stereotyped knowledge, of “organized religion” and the contemporary church. This is also the age group largely missing from many United Church congregations, which are aging and diminishing. It is, in other words, the generation that can illustrate for the church the shifts that have taken place in North American culture. Targeting a particular age group also makes it more feasible to do the market research undertaken by the project. This research,

carried out by Environics and a series of TerraNova Discovery workshops (focus groups on “Life Today”, “Faith, Spirituality and God” and “Religion and Going to Church”) centered on what life is like today in Canada for people aged 30-45, what their views are, and how best to reach them.

This targeting approach begs the question of motivation. Is it, as the media coverage suggested, to “get people into the pews” in an attempt to shore up a shrinking denomination? Or is the motivation grander and deeper? Bryan Stone offers some helpful reflections in examining the logic of evangelism. He advocates that, rather than a practice of reaching out and making converts, evangelism is inherently about bearing witness.<sup>1</sup> The church is called to bear witness for the world through its life of what God has done, is doing and will yet do. In referring to the group reviewed by the research work, Keith Howard, Executive Director of the Emerging Spirit project, describes those most likely open to the church as seeking “a witness to where God may be found”.<sup>2</sup> His statement, along with the fact that the project is not tracking how many people cross the threshold of a church due to the Emerging Spirit project, points in the direction of witness rather than the production of converts as its core motivation. The latter, however, has never really been a primary focus for the United Church. Often hailed as Canada’s largest Protestant denomination, our self-image may be summed up in that little preposition “of” – the United Church *of* Canada (versus, say, *in* Canada). We have been accustomed to the “Christendom” privilege of attempting to be the conscience of the nation. With the collapse of “Christendom” our church has lost its place at the center – or of what we understood to be the center. Our unfamiliar place on the margins means we may be viewed as irrelevant and insignificant and may go quite unnoticed. If this is a Spirit-led journey the church finds itself on, is this a cup that we are willing to drink? Is \$5 million to help raise

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*, (Brazos Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007) p 18.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Howard, *Emerging Spirit News*, “Emerging...”, Issue 2, Nov., 2005.

awareness of the United Church even the church's business? Do the ads and web site exemplify a basic mistrust in the Holy Spirit's ability to work through the church of its creation, or are they a 21<sup>st</sup> century form of fishing for people? Perhaps they are the latter, with the ever-present danger of the former.

The print ads and web site have been described by their designers as pre-evangelism. They are offered as a service – the creation of a safe place where people can explore “questions and issues about faith, spirituality, and other topics which concern and interest them”. They are carefully tailored not to use churchy language, given that such language carries a cultural baggage which might immediately offend potential seekers. It is understood by this that the evangelical moment will take place when a person takes up the “invitation” to visit a local congregation. This approach recognizes that it can no longer be assumed the people we encounter every day have any knowledge of, or exposure to, the church. It also recognizes that it is the life and work of the local congregation that has the potential to evangelize, not an advertisement or web site. I am, however, admittedly suspect of the characterization of this part of the initiative as “pre-evangelism”. It is, without doubt, pre-apologetic, as there is no attempt to make an explanation for why a person might become a disciple of Jesus, the Christ. As an enterprise, though, that has been researched, created and funded by the church, it *is* a work of the church and therefore proclaims something of who we are.

The market research which was undertaken speaks in its own language of commodity. It recommends, to give the “strongest marketing opportunities for the United Church”, that the church “focus on the theme of questing and embracing” as the best way to “distinguish itself from other faith communities” (since people aged 30-45 already “expect churches to have the attributes found within the themes of achieving personal faith and connecting and reaching out”). Hence the design of the advertisements and web site. This part of the Emerging Spirit venture could be viewed as seeking to proclaim that the United Church is the best choice for those looking for a relationship with the church because it has more of the

attributes they want. Rather than encouraging what unites the ecumenical household of God (the Church) – the “invitation to God’s future and to hope for the new creation of all things”<sup>3</sup> – what is present here is the danger of encouraging denominationalism and what could be construed as an attempt to posit the United Church as the “truer” church. Gone it seems is the intent of the words *ut omnes unum sint* on the crest of the United Church – that all may be one. There is also, of course, the danger of commodifying the gospel. We are informed that in order to be “heard” in a pluralistic culture, where increasingly anything viewed as proselytizing is seen as judgmental and manipulative, we must reduce what the church has to offer to what is unique about the United Church. This does not do justice to either the jeopardy all of creation currently faces, which most 30- to 45-year-olds are well aware of, or the hope that an incarnated (lived out), cruciform gospel invites us to, which many 30- to 45-year-olds are not aware of.

The other \$5 million funding the project is, as I have said, being directed toward local United Church congregations. The training sessions and resources being provided are focussed on educating congregations of our changed, post-modern culture, how this impacts the significance of when new folk arrive in our midst and on improving our practice of “welcoming”.<sup>4</sup> These are conversations long overdue in the church. It is still common for new people to be routinely ignored when they show up for worship and the traditional gathering for coffee, tea and juice that follows.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Moltmann, *The Source of Life*, p 21.

<sup>4</sup> The decision to use the word “welcoming” versus “hospitality”, which has a long and rich tradition in the Christian faith (note that the word “hospital” arises from the Christian practice of “hospitality”), was based on clarity in communication. “Welcoming”, though, will have its own need to be interpreted and unpacked. For helpful reflections on the Christian practice of hospitality, see Christine Pohl’s *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Eerdmans, 1999) and Elizabeth Newman’s *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Brazos Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Here I also speak from my own little family’s experience. After moving to a small city two years ago we began what can unfortunately be the painful search for a church, even for folk very much already “in” the church. At two different congregations, one United Church and one Lutheran, no one even spoke to us.

Given that people no longer seek to be a part of the church because every one else is doing it or out of a sense of duty or obligation, the precious gifts of their presence are often tragically overlooked and lost. I am unsure as to whether or not the advertisements and Wondercafe web#site will bring people to the church but I do trust that the Holy Spirit will, and there is nothing like inviting guests to prompt a house cleaning. The emphasis here of the Emerging Spirit's project could be beneficial.

