

Report of the Science and Spirituality Work Group

Background

The Work Group on Science and Spirit consists of two segments: a Core group of 9 persons and the Large group, averaging 100 person. The Core are:

Four theologians: John Cobb, Matthew Fox, Peter Hess, and Ted Peters

Five with science backgrounds: Fritjof Capra (physics and systems analysis), Ty Cashman (Philosophy of Science), Stanley Klein (physics and neuroscience), Henry Stapp (physics), Arnie Stoper (psychology)

In addition to email exchanges five of the Core (Klein, Peters, Cashman, Stoper and Cobb(by phone)) met the Saturday before the Conference to plan our sessions.

The population of the large group fluctuated. On Days 1 and 2 more than 200 and 100 people, respectively, were present. Day 3 had a sharp reduction to about 40 people partly because of a changed location. Day 4 was the most productive day with about 25 present.

The daily topics and formats were:

Day 1, All Core members except Hess presented either 5 min overviews of the goals of the work group or 8 min presentations on the topic of approaches for yoking secularism, spiritualism and theism. Presenters took longer than originally scheduled, leaving only about ½ hour for discussions with large group.

Day 2, The theme was the evolution/ID debate. Everyone was amazingly precise in keeping to the 8 min scheduled talk time. We then broke into circles with 8-10 people per group, with most groups having a Core member. Most participants in Days 1 and 2 turned in "red flag" items (on red paper) for words or concepts that pushed strong buttons that made it difficult to take that person seriously. Green sheets were also passed out for "friendly" concepts. The original intention was to collate these ideas and put them on the web for future guidance. However, most were too wordy for easy collation, and they were given to a person who expressed interest in collating the information.

Day 3. The theme was to be presentations by Cashman and Cobb focusing on environmental and sustainability issues that could bind progressives together. However, there was so much desire for the participants to participate that the full 1.5 hours was spent in discussion.

Day 4. The theme was development of action items to be presented to the full conference. These action items are to be input to the next conference to be held in the early 2006 in Washington DC. Five concrete proposals were developed with most having designated persons taking care of individual themes.

Choice of Work Group theme

The Core began with the following theme

What changes are needed in science, holistic spirituality and progressive religion so that these three forces can work closely together in solving critical problems facing humanity in the next 50 years.

Several members of the Large work group proposed including the following theme that seemed to some to be more in accord with the spirit of the Network of Spiritual Progressives, the group sponsoring the conference.

Alternative theme: *What changes are needed in the structure of science to make it fit in with the Progressive Spirituality agenda.* Proposed items included:

- i) Science and engineering societies should develop a "Hippocratic Oath" for scientists and engineers to only use their expertise for the benefit of society and not do research or development on topics that were dangerous for society.
- ii) Science and engineering societies should form work groups to monitor scientific progress on topics of concern to society such as bio-technology, weapons development...
- iii) Improved education at all grade levels to include instruction on the limits to science ethical concerns, spiritual issues.

This topic was proposed on Day 3 and discussed by the full Work Group on Day 4. The group concluded that this proposal would be divisive. The goal of our Work Group was felt to be to develop approaches for solidifying bonds between the world of science and the world of spirituality and religion. Having divisive issues is going in the wrong direction. There are many other progressive science and engineering organizations that should take up the Hippocratic Oath topic. We felt that this suggestion would get in the way of succeeding on the job of yoking science with religion.

Suggestion to next Work Group on this topic for the Washington, DC meeting. We strongly suggest that you avoid any platforms that divide mainstream science into "progressives" and "less than progressives". By and large all of mainstream science and academia are on the politically progressive side. The task before us of getting the secular world to become comfortable with the worldviews of spirituality and progressive religion is plenty daunting. There is little to gain by alienating segments of that group.

Motivation for Work Group:

- i) In the past 30 years the political right and the religious right have formed a powerful alliance, visible in the last two national elections and in the present battles in the school boards of America where the teaching of evolution in high school biology is being weakened. Political and religious progressives need to form a similar alliance.
- ii) In order to stand up against the powerful religious/political right a powerful progressive Christian force is needed. Progressive Christianity is presently weak and meek partly because the atheist secular world of academia seduces young progressives away from the church of their parents. The

Science and Spirit Work Group seek to develop plans for educating secular academics that the metaphoric theology of progressive theists is 99% metaphor and myth and not repulsive. In fact, the myths of progressive theists are supportive of the visions of most academics.

iii) Ty Cashman sent the following email to the Work Group and it provides further motivation for our Work Group:

" This nation and the world are facing what could be a convergence of catastrophes in the next 10, at most 20 years: The end of affordable oil, with massive economic repercussions. The loss of checks and balances in the American government, with very large political repercussions worldwide. A probably growing tide of Islamic suicide bombers, perhaps soon with nuclear capability. Massive extinction of species. Destabilization of climate. These are just the big ones. And they will most likely interrelate synergistically, unfortunately.

