



# the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

## WHICH SCIENCE? WHICH DIALOGUE?

*Christopher B. Kaiser  
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Scientists do it. Theologians do it. Even a few theological seminaries do it! "God talk" is now back in vogue, and dialog between science and theology is the name of the game. I am writing this brief note to share with readers an overview of current developments in this growing field. The purpose is partly to demonstrate the remarkable vitality of this emerging field and partly to help you sort out your options if you are interested in joining.

The 1996 *Who's Who in Theology and Science*, compiled by the John Templeton Foundation, lists a hundred professional organizations devoted to various aspects of science and theology. Many of these are regional

and/or quite specialized. Among the more comprehensive ones that have a continent-wide membership are:

once a year.

The Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics

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ASA: The American Scientific Affiliation is open to all those interested in modern science who share its evangelical statement of faith. The ASA attempts to be inclusive of Christian scientists leaning toward creationist as well as evolutionist positions.

IRAS: The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science, based in Chicago, gets more deeply into process theology. Its members often look to evolutionary theory as a paradigm for all knowledge.

ITEST: The Institute for a Theological Encounter with Science and Technology is centered in St. Louis, Missouri and Jesuit in origin, but includes members of many different denominations. It covers a range of issues but specializes in the issues of modern technology and the ethical problems it raises. Proceedings of their workshops are published at least

encourages discussion of issues in medical ethics with respect to religious faith.

In addition to these membership-based organizations, the Templeton Foundation has made a major commitment to encourage the discussion of

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spiritual issues among scientists and scientific issues among people of religion. Among the projects are the annual Templeton Prize, often awarded to a contributor in the field of science and/or theology, the sponsorship of conferences and workshops, sponsorship of special Templeton lecturers at colleges and universities, the exploration of the spiritual aspects of medicine, the publication of papers in science-faith issues, and the teaching of courses in colleges and universities.

There are several important regional centers for science and theology studies. Usually associated with a college or university, these centers promote scholarship, support lectureships, and host major conferences on science and theology issues. Among them:

**CCRS:** The Chicago Center for Religion and Science is affiliated with the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. It has an excellent lecture series every year on topics ranging from cosmology to ethics.

The Center for Faith and Science Exchange is an inter-religious, ecumenical organization dedicated to promoting discussion of science and faith issues in churches and schools in the Boston area. It is associated with the Boston Theological Institute.

**CTI:** The Center for Theological Inquiry in Princeton is the theological equivalent of the Center for Advanced Studies. It hosts a small number of Christian scholars, some of whom focus on science and theology issues, and it has hosted several important consultations on science and theology.

**CTNS:** The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences is based in Berkeley and associated with the Graduate Theological Union. It specializes in issues of physics and theology. Presently the CTNS is sponsoring several major consultations of scientists and theologians with support from the Templeton Foundation

The Pascal Centre is associated with Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario. Like Redeemer College, the

Centre is inspired by a distinctively Reformed worldview, but it hosts a variety of scholars and speakers on issues of pure science.

America's largest organization of professional scientists, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is developing a science and religion dialogue in association with its highly publicized annual meetings with the aid of Templeton funding.

There are also denominational work groups in the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Canada, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. An Ecumenical Round Table on Science, Technology, and the Church serves as an umbrella organization in which delegates from each of these denominational workgroups come together annually for the purpose of promoting interest in science and theology issues in the churches.

There are at least a dozen periodicals on "science and theology"

published in the USA alone. Among the ones with which I am familiar are the following:

*CTNS Bulletin* is a periodical of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences. It now carries major articles on issues of science and faith with a focus on physics and a strong theological stance.

*Covaleance* is the bulletin of the Ecumenical Roundtable on Science, Technology, and the Church. Its focus is on issues that are being discussed in the churches.

*F&SE Notices* is a newsletter published by the Center for Faith and Science Exchange. It keeps its readers informed about lectures and courses on science and theology open to the public in the Boston area.

*Insights* is the magazine of the Chicago Center for Religion and Science. It carries schedules of lectures at the CCRS and often has excellent reviews of the process of evolution and its theological implications.

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## **The Gospel and Our Culture Newsletter**

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## Book Review

# *VIRTUAL FAITH: THE IRREVERENT SPIRITUAL QUEST OF GENERATION X*

By Tom Beaudoin. Jossey Bass Publishers, 1998; 210 pp., hardcover, \$22

Reviewed by Jeff Van Kooten  
The Outpost  
Denver, Colorado

If you want to know about water, don't ask a fish. That Chinese proverb makes the assumption that any knowledge of an environment from an insider's point of view is moot apart from a counter perspective to bring insights. The same challenge can hold true in understanding the uniqueness of Generation X. As a generation steeped in popular culture, it would seem impossible for any fellow Gen Xer to understand the spiritual quest within that populace by any member of that generation. Yet Gen Xer theologian Tom Beaudoin masterfully rises above the tide of popular culture long enough for us to catch our breath before diving back down through the turbulence with spiritual insights that infuse meaning to a generation in search of its soul.

