

Quaerens

Newsletter of The John Templeton Oxford Seminars
on Science and Christianity

John Templeton Oxford Seminars on Science and Christianity

Volume No. 1, June 1999

The Steering Committee

- **Professor John H. Brooke**, *historian of science and religion at Lancaster University, UK*
- **Professor Edward Grant**, *historian of medieval science, Indiana University*
- **Professor Owen Gingerich**, *astronomer and historian of science at Harvard*
- **Dr. Harold Heie**, *director of the Center for Christian Studies at Gordon College (MA) and chair of the Faith, Living, Learning Commission of the CCCU*
- **Dr. Robert Herrmann**, *biochemist, Gordon College (MA) and Director of The Templeton Science and Religion Course Program*
- **Professor David Lindberg**, *historian of science, University of Wisconsin, Madison*
- **Professor David Livingstone**, *geologist and historian, University of Belfast*
- **Professor Ernan McMullin**, *philosopher, theologian and historian of science, University of Notre Dame*
- **Professor Nancey Murphy**, *theologian, Fuller Theological Seminary*
- **Dr. Arthur Peacocke**, *biologist and theologian, University of Oxford*
- **Professor William Shea**, *historian of science, Universit• Louis Pasteur, Strasbourg and Chairman of the Standing Committee for the Humanities of the ESF(European Science Foundation)*
- **Professor Keith Ward**, *theologian of science and religion, and Regius Professor of Divinity, Oxford University*

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How It All Began...

The seminars represent a faculty development project of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU). This international association, which serves 130 member and affiliate colleges and universities, has had a long history of involvement with Oxford, beginning with an annual student program--Oxford Summer School--hosted by the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. In 1998, a semester-long Oxford Honors Semester was also established.

Building upon these relationships, Dr. Alister McGrath, Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, began conversations with the CCCU about possible trans-Atlantic faculty development initiatives. In 1997, the dream of establishing a research oriented project at Oxford on science and religion began to take shape. As part of the CCCU's "breadth and depth" agenda for faculty development, scholars from within and beyond the CCCU were encouraged to be involved in scholarly projects that would be of superior quality and authoritative both within the setting of Christian learning and in the secular academy.

Wycliffe Hall was founded in 1877 as an evangelical theological college within the Church of England. It is now firmly established as one of the most important evangelical institutions in Britain, aiming to equip men and women for ministry and service in the church in England and far beyond. It is a permanent private hall of Oxford University, giving its students status as full members of the University. Wycliffe Hall is located close to the centre of Oxford and to the University Parks.

On December 31, 1997 The John Templeton Foundation informed the CCCU that supportive funding had been approved for the John Templeton Seminars on Science and Religion at Oxford, to be convened by Dr. Alister McGrath, and Dr. John Roche of Linacre College, Oxford. The John Templeton Foundation encouraged the seminar emphases of theologically relevant findings of modern science and the attempt to discover new information about God through scientific research. It also emphasized the importance of publication and dissemination. The convenors immediately set about establishing a steering committee based on earlier discussions with Dr. Charles Harper and Dr. Robert Herrmann of The John Templeton Foundation, and others. Twelve possible committee members were invited, many of whom are the most distinguished scholars in their respective fields. All accepted the invitation to serve in an advisory capacity to the project.

The first meeting of the steering committee was held in Washington, D.C. in May of 1998, with administrative

support provided by Dr. Charlotte Kroeker of Messiah College (PA) and Dr. Karen Longman of the CCCU. Possible lecture courses for the first three years were circulated in advance together with a synopsis of the proposal and the agenda. The directors found the meeting particularly helpful in defining more clearly the goals of the seminars, in establishing names of possible lecturers, in discussing venues for publicity and for reaching potential participants, and in defining selection criteria to ensure the involvement of highly distinguished scholars. A second meeting of the steering committee was held in Oxford in August of 1999, largely organised by Dr. John Roche and Dr. Alister McGrath with the help of the CCCU and Wycliffe Hall. The presence of Dr. Charles Harper, Executive Director of The Templeton Foundation, was particularly helpful in clarifying The Templeton Foundation's expected outcomes for the seminars. This led to recommendations that the lectures and workshops give greater emphasis to current issues and to ensuring that it would help evangelicals to construct a new narrative of the relationship between science and religion. The meeting finalized the project's title as **The John Templeton Oxford Seminars on Science and Christianity**.