There are deep religious and scientific issues buried in these trends. There was never a need for them to get this bad, any of them. It was a failure to respond to good science, science that predicted them long enough ahead of time that mitigation efforts could have been fairly successful. That failure to respond was rooted in the moral culture of our nation, which is the business of religion in a nation as religious as ours.

Somewhere in here are the issues of science and religion we need to look at together this week. It seems with this large audience that we have the opportunity to speak to the even larger vision of creating a national movement."

iv) Finally all of the above motivations are summarized in Einstein's famous quote:

***Religion without science is blind
Science without religion is lame***

Two questions defining our Work Group

How can a partnership between mainstream science, holistic spirituality and progressive religion strengthen public commitment to values such as:

- planetary sustainability
- global peace
- economic, gender and racial justice
- economic, gender and racial equality
- and....?

What action items are needed to facilitate the above partnership?

Action items:

We propose forming five InterimWork Groups whose output would be sent to the Washington D.C Science & Spirit Work Group. Once the Washington Work Group is organized they should get involved with the Interim Group. Several individuals have volunteered to lead these groups as indicated below. However, the some of the language and focus of the groups has changed, two of the groups have been merged. So before the email addresses are posted on the web we would like to have confirmation that these individuals are still happy to take on the leadership of the group.

1) Interim Work Group on Science and Spirit dialog and how to put the internet to best use for our purposes. After Friday's session I had a long discussion with Bruce Schuman who has put together a pretty amazing web site on interfaith networking. I'll CC this to him. You may want to visit <http://www.origin.org/ucs/> to get a glimpse of what he is up to.

2) Interim Work Group on evolution. Stan Klein can be temporary contact person. The group would produce a carefully worded statement regarding evolution that will satisfy progressive theologians and mainstream biologists. The Work Group would include at least one leading biologist and one leading theologian. The statement should provide sufficient details on the variation part of the evolutionary process to be unambiguous about the words "random" and "purpose". Maybe those two words wouldn't be used. It seems that God/ID/ET intervention is needed to increase the probabilities of multiple variations coming about at the same time. So it is a mathematical calculation rather than a measurement of purpose. Clarifying this point would be helpful. If the word "purpose" is definitely needed for theology/spirituality, it should be definable in a way that can satisfy biologists. For example, one could have a paragraph on the power of myth and metaphor including a pointer to a discussion of how quantum physics has a mythic/metaphoric underpinning. The new understanding of emergence and systems theory needs to become widespread.

3) Interim Work Group on a sustainable, eco-sensitive future. There seems to be general agreement on the broad goals of this topic: less consumerism, greater expenditure of funds for incentives for renewable energy and conservation. This work group should not only include environmentalists and theologians, but also political scientists and sociologists to develop plans for how to make this an issue of the masses. The work group's goal would be to prioritize issues that theologians and leaders of spirituality movements should focus on.

We also proposed a work group to advocate NIH & NSF to develop programs for funding eco-sensitive and socially conscious research. This would include studies on who neuroscience could be improperly used say for brainwashing or torture.

This group would also advocate the creation of an national agency for evaluating old and new technologies and products. It could be a resurrection of the Office of Technology Assessment.

It makes great sense for Ron Keeney and Greg Keaton to contact their counterparts of the Berkeley Work Group D: Environmental Policy, Sacred Stewardship of the Earth.

4) Interim Work Group on a science/religion dictionary red-flag glossary. We need to develop a

dictionary to help our three constituent groups: secularism, theism, spirituality do the needed translations of some critical words: reductionism, materialism, God, soul, purpose. We need a multiplicity of clarifications of these words, a subset of which are not offensive to the other groups.

5) Develop a Office of Science Assessment. This is similar in scope to the OTA (technology rather than science). This office would assess the relevance of different scientific developments for theologians. It would be similar to the Vatican Pontifical Academy of Sciences that gives advice to the pope.

6) Work Group on developing ontological bases for connecting science and theology.

This would be an autonomous Work Group because it requires special people. The Washington Science & Spirit planners may or may not want to include some aspect of this work group in their plans.

A) Whitehead and Process Theology need to be brought up to date to make close connections with modern quantum mechanics. Of our Work Group Stapp and Cobb could be core members. I could help organize it.

B) Emergence and theology. Cashman and Clayton would be good on this.