



Arie Leegwater

Last Call: Reflections of an Editor

No, this is not the last call at your local pub, much as I delighted in reading Daniel Okrent's recent book, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2011). Rather, as editor of *PSCF*, I need to compose a short opinion piece for each issue. Writing it has been one of the more challenging duties I assumed when becoming editor four years ago. This editorial will be my "last call." Beginning in 2012, James Peterson, Director of the Center for Religion and Society at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, presently one of our book review editors, will become the new editor of *PSCF*. Perhaps this period of transition is a good occasion to analyze and reflect on some of my experiences as editor of a journal dealing with "perspectives on science and Christian faith."

One thing I learned is that the avowed goal of "the integration of science and religion" has become a tired cliché or a seemingly impossible aspiration for many. Frequently in our analysis, we identify science with its findings, conclusions, and products, and religion with theology. As a consequence, we often negate or neglect the cultural imbeddedness of both science and theology. Connecting theology and science can then all too easily become an arid conceptual exercise which neglects or negates the social, philosophical, and historical contexts. By taking such an approach, we undercut the very idea of Christian scholarship as well as any sense of solidarity that we may have with others who do not share our take on the world. As I have argued before, we tend to settle too quickly for c-words: contrast, conflict, complementarity, convergence, etc., when the operative norm is integrality.

A second matter, which I often shared with inquiring authors, is, what criteria make for a good submission? Besides issues of style, length, fit, and grammar, the chief criteria in evaluating manuscripts were the following: Is the article well argued

(does it flow so to speak) and well documented? Is it fair in its treatment of a particular theory and its advocates? Does the article provide some fresh new elements and perspectives of interpretation? Does it advance Christian reflection on the subject? More germane, do the authors adequately describe or assess the theological, philosophical, and cultural backgrounds? Does the article adequately reflect the extant literature or engage sources in a critical way? All too often the theological reflection presented was added to an article as an after- or forethought, but was not integral to, nor did it sustain, the argument in the paper.

One goal I advanced – perhaps unsuccessfully – was to generate a balanced discussion of controversial issues, a balance that reflected responsible scholarly work and advanced the cause of Christian scholarship. Editors are always keen to solicit mature articles that give evidence of solid Christian engagement with, and reflection on, current discussions occurring in the evangelical and secular communities. Articles that aim to challenge received positions, for example, the easy acceptance of complementary arguments and analogical arguments in faith/science discussions, or a facile realism (as if nothing can be gleaned from current discussions of postmodernism) were welcomed. The challenge of Christian scholarship has a dual nature: one side is more internal and radical, namely, to have a distinctive voice, while working out of a tradition, without becoming insular; the other side is more external and pluralistic, namely, not to accede to the idea that Christian scholarship is characterized as a value-added interpretation to a more or less commonly accepted set of facts or realities, or, at best, one of many interpretative slants on an issue. Christian scholarship has a "bite" to it. It rests on well-grounded and warranted beliefs, but it also requires engagement with others in interpreting, understanding and shaping the common world we live in.

Editorial

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Surveying the past four years of *PSCF*, many submitted articles were devoted to questions of origins, flood geology, or biblical “numerology,” often promoting a concordistic reading of science and the scriptures. I continue to hold that if ASA wishes to speak to and attract newly minted Christian scientists and engineers, we need to continually tackle current issues dealing with the environment, climate change, gene therapy, agricultural practices, and biotechnology. Doing this will also make the journal more credible in the eyes of the “secular” community. Another factor, which the journal needs to continue to nurture, is historical memory – an important ingredient in the exercise of Christian scholarship. We need to realize that we are in this venture for the long haul, and the Christian community has done much reflection on these issues throughout history. And we can learn from history if we read it aright. The past is not dead, for God speaks through the “remembered past.” The overriding challenge is to keep the Christian tradition alive and vibrant in its scholarly pursuits without turning on itself, constantly keeping its face open to the world. In short, I think that we have to become far less defensive and apologetic about our Christian stance and become far more positive, showing how we as Christians, in all our weakness, address problems which we share with others as God’s fellow creatures.

As I turn over the task of being editor to Jim Peterson, I wish him every success with the sure confidence that with the good help of our new cohort of book review editors and professional referees, ASA members can look forward to being challenged and informed when reading upcoming issues of *PSCF*. Deep thanks and appreciation goes to Lyn Berg (managing editor) and Esther Martin (manuscript editor) who kept me on the straight and narrow, by catching and correcting my numerous editorial errors. Their work is of invaluable editorial service to *PSCF*. In addition, the strong support of ASA Executive Director Randy Isaac, as well as the editorial board of *PSCF*, has made my work as editor that much easier.

Allow me, in closing, to offer a final thought: recently, while listening to a reading of the book of Ecclesiastes in eight different voices [translated by Calvin Seerveld], I was reminded once again of the comfort that undergirds all our work. There may be

a time to go and a time to stay. And casting your bread upon the waters may indeed mean that you will not experience an immediate tangible return, for what works or will work is not within one’s grasp. But there is hope found in Eccles. 3:15, “Whatever is and will be has already been: God picks up the pieces.” *Oant sjen!*

Arie Leegwater, *Editor*
leeg@calvin.edu



In This Issue

This special theme issue has a triptych arrangement. The first panel has three articles devoted to a thorny topic: information, intelligence and origins. I owe a debt of gratitude to Randy Isaac who spearheaded the effort of soliciting these articles, written by scientists representing three different disciplines: Randy Isaac (physicist, ASA), Jonathan Watts (biochemist, University of Texas, Southwestern Medical Center) and Stephen Freeland (astrobiologist, University of Hawaii). The nature of information, its generation, and biological consequences are central issues in the current debates about origins.

In the second panel, we have an article by Janet Warren (MD and doctoral candidate, University of Birmingham, UK) exploring how chaos and chaos-complexity theory may help us better understand demonology.

The third panel has an extensive book review section and two letters to the editor. All three of these panels, each in its own way, reflect a diversity of interests and concerns that continue to exercise ASA members.

A final word: My departure from *PSCF* will be somewhat gradual. I will continue to function as one of four book review editors for *PSCF*. In addition, Jack Swearingen and I will serve as co-editors of the articles in the special theme issue on “Responsible Technology and Issues of Faith” slated for March 2012.

Arie Leegwater, *Editor*
leeg@calvin.edu