This is a unique book. Exploring fashion, music videos, and cyberspace, Tom Beaudoin crafts a Gen X theology markedly different from previous generations but no less poignant or profound. He calls Generation X's lived theology an "irreverent spirituality" which orbits around four primary themes: Suspicion of Institutions; Importance of Experience; Relevance of Suffering; and the Centrality of Ambiguity. All four themes must not be ignored by the church as it strives to participate in the mission of the triune God within the setting of popular culture and this unique group. In fact, Tom Beaudoin contributes practical suggestions on bridging the irreverence of this generation with the reality of the institutional church.

This is an ambitious book. What makes it tough for the medium of popular culture to convey any permanence of meaning is that it can easily become a landfill which begins to accumulate and is spread thinner and thinner to cover a bigger field. That is, not everything in popular culture has to have deep religious undercurrents no matter how irreverent. I felt as if the author stretched himself too far at times to squeeze profound spiritual meaning out of some popular culture examples.

This is an important book. As the author states, and with this I agree, this generation is already theological by virtue of its popular culture. God talk is already loose in the culture. As a Network in North America, we must not lose sight of the interaction between the gospel and popular culture as it emerges upon the horizon of the church through the irreverence of this generation.

As a member of Generation X and a missional church planter, I value the insights and welcome the theological conversation with popular culture. I agree wholeheartedly with Harvey Cox in the introduction, "Beaudoin enables the reader to peer into a reality that is both religious and secular, both outrageous and touching, both postmodern and—in its own odd way—very traditional. If he is wrong, he is fascinatingly and brilliantly wrong, and no reader will regret taking this trip through the various layers of our contemporary divine comedy with him as their Virgil."

### **LIVING GOSPEL**

*A consultation engaging the work of the GOCN  
Hearing the Gospel Today team.*

*October 22-24, 1998*

*Techny, Illinois*

*Registration information may be obtained  
from the GOCN office.*

*The Journal of Faith and Science Exchange* is a newcomer to the field. Presently it is devoted to award-winning essays sponsored by the Templeton Foundation.

*The Pascal Centre Notebook* keeps its readers informed of research and conferences at the Pascal Centre in Ancaster, Ontario.

*Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* is the journal of the ASA, and is received by all members, but is also carried by most theological libraries. *Perspectives* carries excellent articles and book reviews covering all aspects of science and faith.

*Progress in Theology* keeps people informed of the Templeton Foundation projects. The “Readers Supplement” provides abstracts of award-winning papers in science and theology. Both newsletters are sent free of charge to interested persons.

*Science & Spirit* provides notices of major events and publications in science and theology and also has helpful review articles. It has historical ties with the IRAS.

*Second Opinion*, published by the Park Ridge Center deals with the complexities of modern health care in a faith context.

*Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* is the official journal of IRAS, but is also carried by major university and seminary libraries. It often has helpful review articles and a “Teachers File” that cover current issues or recent books.

So you will be hearing a lot about “science and theology.” If you have been around for a while, you may be surprised (and delighted as I am) to see a remarkable change in the media on this topic. So perhaps it is time to take stock and try to develop a map to the discussion.

There are at least six broad areas that fit under the umbrella of “science and theology”:

1. A major part of the discussion is devoted to the **natural sciences**: physics, cosmology, and the life sciences. Questions like the origin of the universe, the origin of life, and the process of evolution will be

familiar to readers. They interact primarily with theology in the sense of doctrine. For example, how does the cosmologist’s view of the universe relate to the doctrine of creation?

Among the professional organizations listed above, consider especially the ASA, the CCRS, the CTNS, and the IRAS.

2. Then there are the **medical sciences** and the moral issues they raise. These often relate to theological ethics. Among the professional organizations listed above, consider especially ITEST and the Park Ridge Center.

3. The **cognitive sciences** raise questions about the nature of humanity (particularly human intelligence) on the one hand, and the nature of machines (artificial intelligence) on the other. Among the professional organizations listed above, consider especially the ASA, the CCRS, and the IRAS.

4. The rapid development of **technology** is another topic with obvious implications for theology and ethics. Communications and computer technologies are of particular interest in our present era of globalization. Ecology and stewardship of the environment are another area of interest. These relate to church and society. Among the professional organizations listed above, consider especially the ASA and ITEST.