One of the most significant benefits of the Emerging Spirit project is that it presents the church with the possibility of again becoming missional. The commissioning at the end of our worship, and the assurance in the accompanying benediction, takes effect as soon as we step outside. We are a sent people. Our life together, made up of worship, self-giving love, forgiveness, care, service, prayer, Sabbath rest<sup>6</sup>, shared celebration and suffering, is a life lived for the world so loved. We get to be stewards of the old, odd story; stewards because it is not a story we could have come up with ourselves but is the one revealed to us in and through Jesus Christ, of what God is up to. Hospitality, or welcoming, is one of the ancient practices of our faith. We welcome and share what we have because God has first welcomed and shared God's life with us. We do it for the benefit of the strangers that enter our life,<sup>7</sup> in the hope that we witness to Christ, and we do it for our benefit, knowing that we will meet Christ in them. It is helpful at this point, though, to remember that Christ brings both comfort and challenge. Strangers see with different eyes. Are we willing to see ourselves

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<sup>6</sup> Keeping of the Sabbath is a commandment for our time. In a culture enslaved to production and commodification, a full day devoted to worship, rest, play, meditation and celebration that our life does not depend on ourselves but on God is joyous good news. See Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Sabbath* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951/ HarperCollins, 1979), Wayne Muller's *Sabbath: Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest* (Bantam Books, 1999), and Marva Dawn's *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Eerdmans, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> These strangers can be our own children as well as others, 30- to 45-year-olds included!

as we are seen? Are we open to receiving the gift of Christ's assessment of our witness that new strangers in our midst might bring? The Emerging Spirit initiative to congregations is urgently encouraging us to do so.

The gift of Christ brought to us in hospitality is expected to be met by the witness of the Body of Christ so that the comfort and challenge flow both ways. The judgement of Christ should also confront newcomers, if we have allowed it to confront ourselves.<sup>8</sup> The individualism, placement of happiness before duty, and consumer orientation of people in our culture, should bump into the *koinonia*<sup>9</sup>, call to discipleship and obedience and self-giving, cruciform orientation demanded by Christianity. In the advertisements and Wondercafe web site the church has chosen to temper its language. We will need to watch that we are not tempted to continue that practice amongst ourselves, or when new people arrive in our midst in an attempt to blunt the offense of the gospel. As Kierkegaard reminded us almost two hundred years ago, "In the New Testament, Christianity is the profoundest wound that can be inflicted upon a [person], calculated on the most dreadful scale to collide with everything..."<sup>10</sup> The good news of Jesus Christ is not meant to be just personal, private good news, though it is that. It is also good news for the whole world, especially the poor and oppressed – God's future seen in a people who serve. There is much in the formation of the average person in North America that

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<sup>8</sup> This confrontation nurtures in us the humility required to be evangelical witnesses to God's love.

<sup>9</sup> The *koinonia* (a Greek term denoting a fellowship) of the early Church was startling in the equality, sharing and behaviour it was called to. Our present day term, "coin" arises from the word "koinonia" – the currency present in the early church and called for today is that of self-giving love. An encounter with a young Christian reading C.S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* on a local beach led to the sharing of his definition of a church: you can always tell you have encountered a church if it is where people are trying to set themselves aside and replace that with Christ.

<sup>10</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon "Christendom"*, translated by Walter Lowrie (Beacon, 1956) p 258.

will be challenged by this.<sup>11</sup> If this formation remains unchallenged, then the risk is present that the gospel, as understood and lived out, will be diluted and weakened; and its ability to challenge the powers and principalities, in ourselves and in the world, will be lost.

It has been stated that to be unaware of the culture in which the church exists condemns the church to replicating that culture in an undifferentiated manner.<sup>12</sup> The help provided through the Emerging Spirit's training and resources in understanding the present culture in which the United Church finds itself gives it the opportunity to discern in its own life what is of Christ and what needs critique and challenge. Here we come to the crux of the matter, for the whole Emerging Spirit project is contingent upon local congregations' practice of warm hospitality and of the faith. Given our previous (and perhaps to an extent still present) imbeddedness in Christendom, are we, as Walter Brueggemann muses, "mostly so kept and domesticated that we cringe from the very news given us? We find ways to skew our language and trivialize the sacrament so that there is nothing left for us except accommodation to cultural expectation."<sup>13</sup> This critique may seem harsh, but if we do not confront our own enculturation (undifferentiated formation by the culture) we will have little to offer seekers or the world, or what we do have to offer will not be Christian. A small case in

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<sup>11</sup> The early church, which also existed in a pluralistic culture, recognized that seekers and new people to the faith had been formed by practices, habits and beliefs foreign to the church and so arose the practice of an extended mentorship for new converts. As Debra Dean Murphy notes in *Teaching that Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education* (Brazos Press, 2004), "While the early church, of course, separated catechumens from the larger congregation until their baptism at the Easter vigil, such a 'division' was for the purpose of providing the uninitiated with the kind of rigorous catechesis that would form them in their new life of Christian discipleship. The current congregational divisions, by contrast, . . . operate on the problematic assumption that the uninitiated ('seekers') should be given *less* substantive teaching, not more. The rationale is that 'too much theology' (or liturgy, doctrine, etc.) will turn off and turn away potential church members" (p 240).

