



# Introduction to Papers from the Redeeming Reason II Conference

*Terry Morrison with assistance from John Mulholland*

In Swift Hall on the campus of the University of Chicago, in an ecclesial looking room with a hammered beam ceiling, professors, graduate students and others gathered November 8–10, 2006, to consider Redeeming the Reason employed in “doing” science. Outstanding speakers read papers, answered questions, and spoke “off the cuff” to disturb, to challenge, and to encourage us. The conference was entitled “The Redemption of Reason: Intentional Christian Scholars in Conversation with the Sciences and Scientists Today.” Its purpose was to encourage, equip, and inform Christians in science, and others, about the opportunities to engage in science as service to Jesus Christ, the Lord of science.

This was the second conference in what is hoped will become a long series. The first conference was prompted by a lecture entitled “The Redemption of Reason” given in 1998 by Dallas Willard, professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California. After discovering a tape of this lecture and transcribing it, John Mulholland, formerly a graduate student at the University of Chicago and now working in the law library, shared the lecture with Craig Gartland, then senior InterVarsity (IV) staff and now Midwest Coordinator for IV’s Grad and Faculty Ministry. In turn they discussed the lecture with a professor in their church. All agreed that this lecture was a provocative summary of many issues concerning the Christian faith and the academic enterprise, especially a major secular research university like the University of Chicago. They resolved to invite Prof. Willard to speak on the issues he addressed.

After making a presentation to the IV grad group, John organized a study group of graduate students and IV staff at the university to study Willard’s original lecture and other works Willard cited in that paper and later ones.

In the course of two years of study, they decided to develop a conference to address the many issues and problems Willard presented. [One can read the papers from the first conference held in November 2005, as well as Willard’s lecture at the conference website, [www.redeemingreason.org](http://www.redeemingreason.org), and Willard’s website, <http://dwillard.org>.]

Though they had originally thought only of inviting Willard to speak, and then only of a single conference, it became ever more apparent how much work lies ahead for Christians seeking to be salt and light within their academic disciplines. Mark Noll’s *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* loomed large, as people considered the results of the first conference.

Spurred on by Jeff Hammond, a graduate student in computational chemistry at Chicago who knew Henry “Fritz” Schaefer from professional meetings, John and Jeff set to work to see what could be done by focusing on the sciences. Were there enough major scientists who were also Christians who could help us learn how we might proceed? Would they be willing to attend and speak?

The result of this work was the second conference, “The Redemption of Reason: Intentional Christian Scholars in Conversation with the Sciences and Scientists Today.” We were blessed with presentations from ten major scholars: Cal DeWitt, environmental science (Wisconsin); Ard Louis, biochemistry and physics (Oxford); Ian Hutchinson, nuclear science and engineering (MIT); Alan Padgett, theology (Luther Seminary); Alvin Plantinga, philosophy (Notre Dame); Pattle P. Pun, biology (Wheaton); Patricia Reiff, astronomy and astrophysics (Rice); Henry F. Schaefer III, computational chemistry (Georgia); John Suppe, geology (Princeton); and Donald York, astronomy and astrophysics (Chicago).



**Terry Morrison** received a Ph.D. from Syracuse University. Formerly a professor of chemistry at Butler University, Terry joined the staff of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in 1974 and has held a number of different leadership roles within the organization, the most recent one as the Director of Faculty Ministries since 1990. As of January 2004, Terry became the Director of Faculty Ministries Emeritus. He is an active member of the American Scientific Affiliation, formerly a Board member of the Au Sable Environmental Institute, a Wilberforce Fellow and a participant in many conferences and seminars. Terry has offered courses and talks on various aspects of the university curriculum and life, specializing in science and Christian faith discussions. He lives in Madison, WI with his wife, Shirley. They are the parents of three adult children and two grandchildren.

# Guest Editorial

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Kindly invited by the editor of *PSCF*, we share with you, four of the major papers and a brief summary of the rest. Two of the papers have been reworked and edited from the verbal presentation of the speakers, with their cooperation and permission. Following this introduction you will find the papers of Ian Hutchinson, Pattle Pun, Calvin DeWitt, and Alan Padgett. We hope to publish some of the other papers at a later date. I have included below very brief sketches of these latter papers. I recommend listening to them on the Redeeming Reason Conference website, [www.redeemingreason.org/2006](http://www.redeemingreason.org/2006).

- Dr. Schaefer began the conference by asking the question, is it possible for a scientist to be a Christian? Can a unified worldview encompassing Christianity and other intellectual pursuits be developed? He gave many examples of scientists who have, in fact, developed such a unified worldview. Even the physicist Richard Feynman concluded that a Christian can be a scientist without contradiction.
- Dr. York was interested in the systematics of science, interpreting the world of astronomy, for his examples. He showed us how long a time period is involved in the study of astronomical questions. It turns out that major questions in astronomy are still far from being answered. In fact, he showed us how many discoveries have come from accidental investigations not from existing theory. His visuals were awesome.
- Dr. Suppe intrigued us with the idea of “rich knowledge.” Rich knowledge is obtainable in science when the data lead us deeper into understanding and help us discover unexpected new insights. Just so, God’s revelation and his ongoing relationship with us lead us to new understandings and link together areas of understanding that surprise us.
- Dr. Reiff told us of her research in “space weather,” for instance, the behavior of the Sun, and of her activities as a science educator. She shared with us how she has structured her life as a scientist and as a Christian engaged in public education in science via astronomy. She also had stunningly beautiful planetarium visuals such as a description of the Big Bang, a program she made with the help of Steven Weinberg.
- Dr. Louis talked to us about biological complexity, and how we can think Christianly about it. He discussed the cultural barriers Christians have dealing with this and traced it to what in Noll’s book is called the “populism” of the Christian Church.

Three submitted student papers were presented:

- Mr. John Ferrer read his paper, “Christian Freedom,” in which he attempted to justify and apply the concept of “Christian Freedom” in regards to academia in general and to an academic ministerial calling specifically.

- Mr. Benjamin Ruddell gave a paper entitled “Coming to Grips with Science and Spirituality in America.”

The secularization of the American scientific culture has crystallized and hardened to its current state, such that many contemporary scientists and practitioners are both unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the religious factors in the implications of their work. The result ... is a self-imposed alienation of the scientific community from mainstream spiritual currents and cultures in the USA, which in turn contributes to further mistrust and discomfort with science by the general public.

- Mr. Don Smedley read his paper, “Science and Religion: Some Observations, Opportunities and Obligations.” He gave us an interesting contrast between a 1974 conference he attended as a senior in college that focused on Creation Science and the 2006 Terry lectures at Yale, which were entitled “The Religion and Science Debate: Why Does It Continue?”

The conference organizers want to encourage as many people as possible, in all academic disciplines, to work on the problem of integrating their Christian faith and academic work, redeeming reason (Willard), and becoming faithful scholars (*Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* by Nicholas Wolterstorff, Clarence W. Joldersma, and Gloria Goris Stronks, Eerdmans, 2004). In addition, we want to encourage Christian scholars in all disciplines to organize for support in this important task—join existing organizations or start chapters in your locale. If the Body of Christ is needed for witness and the life of the Church in general, certainly that is true for all of us in the academic world.

As a scientist and the former director of InterVarsity’s faculty ministry and longtime member of ASA, it has been a pleasure to be engaged with Jeff, John, Craig, Loren and Deborah Haarsma (Calvin College), David Cook (Wheaton), and all the others who helped to make this conference a reality and a success, and to join with the speakers to encourage all who read this work to take up the enterprise of redeeming reason in service to and witness for our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. ♦