5. Less known, but no less significant for theology, are what is known as **science studies**. These include the history of science, comparative science, the sociology of science, and even more refined areas like the historical sociology and the comparative historical sociology of science. These relate to historical theology and comparative religion. Among the professional organizations listed above, consider especially the ASA: it now has a special commission on the history of science that interfaces with the History of Science Association.

6. The **philosophy of science** is an important discipline dealing with issues of methodology and epistemology in the sciences. These interface

with issues in philosophical theology and the philosophy of religion. Among the professional organizations listed above, consider especially the ASA and CTNS.

I close with a personal note. Thirty years ago when I completed my doctorate in astro-geophysics and entered theological seminary I found that the notion of combining science and theology was almost universally regarded as an esoteric and potentially illegitimate endeavor. There were only a handful of pioneers, people like Ian Barbour, William Pollard, Bernard Ramm, and Thomas Torrance, to give respectability to the subject. Now in addition to the organizations and periodicals listed above there are courses on aspects of science and theology in most major academic institutions and several theological seminaries have positions that include science issues as part of their job descriptions. On a more sober note, there is no accepted definition of just what the field of science and theology is. The plurality of the sciences and science studies, on one side, and the diversity of voices in theology, on the other, make for quite a cacophony of voices. But the field is taking shape, or perhaps a number of shapes as outlined above. And the dialogue is going on. n

*“Faith and Reason,” a one hour program on science and theology, was recently aired on PBS television.*

*Narrated by Margaret Wertheim, it included interviews with numerous scientists and theologians on the variety of themes mapped in Chris Kaiser’s article above. A full transcript of the program and those interviews, along with a guide to many resources in the field, is provided on the PBS website at URL <http://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/>.*

# Empirical Indicators of a 'Missional Church'

*Editor's Note: What follows is part of a working document of the "Developing Congregational Models" Team of the GOCN "Transforming Churches Towards Mission" Project. The team's assignment is to discover and study twelve to fifteen congregations across North America that give a particularly vivid display of the qualities of a "missional church" as that is defined in the book by that title in the Gospel and Our Culture Series published by Eerdmans. In order to identify what such churches would look like-how to know one when you see it-the team has developed a working paper articulating what they are calling "empirical indicators" of such churches. What is presented here is a selected portion of that document, the full version of which is available upon request from the GOCN office.*

*The document is currently being sent to a number of people who are in a position to know churches that illustrate in their life the qualities identified here. These people are being asked to nominate such churches for the team's consideration in their selection of churches to study and highlight in the final publication which will report their work. Readers of the GOCN newsletter are also welcome to suggest churches they believe match the portrait. These can be sent to Team Leader Wally Hobbs in care of the GOCN office.*

The missional church represents God in the encounter between God and human culture. It exists not because of human goals or desires, but as a result of God's creating and saving work in the world. It is a visible manifestation of how the Good News of Jesus Christ is present in human life and transforms human culture to reflect more faithfully God's intentions for creation. It is a community that visibly and effectively participates in God's activity, just as Jesus indicated when he referred to it in metaphorical language as salt, yeast, and light in the world.

The following empirical indicators are an effort to identify what might be some of the key aspects that contribute to the church's unique saltiness and yeasty nature in the varied and diverse worlds within our North American culture today. Twelve indicators are summarized below with a brief description of each.

## 1. The missional church proclaims the Gospel.

What it looks like: *The story of God's salvation is faithfully repeated in a multitude of different ways.*

The community's thought, words, and deeds are being formed into a pattern that proclaims the Gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. As a result, the Good News of God's reign is publicly announced. The proclamation is a "word and deed" proclamation; it is not only audible but visible as well. It is *audible* in a proclamation that focuses not solely upon the salvation of persons, or the transformation of individual human lives, but also the transformation of the church, human communities, and the whole human community, history, and creation in the coming and already present reign of God. It is *visible* in, with, and through the quality of a common life that manifests the unique culture-contrasting good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## 2. The missional church is a community where all members are involved in learning to become disciples of Jesus.

What it looks like: *The disciple identity is held by all; growth in discipleship is expected of all.*

Persons are not expected automatically to know the 'way of doing things in the reign of God.' Citizenship in the reign of God is learned. The learned protocol involves primarily those behaviors and processes that witness to the way of Jesus, who is forming his people for life in the reign of God. The community does not simply rely on 'how we've always done things here,' or 'that's how we Baptists/Lutherans/Presbyterians/Methodists/etc. do it,' or even 'that's how we do it in the company where I work.' Rather, the community seeks critically to integrate already-learned practices with skills and habits of Christian discipleship. This community shows evidence of growing, changing, and deepening the skills and habits of discipleship. Nurturing citizenship in the reign of God is an overall priority of the church for all members of the community of faith.