<sup>12</sup> See Richard John Neuhaus's "The Public Square: Christ Without Culture," *First Things* (Number 172, April, 2007) pp 55-60.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storied Universe*, (Abingdon Press, 1993) p 45.

point is the warning Elizabeth Newman gives us about our practice of hospitality. In a culture of “tolerance” and commodification, we may be tempted to practice “hospitality as inclusivity” where new people are welcomed into our midst so that what they bring as persons might be added to the market of choices we have for ourselves in our being in the world.<sup>14</sup>

It is our sometimes domesticated practice of the faith that most concerned one ordained minister I talked with about the Emerging Spirit project. She felt that the project had come about two years too soon for the congregation that has called her to guide and sustain them in the Way of Christ, given the work yet to do within the congregation itself. It is not a question of the church needing to be sinless first, but it is a question of whether the church knows who it is; it is a question of identity. As a people of God, do we think of ourselves first and foremost as servants of Jesus Christ? Here I am reminded of Jurgen Moltmann’s statement that, “The mission to the churches goes ahead of the churches’ mission to the world, and today it says: ‘Seek first the kingdom of God and [God’s] righteousness’”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the mere existence of the Emerging Spirit project can help to create the sense of urgency needed in the church about its identity and ultimate allegiance. We will also be well served by our Methodist roots, in their emphasis on warm Christian fellowship, and John Wesley’s “social holiness” (understood not as a “holier-than-thou” attitude, but a humble seeking to be relevant to God for the sake of the world).

Is the Spirit emerging in the Emerging Spirit project? As it has for the prophets of old and the saints before us, time will most clearly tell the tale of the faithfulness of the directions we choose. If we can remain aware of potential perils, inherent in any step the church makes, then the project, especially its initiative to the local congregations, may be a tool the Holy Spirit can work with in directing us at this crossroad on the continuing adventure of faith.

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality* (Brazos Press, 2007) pp 30-33. See also her warnings on a sentimental hospitality, a privatized hospitality, hospitality as a mode of marketing and homeless hospitality.

<sup>15</sup> Moltmann, *The Source of Life*, p 22.

## Profile

### **SIR WILFRED THOMASON GRENFELL: Spiritual Adventurer**

**by Ronald Rompkey**



On the hill behind the hospital at St. Anthony, Newfoundland,<sup>1</sup> stands a huge boulder bearing six brass tablets. One of these locates the ashes of Wilfred Grenfell (1865-1940), the British physician and humanitarian whose accomplishments at the end of the 19th century embraced not only medical care but the building of hospitals, orphanages, schools and small industries where none had existed before. Though Grenfell was a devoted Christian, the tablet registers his existence without any conventional

Christian iconography or sentimental language, but simply with a name, a date and an inscription, “Life is a Field of Honour”. Grenfell was, however, one of the “manly” Christians who carried the code of service into the remote places of the earth at a time when such a philosophy was still possible.

He and his three brothers were raised in the Scottish village of Parkgate, near the mouth of the River Dee, where their father was headmaster and proprietor of Mostyn House, a boarding school for boys. After his early education, Wilfred was sent to Marlborough, a tough English public school that encouraged the

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<sup>1</sup> For those unfamiliar with the geography of Newfoundland, St. Anthony is as far away from the capital, St. John’s, as you can get. St. John’s is on the eastern extremity of the island, while St. Anthony is on the northwestern, located on the coast near the top of the Northern Peninsula, facing east.

social and religious attributes of masculinity for which Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes were the chief proponents. But while young Wilf revelled in the physicality of the school's regime, his father grew dissatisfied with the progress of his studies. In 1881 he took him away to read with a private tutor for the London matriculation, and to ponder what he might do with his life. First, Wilf considered the army, then the church. However, during an interview with the village doctor in nearby Neston, he was consumed with the idea of becoming a physician, and in February 1883 entered the London Hospital Medical College. At the same time, his father, overwhelmed with the stresses of life, leased his school and accepted the chaplaincy of the London Hospital. But there his condition worsened, and in 1885 he was committed to an asylum in Chiswick. Two years later, he died by his own hand.

At this stage, Wilf already showed tendencies for which he would later be recognized. While he enjoyed the study of medicine, especially the diagnostic techniques of Sir Andrew Clark and the surgical practices of Frederick Treves, he often absented himself from lectures for cricket and rowing. He also played rugby and football, and filled out his schedule by running a gymnasium and a Sunday school out of his house in Hackney. "He always aimed at the big things in life," wrote fellow student Dennis Halsted in his book *Doctor in the Nineties*. "The details...he left to others less competent." During the vacations, he organized summer camps in Wales for East End boys and by publishing his accomplishments in the *Review of Reviews* exhibited another mark of his personality: the need to publicize and promote his work.

More profound than all this, however, was a religious experience he had in 1885, during his second year of medical studies. As he returned one night from treating a case in Shadwell, he was drawn to a tent meeting conducted by the American evangelists Dwight L. Moody and Ira Sankey. Moved by their simple formula for living the Christian life, he went away convinced that he ought to devote his energies and training to what he thought Christ would have done if he had been a doctor. At a subsequent

evangelistic meeting, he went to hear the cricketers J.R. and C.T. Studd, who assisted with the campaign, and when the call came to stand up for Christ, he did so with a determination to dedicate his life to some form of practical service. Having attained the conjoint diploma LRCP, MRCS in 1888, he spent the fall term at Queen's College, Oxford, where he earned Blues for rowing and rugby and a half Blue for athletics, but he failed the Bachelor of Medicine examination set by the University of London.

Meanwhile, another life-changing development was unfolding. Treves had suggested he put his training to use as a physician with the Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen, the newly formed society that operated for extended periods among the North Sea fishing fleet, for which Treves himself was the medical advisor. This kind of physical and practical challenge suited Grenfell perfectly, and gave him an opportunity to preach the gospel in evangelical terms.

Indeed, in its earliest days the Mission regarded itself primarily as an evangelical organization, and only secondarily as a philanthropic and medical agency. By the end of 1887, it already maintained eight vessels at sea and a growing body of lay and ordained evangelists. Grenfell, at the age of 24, was appointed its first superintendent, with responsibility for fleet maintenance. After establishing himself at Yarmouth, he recognized that fishermen also needed facilities ashore, such as a fishermen's institute and a circulating library. Once again, he exhibited a talent for publicity, making regular contributions to the Mission's monthly, *Toilers of the Deep*, where he dramatized its spiritual and medical work. At this stage, he was becoming knowledgeable about medical treatment at sea, but also about broader questions of fishing techniques and market values, and was personally acquainted with numerous fishermen. His devotion to field work, however, left the Mission office neglected, and in 1891 the Mission's council appointed a separate fundraising secretary.

