

News for October 2013: Yoking Scientific Knowledge and Religious Wisdom

For the past 6 months, I've written short articles on various topics in Astrobiology for the CLP e-newsletter. The primary motivation for doing this was to raise awareness of a field whose implications for humanity extend far beyond the science. Science is a powerful tool for explaining how things work in the natural world, but ultimately, science cannot explain itself. Putting this in the words of Albert Einstein, "The most incomprehensible thing about the Universe is that it is at all comprehensible." Although CLP signatories represent a diverse group of faith traditions, I imagine we all recognize that there is a pressing need to fit the incredible narrative of science into the "meta-narratives" that provide the frameworks in which we set the stories of our lives and cultures; so this month, I would like to solicit your feedback about what scientific issues you view as most critical in addressing the needs of your individual faith communities -- not simply those I'd like to explore with you as a person whose curiosity and wonder inspired me towards a career in science early in my life. At the end of this month's news, you will find a link to a Survey Monkey with 10 questions that will allow for 100 respondents. If I find that this is insufficient to accommodate all those of you kind enough to take the time to respond, I will set up an additional survey or joyfully pay to expand my Survey Monkey service. The information you provide will be used to help plan future efforts to partner clergy and scientists in ways that address the needs and concerns of individual communities.

For over a decade, it's been my privilege to participate in a variety of programs at the Zygon Center for Religion and Science (ZCRS) at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). The ZCRS has a 25-year history of bringing together scientists, theologians, and other scholars to gain insight into the origins, nature, and destiny of humans and their environment (zygoncenter.org). The word *zygon* means the yoking of two entities or processes that must work together, so the ZCRS is aptly named. Under the leadership of Dr. Lea Schweitz, the Center recently received a grant from the Templeton Foundation to develop new curricula to incorporate science and religion modules in existing *required* seminary classes at the LSTC (zygoncenter.org/grant_13.pdf). I am honored to be on the Advisory Committee for this outstanding initiative. The first round of new modules developed for the *Teaching Religion and Science across the Seminary Curriculum* project include "Neuroscience, Dementia, and Pastoral Care: An Interdisciplinary Conversation" in the course *Fostering Narratives of Hope*; "Evolution and the Doctrine of Creation" in *Systematic Theology I*; "The Neuroscience of Reading" in *Introduction to Christian Education*; "Science, Healing, and Miracles in the Gospel of Mark" in *Jesus and the Gospels*; and "Cognitive Science and our Understanding of Reflection and Judgment" in *Ministry in Context*. Quite frankly, this incredible line-up makes me wish I had room in my schedule to audit classes at the LSTC!

The ultimate goals of the ZCRS/LSTC project are to incorporate science and religion modules in 16 courses across the M.Div. curriculum that reflect the needs of parish pastors, and create resources and a replicable model for other seminaries to use. In other words, this initiative serves as a bellwether to raise the quality of discourse and reflective thinking on issues of global importance. In recent years, I've seen a growing shift in education toward the realization that integrated, rather than compartmentalized, learning is crucial to serving the needs of society in the 21st century. How exciting to be part of this unique opportunity to help equip future church leaders with the skills to extend such learning beyond the ivory tower!

Finally, curiosity and wonder are as essential to the human spirit as science and technology are to addressing the physical and mental needs of human beings. My friend, Guy Consolmagno, learned this while teaching science in Kenya during his tenure in the

Peace Corps, before he entered the Jesuit order. Initially, he saw the primary goal of his work as helping the Kenyans raise the quality of their lives through education, but he came to realize that even in the midst of poverty, disease, and death, his students' hunger for knowledge about the Universe rivaled their physical hunger. Chuck and Sue Ruehle, both retired ELCA pastors, are addressing this dual need through *Telescopes to Tanzania*, a program to use Astronomy as a vehicle to teach science, technology, engineering and math to the Meru community in northern Tanzania (astronomerswithoutborders.org/projects/telescopes-to-tanzania.html). They are currently raising money for the development of a center for science education to enable teachers in Africa and astronomers from around the world to meet and share the wonder of the night sky. As ELCA `starpastor' Bruce Booher so eloquently puts it: "Awe is a vital dimension of life, but one that is often ignored in our day. Without awe life becomes flat and people become hollow. Science reveals a world filled with mystery and wonder. Mystery is truth that is bigger than us. Mystery is not a problem or riddle to be solved. With mystery, the more we learn, the more we realize how much more there is that we don't know. Mystery inspires awe, which invites us to enter into mystery and celebrate the wonder that is all around us" (mysteryandawe.com).

Whether your main concern is how science and technology might benefit your community, or whether you simply wish to rekindle your capacity for wonder, please help us in our efforts to yoke scientific knowledge and religious wisdom by going to the following link and providing your input: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VH39L3J>

Thank You.

Until next month,

Grace Wolf-Chase, Ph.D.