Prior to and following the second steering committee meeting the publication of the seminars among scholars was intensified. In August of 1998, brochures were mailed to The Templeton Foundation Science and Religion Course Award Winners for the past five years and to a large mailing list of persons and institutions in the United States and abroad interested in science and religion. The "Call to Scholars" was also advertised in various journals, on The Templeton Foundation website and on a special website devoted to the seminars--www.cccu.org/templeton--established by Dr. Gwen Ladd Hackler of Southern Nazarene University (OK), who serves the seminars as website consultant. Queries began to pour in from September 1998 through to the closing date in November 1998.

Asking applicants to submit a proposal in outline to the directors before submitting the final application to the CCCU provided an overview of the quality of the candidates, the areas of interest in this field and the many different approaches to issues. The CCCU office in Washington, D.C. responded to over 200 project enquiries. These came principally from the United States, then from Canada and the United Kingdom but also from Italy, Poland, Australia, India, Japan and Brazil together with enquiries from an expatriate Russian and a Zimbabwean. A high proportion of those inquiring were Templeton Course Award Winners. A very wide range of professions was represented, chiefly biologists, physicists, mathematicians and theologians but also clergymen, philosophers, historians, medical doctors, chemists, psychologists, a computer scientist and an attorney. In total, 116 applications were received for 30 places; the process of selection was very difficult because of their high quality. Although selection was based entirely on the definition of merit as set out in the "Call to Scholars," an excellent balance of disciplines and projects was achieved, with high-quality scholars and promising opportunities for dissemination. In addition, it was made clear to chosen candidates that the goal of their scholarship must be to illuminate current issues.

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Mission Statement

The project is a year round programme of research, communication with other scholars and presentation of research results to scholarly and popular audiences. Participants will attend month-long research seminars at Wycliffe Hall in the summer of 1999, with similar one-month seminars in 2000 and 2001. There they will receive lectures from distinguished scholars in the field, carry out research (much of it future-focused although anchored wherever appropriate in historical study), make presentations and participate in workshops.

The main goal of these seminars from the outset has been to introduce a greater scholarly rigour and authority into the study of major issues in the relationship between science and religion. A piecemeal approach will be replaced by a systematic and coordinated investigation. Rather than simply promoting understandings that are already in circulation, the seminars will seek through sustained cutting edge research to generate fresh thinking and to feed new insights and approaches into the debate. The intention is also to provide fresh authoritative material for undergraduate and graduate courses, popularizing books, and debates in the media. The study of current issues will be backed by historical study to provide depth and sophistication. Rather than interpreting the field as a debate between Christians and skeptical scientists, the seminars will seek to create a new scholarly space which defines its own canons of rigour, which is interdisciplinary and accessible to scientists, theologians, philosophers and historians.

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Lectures, Workshops and Discussion Seminars

Lectures (for participants only) will be given daily from mid-July to mid-August 1999 at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. The 1999 lectures are as follows:

- *The Seeds of Natural Science* - Ernan McMullin
- *Changing Conceptions of Science* - Ernan McMullin
- *Changing Relations between Science and Religion* - John H. Brooke
- *Science from the Perspective of Religion: Defining a Relationship* - John H. Brooke, Alister McGrath and Arthur Peacocke
- *Significant Current Issues in Science and Religion* - Alister McGrath
- *Science and Religion: The Usefulness of Historical Perspectives* - John Roche
- *The Reception of Pagan Philosophy and Science after 1150* - David Lindberg
- *The Relevance of the Medieval Experience to Contemporary Issues* - Alister McGrath
- *Catholic Hermeneutics, The Council of Trent and Galileo* - William Shea
- *Protestant Hermeneutics and Concepts of Nature* - Scott Mandelbrote
- *Biblical Hermeneutics and Science: Looking Ahead* - Alister McGrath, Owen Gingerich and Scott Mandelbrote
- *The Mechanical Philosophy and its Impact* - William Shea
- *Modern Physics and Cosmology* - Peter Hodgson
- *Neuroscience and Religion* - Fraser Watts
- *Psychology and Religion* - Fraser Watts
- *Evangelical Christians' Responses to Evolution* - Ronald L. Numbers

Public lectures will be provided every week at Harris-Manchester College, Oxford ([see box below](#)). The lectures will be complemented by workshops on significant issues of content and methodology, presentations by participants describing their research projects, and discussion seminars. There will be ample time for participants to use the substantial research facilities of Oxford libraries.