That same year, at the request of the Newfoundland government, the council sent one of its members, Francis Hopwood (later Lord Southborough), to investigate living and working conditions in the fishing industry in that region. His findings

dramatically changed the Mission's priorities, for Hopwood learned of the migratory Labrador fishery carried out by approximately 25,000 men, women and children – Newfoundlanders living in temporary habitations and lacking the basic means of civil society. These conditions took him by surprise, and while still in St. John's, Hopwood suggested the Mission might send a hospital ship the following summer to provide basic medical treatment and distribute clothing. Back in London, he chose his words more carefully. The expedition to Labrador was presented as an "experiment" contingent on the report of the doctor on board, and at its meeting in February 1892, the council decided to send Grenfell on the Mission ship *Albert*. Once the vessel had been refitted for ice conditions, Grenfell got under way on 15 June with a hand-picked crew.

Throughout the first summer, the *Albert* made spectacular entrances in remote Labrador harbours, with Grenfell treating the full range of illnesses. At the same time, he handed out clothing and religious tracts and held prayer meetings as far north as Hopedale, which is about mid-point on the Labrador coast, just above the 55<sup>th</sup> parallel. As he proceeded, the enormous potential for Christian service took shape in his mind, and he wrote London to express his conviction that the experiment should become an annual feature of the Mission's programme. By the time he arrived back in St. John's in October, he had seen over 900 patients, and there was no doubt in his mind about the direction his life would take. Moreover, the government of Newfoundland was prepared to erect and furnish two small hospitals and make a direct grant for their upkeep. The commercial interests of the city had pledged a house at Battle Harbour and at Smoky Run, as well as cash contributions, if the Mission provided the medical personnel.

Once the Mission had approved the offer, Grenfell returned with a medical staff for the summer of 1893, and personally piloted the steam launch *Princess May* as far north as Okak before returning to St. John's in late October. Without consulting the Mission, he then decided to take his annual leave to raise money in the larger Canadian cities, where he received a warm reception from such people as Sir William Dawson, principle of McGill University, and

Sir Donald Smith, a prominent figure in the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway, who had once worked in Labrador with the Hudson's Bay. But by the time Grenfell returned to London in the spring, he realized that the Mission itself was not fully behind him.

During the winter of 1895, he finished his first book, *Vikings of To-day*, which established a pattern for others to follow. Placing the Mission work in context, he walked a fine line between travel literature and promotion, in order to bring Labrador before a more general readership. Already he had moved beyond the requirements of a simple medical service, and embraced the social problems existing in Labrador outside the reach of the Newfoundland government. But the Mission's council was still not convinced. That year, they ordered him to stay in England while they considered his future. He went anyway.

Although he spent the next two seasons in the United Kingdom to oversee the Mission's programme, he persuaded a naval architect to draw up plans for a steamer that could be dedicated to the Labrador work. The plans originally called for a wooden-hulled, ketch-rigged vessel, but by the time construction started it had become a steel-hulled hospital ship of 97 feet and a displacement of 130 tons. *Strathcona* was launched in June, and Grenfell assumed he would pilot it to Labrador under his own command. But since his Board of Trade certificate authorized him to sail nothing more than a yacht, the council registered the vessel under the Merchant Shipping Act and brought over a qualified crew from Newfoundland to sail it back the following summer. Meanwhile, in the fall of 1899, when he was sent unexpectedly, not to Labrador but to Newfoundland, to replace one of his physicians, he seized upon the idea of building another small hospital at St. Anthony. Its purpose would be to treat the scattered population on the "French Shore", the section of the west and north coasts of Newfoundland on which the French had been granted fishing and drying rights by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713. Without any decision by the council, the Mission was landed with a new branch on the Northern Peninsula, and during the winter Grenfell operated from the house

of a local merchant. Once again, the Mission was left to respond to the enthusiasms of its errant superintendent.

With expenses mounting steadily, the Mission insisted that more assistance should come from North America. This inadvertently presented Grenfell with a platform to start his own organization. During his fundraising tours of Canada and the eastern United States in 1901 and 1902, he became more aware of the immense potential of American and Canadian philanthropy. Then, in 1903, he met one of his most useful allies, William Lyon Mackenzie King, then deputy minister of Labour in Ottawa and editor of the *Labour Gazette*. Mackenzie King opened doors to the Canadian bureaucracy and introduced him to the writer Norman Duncan, who would become one of his earliest promoters. Grenfell's public lectures on Labrador created such interest in American newspapers, especially in New York, that he was rapidly idealized in the popular press as a saintly figure, a rugged individual intent on doing practical good works. Numerous other articles appeared in magazines aimed at a Christian readership, especially the endorsement written by Lyman Abbott, an influential Congregational minister, who in *Outlook* advanced the myth of Grenfell as a heroic, adventurous doctor. "If there is any better preaching of the Gospel of Christ in the world than this we do not know it," he wrote.

By now, Grenfell had opened a third hospital at St. Anthony and started a fox farm and a sawmill, and he was already weighing the merits of an orphanage and a series of fishermen's co-operatives. But inevitably, he was losing touch with London, who now considered handing over the whole enterprise to a joint Canadian-American committee before its financial resources were drained.

As a result of Grenfell's advocacy, associations bearing his name had sprung up in Boston and Toronto, and a quarterly magazine, *Among the Deep Sea Fishers*, published his articles and opinions as well as lists of donors. In 1904, he published his second book on Labrador, *The Harvest of the Sea*, and in 1905 Norman Duncan produced *Dr. Grenfell's Parish*, which together with his admiring journalism created an audience where none had existed

before. A third association was founded in New York with Henry Van Dyke as president, and a board of directors who placed upon his work the stamp of Fifth Avenue liberalism.