## 3. The Bible is normative in this church's life.

What it looks like: *The church is reading the Bible together to learn what it can learn no where else – God's good and gracious intent for all creation, the salvation mystery, and the identity and purpose of life together.*

There are two commonly held expectations: that we

will seek to know the Scriptures, and that we will seek to become obedient to the Word which is revealed in the Scriptures. Listening, reading, studying, and obeying the Bible is integral to all of church life, including its worship, spirituality, service, education, stewardship, and witness. The Bible is engaged communally. The overarching approach to Scripture study in the body is not solely ‘personal devotion’ or merely ‘moral guidance,’ but is characterized by the question, ‘What is the text saying to the church which is attempting to be faithful today?’ ‘How does the biblical word prepare God’s people for their mission in this particular place?’

#### **4. The church understands itself as different from the world because of its participation in the life, death, and resurrection of its Lord.**

*What it looks like:* In its corporate life and public witness, the church is consciously seeking to conform to its Lord instead of the multitude of cultures in which it finds itself.

Discipleship requires a willingness to follow the way of the cross and share in the sufferings of Christ. The church is not getting its bearings by the world’s standard of success—institutional status, power, or influence. Rather, it witnesses to the truth of the Gospel that the one on the cross is the way, the truth, and the life for the church. Jesus models what the church is called to be. Thus the church is called to show hard evidence that as a body of people it provides a collective witness to its crucified savior. The church’s distinctive conduct, then, is frequently different from and often in opposition to the world’s patterns of behavior. This is particularly evident when the power of love, service, and sacrifice for one another in the community is contrasted with the powers of hate, violence, and domination in the world.

#### **5. The church seeks to discern God’s specific missional vocation for the entire community and for all of its members.**

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*What it looks like: The church has made its ‘mission’ its priority, and in overt and communal ways is seeking to be and do ‘what God is calling us to know, be, and do.’*

The goal of decision-making is not simply to discover the will of the community, but to discern together the will of God. Because all participants in the body participate in decisions that affect their life and mission together, shared power and influence (rather than status, position, or ‘majority opinion’) are the keys of authority. The need for the gifts and insights of all members to shape and guide a faithful and effective ministry is recognized and emphasized. Mentors, teachers, and partners provide intentional support, challenge, and advice to enable one another to extend these skills and habits and deepen their participation in the life of Christ. Members make efforts to set aside the necessary time to listen, study, share, struggle, pray, and plan together as they search for God’s will and seek to participate in God’s mission. Members pledge to live out together the conclusions they have reached together. Church leadership encourages, guides, teaches, and serves the process of communal discernment through consistently holding the following key questions before the community as they seek together to answer them:

What is God calling us as this church to be and do?

How can we enter more faithfully into the reign of God?

How will we learn from the Bible what it means to be the church?

How will we more faithfully and effectively practice Christian community in our life with one other?

#### **6. A missional community is indicated by how Christians behave toward one another.**

*What it looks like: Acts of self-sacrifice on behalf of one another both in the church and in the locale characterize the generosity of the community.*

The church exhibits the fruits of the Spirit which include (but are not limited to) not thinking more highly of oneself than one ought; valuing the gifts of others; loving one another with mutual affection; eagerness to show the workings of the Spirit; patience in suffering; hospitality to strangers; blessing those who do not understand, or who persecute; associating with the lowly; not repaying evil for evil, but overcoming evil with good; and living peaceably. Acts of generosity are commonplace and self-giving is a behavioral characteristic of this community.

## 7. It is a community that practices reconciliation.

What it looks like: *The church community is moving beyond homogeneity, toward a more heterogeneous community in its racial, ethnic, age, gender and socio-economic make-up.*

The barriers that separate people are identified, addressed, and overcome. Differences and dissension among people are dealt with constructively. Conflict is used to enrich discussion. Evil done within or to the body is overcome by doing good. Healing involves confession to and the forgiveness of one another wherever and whenever wrong exists. This process of healing and reconciliation takes place between individuals and within the body, both of which serve to shape and reform the community as a whole. Society's boundaries are crossed—class, economic status, race, gender, age, occupation, education. Amazingly diverse people allow themselves to be formed by one Lord into one body. Violence is rejected as a method of resolving difference.