Field trips are being organized to:

Stonehenge, Wiltshire - The fascinating megalith Stonehenge is the remnant of a monument erected between 3000 and 5000 BC. The circular structure is aligned along the rising of the sun at midsummer solstice.

Woolsthorpe Manor, Lincolnshire - A small 17th-century manor house, the birthplace and family home of Sir Isaac Newton, who formulated some of his major works here during the Plague years. An early edition of his *Principia* is on display. The orchard includes a descendant of the famous apple tree. There will be a total solar eclipse in Cornwall on August 11, 90% visible in Oxford. Total eclipses take place on average only once in several hundred years. The last total eclipse visible in Britain was in June, 1927. The seminar group plans to walk to the University parks to see this historical event.

Public lectures will be provided every week at Harris-Manchester College, Oxford, Chapel, Oxford on Thursdays at 5.15 p.m.

The lectures will be complemented by workshops on significant issues of content and methodology, presentations by participants describing their research projects, and discussion seminars. There will be ample time for participants to use the substantial research facilities of Oxford libraries. Since the Seminars are not open to the public, it has been decided to make some of the keynote speakers available to a wider audience through a series of public lectures. Harris Manchester College, with its long history of support for this field, has thus kindly agreed to host a series of public lectures to accompany each summer seminar.

Each public lecture will be preceded by tea at 4.15 p.m. in Harris Manchester College garden, weather permitting, which is open to all of those who wish to attend the lectures.

Week 1, Thursday, 22 July
Science and the Future of Theology - Some Critical Issues
Dr. Arthur Peacocke
Ian Ramsey Centre, Oxford

Week 3, Thursday, 5 August
The Trial of Galileo
Professor Owen Gingerich
Harvard University

Week 2, Thursday, 29 July
God and the Medieval Cosmos
Professor Edward Grant
Indiana University

Week 4, Thursday, 12 August
The Battlefields of Science and Religion Revisited
Professor Ronald L. Numbers
University of Wisconsin, Madison

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Research Projects

Research projects by seminar participants fall broadly into the following areas: current issues in the physical sciences and religion, religion and the life sciences, and ethics and Christianity. The shifting nature of the debate is reflected in projects that deal with the relationship between religion and psychology, neuroscience, information theory and the human genome project. Well-established themes are also represented, such as the anthropic principle, chaos, evolution, Christian ethics and war, quantum theory and free will, the design argument and the theology of nature.

Some project descriptions include:

- **The Behavioral Neuroscience Revolution & Essential Aspects of Personhood**
- **The Historical Impact of Western Christianity in Framing and Answering Scientific Questions**
- **Divine Action in the Natural World**
- **Chaos Theory and Divine Action**
- **Theories of Brain Function and Freedom of Will Debate**
- **Scientists and Evangelicals in a Climate of Cultural Warfare**
- **Ecological Implications of the Sacred**
- **Science in a Postmodern Era**
- **Contemporary Physics and Self-organization Scenarios**
- **The Ethics of Genetic Intervention**
- **The Scholarly Debate Surrounding Creationism and Evolution**

Other more historically oriented topics include scientific negotiations in historical scientific controversies, the infinite in mathematics and theology, Eastern Orthodox perspectives on science and theology, Christian religious beliefs and the interpretation of nature by scientists.

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List of Participants

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Professor of Psychology
Indiana Wesleyan University
(Indiana)

John A. Bloom

Assoc. Professor of Psychology
Wheaton College (Illinois)

Hyung S. Choi

Professor of Mathematical
Physics and
Philosophy of Science
Grand Canyon University
(Arizona)

Edward B. Davis

Professor of the History of Science
Messiah College (Pennsylvania)

Alan John DeWeerd

Assist. Professor, Physics Dept.
University of Redlands (California)

Gerald W. Eichhoefer

Professor of Computer
Science
Greenville College (Illinois)

Rebecca J. Fliestra

Professor, Dept. of Biology
Point Loma Nazarene University
(California)

Karl W. Giberson

Professor of Physics, Director of
General Science
Eastern Nazarene College
(Massachusetts)

Robert George Harnish

Chaplain and Dean of Divinity
New College
Oxford (UK)