In the summer of 1905, with the assistance of Mackenzie King, he approached the Canadian government for a grant to build a hospital at Harrington Harbour, Quebec, and secured a gift for its construction from the Dow family, Montreal brewers. To Harrington Harbour he sent Dr. Mather Hare, a Halifax surgeon with missionary experience in China, and presented the task of funding it to the new Grenfell association in Montreal. The following year, he convinced Jessie Luther, a Rhode Island artist and occupational therapist who had worked at Chicago's Hull House, to teach crafts at St. Anthony and develop a crafts industry for local women. As a result of these ventures, public accolades flowed in. The Governor General of Canada, Earl Grey, at the urging of Mackenzie King, recommended Grenfell for the King's birthday honours' list, and in 1906 he was named a commander of the Order of St Michael and St George. In 1907, Oxford University made him an honorary Doctor of Medicine, the first such degree it had ever awarded.

None of this, however, aided his cause more dramatically than his near-death experience in Hare Bay, a deep bay near the top of the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland. It took place on Easter Sunday, 1908, when he went through the ice with sled and dog team. Having lost his sled and outer clothing, Grenfell scrambled upon a pan of ice with his dogs and was taken out to sea with wind and tide. That night, he avoided freezing to death by sacrificing three of his animals for their skins and the next morning tried to attract attention by hoisting a makeshift flag on a pole contrived of their bones. Fortunately, he was rescued by local fishermen, who rowed over ten miles to reach him. As a result of his excursion on the ice his reputation stood higher than ever, especially after sensational accounts of his survival appeared in British, Canadian and American newspapers. The following summer, his celebrated survival narrative, *Adrift on an Icepan*, appeared in New York, acquainting a new generation of readers (and donors) with his

exploits. In the winter of 1908-9, as he lectured in the United States, he was received as a hero.

Returning from England aboard the *Mauretania* the following spring to receive honorary degrees from Harvard and Williams College, his life took a sudden shift. He met Anna MacClanahan of Lake Forest, Illinois, and resolved to marry her. After putting in a full summer's work on the coast, he journeyed to Chicago for the wedding on 18 November 1909, returning to St. Anthony with his bride to take up residence in his new house. There Mrs. Grenfell installed herself as private secretary, editor and advisor, and it soon became clear that the pace of Grenfell's life was less frantic than before. In September 1910, Anne Grenfell gave birth to Wilfred Thomason, Jr., who was followed two years later by Kinloch Pascoe, and then by Rosamond Loveday in 1917.

Grenfell might have become more domestic, but he did not slacken his efforts. The Mission in London soon learned of his latest initiatives, especially the expensive new seamen's institute he was building in St. John's, and the time seemed appropriate for them to withdraw. Consequently, in 1913, a new organization known as the International Grenfell Association (IGA) was formed with branches in the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada, to oversee and regulate the corporate side of what had become known as the Grenfell Mission. Its first meeting was convened at the Harvard Club in New York in 1914.

Following the outbreak of war, Newfoundland began to experience financial hardship. The price of fish dropped, and the cost of basic foodstuffs rose. At the same time, the Grenfell Mission's expenses climbed just as donations declined. More positively, however, Dr Harry Paddon, Grenfell's Labrador lieutenant, opened a cottage hospital at North West River in 1915, and Dr Charles Curtis, who eventually assumed the management of the St. Anthony hospital, appeared on the coast as summer volunteer. Grenfell himself wanted to help in the war, and he was invited to join the Harvard Surgical Unit with the temporary rank of major. Arriving at the northern front in January 1916, he remained there until the end of March.

As the war drew to a close, his accomplishments in northern Newfoundland and in Labrador attracted both donors and volunteers, and he himself was held up as an example to children. For example, Saul Bellow's Eugene Henderson tells us in *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), "Forty years ago, when I read his [Grenfell's] books on the back porch, I swore I'd be a medical missionary." Bruce Chatwin confessed in his essay "I Always Wanted to Go to Patagonia", that as a child he had three precious possessions, one of them a copy of Grenfell's *The Fisherman's Saint* (1930). The time seemed propitious for putting his story on paper, and with Anne's help and encouragement *A Labrador Doctor*, a spiritual autobiography with heavy emphasis on the work of the mission, appeared in 1920, and it soon became a commercial success.

Grenfell was doubtlessly riding a wave of celebrity, but he felt himself slowing down physically as he went about lecturing and raising funds. He could not have known it at the time, but the source of his decline was probably Wolf-Parkinson-White Syndrome, a disease involving the electrical fibres in the heart. This condition, which has subsequently been identified by medical scientists, produces a rapid heartbeat leading to palpitations and other associated symptoms such as dizziness and chest pain. While Grenfell himself was not diagnosed with it at the time, he did present such symptoms, and the disease was later identified in both his daughter and granddaughter.

As he approached his sixtieth birthday, he threw himself into the task of building an endowment fund for the IGA, and continued to write, even though his heart condition and the demands of celebrity tired him out. The board of the IGA suggested a holiday, and accordingly, in June 1924, he left with Anne for a kind of sabbatical tour of the Near East and the Far East, during which time the board moved ahead with further initiatives, fully demonstrating that it could act without him. Chief among these was a new concrete hospital at St. Anthony incorporating the best medical technology. On 25 July 1927, as a crowd of distinguished guests assembled for the official opening, the Governor of

Newfoundland announced that the King wished to make Grenfell a knight of the Order of St. Michael and St. George. Numerous public and professional honours followed, and the students of the University of St. Andrews elected him Lord Rector.

Then, in 1929, he suffered a severe attack and cancelled all engagements, while he and Anne turned to the sanitarium run by Dr John Harvey Kellogg at Battle Creek, Michigan. Further attacks, which were diagnosed as angina, drained his energy, and on his last visit to London an examination confirmed that his heart continued to fibrillate. Since he suffered pain doing practically everything except walking, he had no choice but to pursue the conventional treatment of rest, light meals and doses of nitroglycerine, and accordingly, in January 1936, he wrote the directors of the IGA to resign from the active management the mission's work. His ankles swelled. He suffered losses of memory. To make matters worse, Anne herself had developed a malignant tumour, and the two took up residence at a cottage at St Simon's Island, Georgia, where Grenfell continued to suffer one cardiac episode after another.