## 8. People within the community hold themselves accountable to one another in love.

What it looks like: *Substantial time is spent with one another for the purpose of watching over one another in love.*

They covenant together to uphold and watch over one another in love, praying for one another. They are committed to one another, and that commitment is expressed through collaboration, interdependence of work efforts, and being dependable. People place a high value on sharing a common life and supporting one another.

## 9. The church practices hospitality.

What it looks like: *Welcoming the stranger into the midst of the community plays a central role.*

People are reached and invited into new relationships with God and with one another as the community's intent is to welcome as God welcomes. As a result, people are becoming citizens of God's reign. Having heard and received this invitation themselves, they extend the invitation to others to know and experience God's love.

## 10. Worship is the central act by which the community celebrates with joy and thanksgiving both God's presence and God's promised future.

What it looks like: *There is significant and meaningful engagement in communal worship of God, reflecting appropriately and addressing the culture of those who worship together.*

Worship is the community's action of publicly giving allegiance to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is an act of the whole people of God who remain faithful to tradition while integrating variety which reflects and gives new meaning to the unique cultural context of the congregation. Worship actively engages the community in ways that nurture the dynamic, growing and changing aspects of discipleship in the world. As such, it provides for the incorporation of people into the community of faith, their formation into a new humanity, and their reception of God's gift of sustenance for daily life. Its focus is on celebrating God's presence and promises without seeking or expecting worship to be the occasion for God to meet human needs. The congregation departs from worship, knowing that it is a sent and sending community, and each Christian is conscious of his or her apostolic sentness as light, leaven, and salt in the world.

## 11. This community has a vital public witness.

What it looks like: *The church makes an observable impact that contributes to the transformation of life, society, and human relationships.*

What the community intends to be and do actually does occur, and is confirmed both by those who participate in the community (e.g. 'I have learned here that I can disagree and I don't have to leave') as well as by those who do not, (e.g.. 'Oh, you're the church that always helps clean up after floods and tornadoes'). Like political ambassadors, persons know and can articulate where their allegiance lies. They know and can articulate the nature and expectations of the mission that has been given to them. Its public deeds do not consist of imposing its moral will on others, but of giving hard evidence of the reign of God that intrudes as an alternative vision and practice in the immediate locale and elsewhere.

## 12. There is a recognition that the church itself is an incomplete expression of the reign of God.

What it looks like: *There is a widely held perception that this church is going somewhere—and that somewhere is more faithfully lived life in the reign of God.*

The church has been given the gift of citizenship in the reign of God which it has received less than perfectly. Knowing that the church is as yet a flawed witness to the reign of God, it is open to its own reformation as it continually seeks to provide a more faithful and more effective witness in its changing context. Therefore, the church is constantly critiquing and intentionally reshaping its vision, common life, teaching, organization, obedience, witness, and ministry on the basis of its hearing of the Word of God.



## NETWORKINGS

□ Three new volumes have appeared in the *Christian Mission and Modern Culture Series* published by Trinity Press International. *Living Faithfully in a Fragmented World: Lessons for the Church from MacIntyre's After Virtue*, by Jonathan R. Wilson, describes aspects of contemporary culture that create both opportunities and threats to Christian mission and offers understandings and practices that the church today must embrace in order to live faithfully and witness effectively to the gospel. Gordon Scoville's book *Into the Vacuum: Being the Church in an Age of Barbarism* describes an age that is disintegrating into a moral vacuum from which the only exit is to become the church of committed disciples. The book by James V. Brownson, *Speaking the Truth in Love: New Testament Resources for a Missional Hermeneutic*, asks the question, What does it mean to speak of the gospel as true in a world that declares that religious speech can never be true, but only 'true-for-me'? For an answer, he looks to the way the New Testament writers attempted to interpret the gospel as it crossed cultural boundaries in the diverse contexts of the first century.

□ A recent release from InterVarsity Press opens up the matter of consumerism, which has had such a powerful influence on the faith of Christians in the Western, developed world. Rodney Clapp edited the volume which focuses on consumerism as culture, as a way of life, complete with its set of attitudes, behaviors and purposes for living. The book is entitled *The Consuming Passion: Christianity & the Consumer Culture*.

□ The British and Foreign Bible Society, in conjunction with Churches Together in England, has announced an event designed to challenge the assumption in British society that the story the Bible recounts is no longer relevant to the public debate about what kind of society to create or endorse on the eve of the third millenium. The event is part of the long term aims of the Bible Society's program called The Open Book. The theme for the consultation is "Imagining Tomorrow II: Living in the Story" and it will seek to provide the setting for an interdisciplinary forum to investigate how living in the story of the Judeo-Christian faith impacts upon the policies and values which will shape future public life. The consultation is scheduled for October 21-23, 1998, at Regents College, London.

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