John Hart

Professor of Theology, Dept. Chair
Carroll College (Montana)

Peter C. Hill

Professor, Dept. of Psychology
Grove City College (Pennsylvania)

Irmgard K. Howard

Professor of Chemistry
Houghton College (New York)

Michael Newton Keas

Assist. Professor of Natural Science
Oklahoma Baptist University
(Oklahoma)

Jonathan Leech

Professor of Mathematics
Westmont College (California)

Arie Leegwater

Professor of Chemistry
Calvin College (Michigan)

Thomas J. Lindell

Assoc. Head, Dept. of Molecular and
Cellular Biology
University of Arizona (Arizona)

Randy L. Maddox

Paul T. Wells Professor of Wesleyan
Theology
Seattle Pacific University
(Washington)

Timothy D. Morris

Assoc. Professor of Biology
Covenant College (Georgia)

Alexei V. Nesteruk
Senior Lecturer, School of Computer
Science and Mathematics
University of Portsmouth (UK)

Alan Padgett
Professor of Theology and
Philosophy
of Science
Azusa Pacific University (California)

Stephen J. Pope
Assoc. Professor, Theology Dept.
Boston College (Massachusetts)

Dennis Temple
Professor, Dept. of Philosophy
Roosevelt University (Illinois)

Donald A. Yerxa
Professor of History
Eastern Nazarene College
(Massachusetts)

Wayne D. Norman
Professor of Psychology
Redeemer College (Ontario,
Canada)

Donald Petcher
Assoc. Professor, Dept. of Physics
Covenant College (Georgia)

Samuel M. Powell
Professor of Philosophy and Religion,
Dept. Chair
Point Loma Nazarene University
(California)

Henry S. Tillingast, Jr.
Assoc. Professor of Biology, Dept. of
Natural Sciences
Williams Baptist College (Arkansas)

Dean Overman
Winston and Strawn (law firm)
Washington, D.C.

James C. Peterson
C.C. Dickson Assoc.
Professor of
Theology and Ethics
Wingate University (North
Carolina)

Carl Schultz
Professor of Old Testament
Religion
Houghton College (New York)

Jitse M. van der Meer
Full Professor of Biology
Redeemer College (Ontario,
Canada)

Reserve List

John D. Copenhaver, Jr.
Assoc. Professor of Religion
Shenandoah University (Virginia)

David Oakley
Assoc. Professor
Colorado Christian University
(Colorado)

Carol Wayne White
Assist. Professor, Dept. of Religion
Bucknell University (Pennsylvania)

Bruce D. Evans
Assoc. Professor of Biology
Huntington College (Indiana)

Mark S. Railey
Professor of Biology and Chemistry
Azusa Pacific University (California)

Roger H. Kennett
Stroschein Professor and Chair of
Biology
Wheaton College (Illinois)

Victor J. Stenger
Professor of Physics and
Astronomy
University of Hawaii at Manoa
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Professor of Biology and Chemistry
Azusa Pacific University (California)

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Stroschein Professor and Chair of
Biology
Wheaton College (Illinois)

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Professor of Physics and
Astronomy
University of Hawaii at Manoa
(Hawaii)

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Looking Ahead. . .

The experience of the 1999 seminar will undoubtedly be a learning experience for everyone involved and will lead to a fine-tuning of goals, strategies, organization, and even in the content of the research projects themselves. The most challenging and stimulating achievement would be to establish a methodology, or several overlapping methodologies, and a movement of scholarship which would ensure for this project both long-term effectiveness and scholarly respect. We hope that those who are present will develop a sense of participating in a common endeavour, that they will stimulate each other to create a culture of excellence in this field, and that their continuing studies, presentations and publications will have a significant impact on the understanding--and perception--of the relationship between science and religion.

Our next newsletter will contain an account of the summer seminars and planning for the year ahead.

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Contact Information

Dr. John Roche

Project Director

Linacre College

john.roche@Linacre.oxford.ac.uk

Dr. Alister McGrath

Project Director

Principal of Wycliffe Hall

Oxford

alister.mcgrath@wycliffe-hall.oxford.ac.uk

Becca Shopp

Program Associate

Council for Christian Colleges & Universities

329 Eighth Street NE

Washington, DC 20002

(202) 546-8713 FAX: (202) 546-8913

becca@cccu.org