When Anne passed away in New York on 9 December 1938, Grenfell made one final trip to St. Anthony in order to deposit her ashes in the rock face behind the hospital. He then divided his time between Georgia and his summer house on Lake Champlain, where on 9 October 1940, after playing a round of croquet, he suffered one last attack and died. However, his medical and social services continued throughout the Second World War, and during Newfoundland's period of Commission Government. Following Confederation in 1949, they were gradually absorbed into the provincial health system, known to this day as Grenfell Regional Health Services.

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Editor's Note: Readers who would like to extend their knowledge of Grenfell could turn to his autobiography. They are advised to look up Ronald Rompkey's excellent book, *Grenfell of Labrador: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 1991.

**EXPLORING REALITY:  
The Intertwining of  
Science and Religion.  
by John Polkinghorne  
New Haven: Yale  
University Press 2005.  
208 pp. \$17.95**

After 25 years as a respected theoretical physicist, John Polkinghorne became an Anglican priest. He did so in order to explore more fully the multi-layered nature of human reality, notably its metaphysical aspects. In this book he reports on the continuing survey of the frontier between science and religion. The first five chapters move from the generality of science to the purported uniqueness of God; the remaining five consider issues that cluster around this opening progression.

Polkinghorne draws on his scientific expertise in reviewing the major physical theories and accomplishments of the past three centuries: 1) the classical physics of Newton (18th century), which describes a reliably predictable physical world; 2) Einstein's (early 20th century) general and special relativity, in which gravity and space-time structures reinforce a predictable world; this prevailing certainty, however, was opposed by 3) Nils Bohr's and others' (later 20th century) quantum physics and

ensuing chaos theory, as starkly expressed in Schrodinger's and Heisenberg's principles of quantum mechanics, dealing with probabilities rather than certainties. At present, no smooth and well-understood inter-theory transition exists, despite the purportedly promising superstring theory, with its numerous (up to 11) dimensions and multiple universes. Recognizing the inadequacy of a merely reductionist account of the natural world, Polkinghorne asserts his belief in God's providential interaction with the history of the universe.

In further background elaboration, Polkinghorne highlights Darwin's "The Origin of Species" (1859), and "The Descent of Man" (1871), which were instrumental in launching the fundamental theory of long-term organic evolution by processes of natural selection, such development since recognized as including the "ape line" (chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans) starting some 20 million years ago, followed by *Homo sapiens*, some 500,000 years ago. Polkinghorne contends, however, that recognizing the "cousingly" relationship between humankind and the other animals doesn't require us to see human beings as "just another kind of ape". He points to characteristics that mark out this unique genus, like

self-consciousness, language, rational skills, creative powers, and concepts of right-and-wrong. To Polkinghorne, the attempt to use Darwinian evolution as an explanation of these is unconvincing. Rather, he contends that humankind has been made in the image of the Creator, the veiled but grace-giving presence of God.

For Polkinghorne, there is something mysterious yet hopeful about the particular figure of Jesus that emerges from the gospel pages, emphasizing his life, crucifixion, and resurrection. This last event, he contends, is the pivot on which Christian belief turns. This divine reality is expressed to Polkinghorne in the form of the Trinity. Finally, Polkinghorne explores a number of resulting ethical topics with moral implications: the nature of time; relationships of Christianity with other world faiths; the concept of evil; ethical explorations, e.g., reproductive human cloning; concluding with some speculations on the concept of "life-after-death". He accords to Christ the unique role of "the word made flesh".

Despite the book's subtitle, Polkinghorne does not demonstrate the "intertwining of science and religion". The two methodologies remain sharply apart, the first exploring by "theory-experiment", the second accepting of spiritual insight. Both methodologies

command deep respect. Like a pair of scales, both science and religion are required, with each scale unique, the point of balance being the search for truth. The two separate pathway situation is well-illustrated by astrophysicist Jastrow (1992), in a moment of frustration: "At this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."

With his strong trinitarian doctrine front-and-centre, Polkinghorne is seemingly uninfluenced by an impressive body of recent early-Gospel research, which collectively questions the validity of certain traditional Gospel contents/interpretations. Compared to these more fluid and adaptive viewpoints, Polkinghorne's trinitarian doctrinal stance appears to be eurocentric if not ecclesiocentric, and markedly patriarchal. It is noted that this dogmatic attitude is matched by equivalent dogmatism on the "physics" side, as expressed by Richard Dawkins (2006) and Daniel Dennett (2006). Both extremes seemingly lack the

required fluidity to reach the central balancing point of truth.

Paul Davies, in his latest book *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why the Universe is Just Right for Life?*, aptly states that almost the entire history of the last 13.7 billion years, has been put together by physicists during the past 40 years. There is one big catch: they do not know what happened at the very beginning (i.e., pre-”Big Bang”). It is clear that life first appeared on planet Earth 3.5 billion years ago. This could be achieved only because the forces controlling creation were tuned with exquisite precision – hence the title of the book! Cosmologists call this the anthropic principle. Religious believers call it the hand of God. However, neither of these really explains anything. Davies asks: How have we tried to explain this? How has belief shaped the scientific debate? What do we really know about our place in the universe? He admits that answers are few and far between at the moment. Modern science in some instances does seem to converge onto almost theological grounds. However, he speculates that any future “theory of everything” must link human consciousness, the physical laws of the universe, and the creation of the universe itself – in brief, the self-organizing universe!

Should homo sapiens, in fact, be granted more time, we humans may reach a genuine understanding of the symbolic meaning of life on Earth. Until that time, however, one may honourably take out temporary membership in the widespread “Thomas Family”, the founder’s first name being “Doubting”.

– Alan M. Goodwin

**LIFT YOUR HEARTS  
ON HIGH:  
Eucharistic Prayer in the  
Reformed Tradition.  
by Ronald P. Byars  
Louisville, KY:  
Westminster John Knox  
Press, 2005. Pp. xix + 138.  
Paperback, \$23.99**

Scholarship on the eucharistic prayer has been dominated by attention to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, thus tending to leave the impression that the Reformed tradition has little to offer on the subject. This book aims to address that oversight. The result is profitable reading for theological students, scholars and anyone with an appreciation for liturgy and history.

Ronald Byars, a recently retired professor of preaching and worship at Union Theological Seminary,

Richmond, Virginia, takes a liturgically conservative approach, valuing the liturgical riches of the Reformed tradition. "This book means to offer the reader a fuller appreciation of the Great Prayer, based on a deeper acquaintance with its links to Jewish prayer; with its historical development in the early centuries of the Christian era; and with its ecumenical roots; as well as with issues that emerged before, during, and after the Reformation of the sixteenth century." (p.xiii)

To this end, Byars argues for the tripartite, Trinitarian (historically, Antiochene) structure of the eucharistic prayer as a liturgical norm aimed at shaping Christian identity. His overview of the roots of eucharistic praying in Jewish ceremonial meals, the *berakoth* (blessings) of the Synagogue service, and the central role of ritualized corporate *anamnesis* (remembering), grounds his effort to address the liturgical amnesia from which Reformed Protestantism often suffers. This material (pp.1-10) could be effectively adapted for worship education in many congregations.

His treatment of the eucharistic prayer in the Roman Catholic tradition, and its medieval focus on the Words of Institution sets the stage for both a critique and recovery of the contributions of

Calvin, Zwingli, Knox and the English Puritans. For example, "Their conception of the Eucharist as primarily a re-presentation of the Lord's *Last* [italics his] Supper contributed to the failure of their hope to restore the broken relationship between Word and Sacrament by recovering both preaching and a weekly Communion. The tone of melancholy, penitence, and humiliation was not something a congregation was eager to bear every Lord's Day" (pp.24-25). Moreover, the Reformers also tended to view the Words of Institution as all that was necessary for the efficacy of the sacrament, thereby impoverishing the ritual remembering of God's gracious acts in creation and redemption and the expression of hope for Christ's coming again.

However, the Reformers did contribute a rich sense of the living Word and active Spirit in the Eucharist, as evidenced in the various wordings of the *epiclesis* (invocation of the Holy Spirit). This history serves as a provocative study in the theology of Christ's real presence in the eucharist. They also embraced the task of liturgical reform ecumenically (for their time), drawing on many sources, East and West, in keeping with their mandate to be the church reformed, and always being reformed.

In a similar spirit, Byars also includes two rather technical chapters on more recent developments: one tracing modern movements of reform, the other surveying recent resources (including from The United Church of Canada). He closes with a theological exposition of a eucharistic prayer as a means of demonstrating the merits of catholicity over sectarian idiosyncrasy (p. 83). He argues that the more liturgically liberal tradition of providing only directories runs the risk of allowing pragmatism to take priority over theology, “lead[ing] to the neglect ... of liturgical forms that have played a major role in shaping the church’s understanding of who God is and who we are as the people of God.” (p.74) – a sobering word to much of what passes for “contemporary” worship.

Byars work serves to remind us that how we pray matters. His thorough historical approach also humbles any Protestant arrogance in relation to the practices of other traditions. There is enough liturgical failure to go around and enough ecumenical riches to keep calling us

into relationship with our neighbours. However, I am left pondering his preference for a specific (Antiochene) form. Other scholars (e.g., Paul Bradshaw) are increasingly reluctant to be so certain, arguing instead that diversity was the norm in the Early Church. Similarly, Byars’ cursory treatment of the United Church examples from *Celebrate God’s Presence (CGP)* fails to note what is arguably their major feature and greatest challenge: their diversity. The different wordings of, for example, the *Sursum corda* (“Lift up your hearts ...”), *Sanctus* (“Holy, holy, holy Lord ...”), and *verba* (Words of Institution) are not only “for the sake of inclusiveness” (p.66) but reflect different theologies, cosmologies and christologies. Such diversity raises the question of what it means to speak of a liturgical “crescendo of consensus” (pp.55-72). The “Resources for Prayers at Table” in *CGP* (overlooked by Byars) can also be interpreted to suggest that such scope is relevant precisely because how we pray matters. On this we can certainly agree.

— William S. Kervin

**FREE OF CHARGE:  
Giving and Forgiving in a  
Culture Stripped of Grace.  
by Miroslav Volf. Grand  
Rapids: Zondervan Press  
© 2005 247 pp. \$16.99**

A native of the former Yugoslavia, who watched his homeland torn apart in a brutal civil war, Miroslav Volf seems uniquely positioned to write about forgiveness. Volf writes that in part he learned the power and importance of forgiveness from his parents' actions after his brother was killed in a tragic accident. Many of us have far less reason to wrestle with forgiving.

Actually the talk about forgiving is the second half of the book. Before that Volf talks about giving. In a parallel structure Volf talks about God the Giver/Forgiver and then asks two vital questions: "How Should We Give/Forgive?" and "How Can We Give/Forgive?". The book then closes with a frank "Conversation with a Skeptic" that serves to tie things together and recap the major themes and challenges of the text.

In starting with giving, Volf does two things. First, he lays out a base structure which he will later use to support his discussion of the often more problematic practice of forgiving. Secondly he provides an

excellent set of readings for developing a theology of stewardship. In essence, he says that God gives because that is who God is (as opposed to a Santa Claus who fulfills wish lists, or a picture of God as a deal-maker in a *quid pro quo* model of giving). Then he challenges all of us to give as God gives.

In this discussion, Volf also uses the argument that we are able to give because everything we have is given by God. Furthermore, we need to give freely, with no expectation for reward, since that is how God gives. At the same time, Volf makes it clear that we are obliged to give both by receiving God's gifts and by the frequent commands to give we find in Scripture. Interestingly, Volf suggests that in essence we are "obliged to give freely" (p.65) and suggests that this is the message Paul was giving in 2 Corinthians.

From giving, Volf moves on to the practice of forgiving. The interlude that marks this break is the story of his brother's death and the amazing forgiveness shown by his parents. This interlude is worth reading all on its own to show the power and potential of forgiveness.

Volf's model of forgiveness is challenging, to say the least. As with giving, Volf calls us to forgive as God forgives. But he is clear about what that means. To parallel

the God as giver imagery, Volf describes two inaccurate images of God as forgiver. This is God as Doting Grandparent (p.136 ff) and God as Judge (p.131 ff). God does not judge and hand out the punishment we deserve, but neither does God pat us on the head and say, "That's okay". Volf describes God as choosing "To condemn the fault but to spare the doer" (p. 141). Throughout this discussion, it is clear that for Volf part of forgiveness is acknowledging that wrong has been done. It is equally part of forgiving to erase the debt, to live as though the wrong had not been done.

While taking seriously the truth of forgiveness, Volf does not set aside the idea of justice (which is tempting as a way of explaining how God is able to forgive). Volf's model of how God's forgiveness and God's justice intersect leans heavily on Lutheran thought. As such, it also leans heavily on the satisfaction theory of atonement. As he moves into how we can forgive he carries through to suggest that it is only in meeting and embracing Christ that we can do so. Volf addresses clearly the hurdles

humans have in forgiving and takes them seriously. Still, in the end he calls us to the challenge of forgiving as God forgives.

*Free of Charge* was the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lenten study book for 2006. As such, it is written in a style that is less academic and more widely accessible. Both sections of the book have strong messages and challenges to the church and to the culture at large. Those of us who struggle with the satisfaction theory of atonement will have some issues with how Volf sees forgiveness happening. However, this doesn't really take away from the challenge of naming and condemning the wrong but not condemning the doer of the wrong. Apart from a brief reference in the prelude, there was little explicit discussion about "A Culture Stripped of Grace", but in the end it is obvious that issues of grace and gracelessness lie at the heart of both giving and forgiving. Anyone who finds the need to wrestle with one or both of these practices, which are central to how we interact with others, would do well to check out this volume.

– Gordon Waldie

## THE WITNESS OF PREACHING

by **Thomas G. Long.**  
(Second Edition),  
Louisville, Kentucky:  
Westminster John Knox  
Press, 2005, 267 pages.  
\$33.99

Thomas G. Long is Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology. His many writings have had a major impact on the preaching ministry of the church in North America. My own preaching and desire to become a more faithful and effective preacher have been influenced by an ongoing engagement with Long's writings and my having heard him preach on several occasions.

Long's seminal work, *The Witness of Preaching*, first published in 1989, became the standard text in many a preaching class. In 2005, Westminster John Knox Press published a revised second edition of this classic text. Its chapter on biblical exegesis has been expanded. Additional examples of sermon forms, illustrations, and conclusions have been included. Long critically engages the best thinkers and writers on preaching in the past 15 years, as well as exploring the most recent work of those who appeared in the first edition. This second

edition also addresses the more recent uses, and potential misuses, of video clips and Power Point in sermons.

In his preface Long writes, "I hope this book will help preachers prepare more faithful sermons, but my most fervent prayer is that this book will encourage preachers to think critically and theologically about the very ministry of preaching" (p. xi). There is every reason, I believe, to expect that Long's fervent prayer will be answered. The inspired preaching of those who read this work and apply its insights will ring out in a church that is blessed and empowered by God's Word in its witness to the gospel's good news.

*The Witness of Preaching* provides a richly developed understanding of the *preacher as witness*. The identity of the preacher is explored as a fundamentally theological concern. I believe that any preacher who has struggled or is struggling with their identity and calling – which, likely, would be all preachers – will find within Long's reflections considerable affirmation, challenge, encouragement and hope.

In chapters entitled "The Biblical Witness in Preaching," and "Biblical Exegesis for Preaching", Long's work appears guided by this governing principle: "It is not the preacher who goes to the Scripture;

it is the church that goes to the Scripture by means of the preacher. The preacher is a member of the community, set apart by them and sent to the Scripture to search, to study, and to listen obediently on their behalf.” (p. 49) Further, “As we prepare to preach, we go to Scripture not just as individual believers but as practicing theologians on the front lines of the church, seeking to hear the gospel today in conversation with the shifting realities of our own lives and in continuity with the living theological memory of the whole church.” (p. 62)

In his chapters “The Focus and Function of the Sermon”, “The Basic Form of the Sermon”, and “Refining the Form”, Long provides a survey and critique of others’ sermon-development theories, in particular those of David Buttrick, Fred Craddock, Eugene Lowry, and Paul Scott Wilson. The various strengths and weaknesses of each are delineated. Long’s own process of sermon development is laid out combining solid exegesis, pastoral attentiveness, theological depth, ecclesial insight, and communications know-how. His is a movement from *claim* (what a particular text wishes to say on this

occasion to this congregation), to *focus* (a concise description of the central, controlling, and unifying theme of the sermon), to *function* (what the preacher hopes the sermon will create or cause to happen for the hearers). This approach of Long’s appears and certainly intends to be creative, dynamic, flexible and imaginative. As he writes, “The gospel comes to us in a wide variety of forms, and the preacher who faithfully bears witness to the gospel will allow the fullness of the gospel to summon forth a rich diversity of sermon forms as well.” (p. 171)

Should the publication of this revised second edition of *The Witness of Preaching* introduce a new generation of preachers and students of preaching to the insights of Thomas Long, this would be good news for the Church and for its witness in the world. Should we, who have been preaching for many years, now take this opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with Long’s work, accepting its correction of our less than faithful practices of sermon preparation and proclamation, I suspect this too would be no small blessing to the Church.

– Ron McConnell