



James C. Peterson

# Writing for an Interdisciplinary Journal

Not many of us can be Alister McGrath with an earned doctorate from Oxford in molecular biophysics and another earned doctorate from Oxford in theology. Nor can many of us be Denis Lamoureux with a doctorate in dentistry, a PhD in developmental/evolutionary biology, and a third doctorate in theology. Yet even McGrath has not turned his prolific writing to molecular biophysics for some time now, nor is Lamoureux keeping up his dental practice. To master any *one* field and stay at the lead of it is quite an accomplishment and as demanding as most of us can hope to achieve.

Now we might be quite cognizant of a field other than our own. Our journal was created to encourage such dialogue. Yet the specialist has sensitivities, precision, and insights that are difficult to master in more than one area of study. Even within one department, the work of a geneticist in population behaviors might seem incomprehensible to a geneticist who focuses on the molecular level. An astrophysicist might wonder at the byways of a string theorist in her own physics department. This is not a council of despair for intradisciplinary, let alone interdisciplinary work; rather, it is a recognition that most of us mortals need a team to be effective in writing at the highest level when more than one field is under consideration. Since the mission of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* is to move forward the understanding of the interaction of science and Christian faith, its articles will usually require knowledgeable discussion across classic disciplinary lines. Cosmologists will talk with theologians. Biblical scholars will listen to social historians. Multiple authors working together can meet some of those expertise needs as an article first takes shape.

Now blind peer review for this journal does not require that the author has one doctorate, let alone two or more to write an article. Yet any article peer reviewed for *PSCF* will be read by experts in each of

the fields an article primarily addresses. Such review has avoided many a blindsided blunder and has often added insightful cross-fertilization. The article that reaches publication is then read in the journal by experts in even more impinging fields of study. A given article is off to the best start toward meeting those multiple and exacting standards if it is originally written by experts in each of the primarily involved fields.

Further, concerning the review process, review is by peers who do not know if there is one or more authors; therefore, no manuscript is excluded due to the number of writers. Fine articles have graced our pages from single pens, but it is to the advantage of the writers, peer reviewers, editor, and journal readers that the multiplicity of disciplines addressed is mastered as early in the process as possible. Teaming authors with different expertise can help that process. The dialogue is likely to be more nuanced, the understanding more complete, the argument more compelling. Once published, challenge and insight will increase as yet more disciplines come to consider its contribution. That is most well founded, when the relevant disciplines have a voice from the start.

Of course, part of what makes such cooperation difficult is that our academic preparation rewards individual effort and accomplishment. An academic degree bears just one name as a reward for long solitary hours. Introverts who are refreshed by quiet reflection are well suited to the task and dominate the resulting professions. Working with a team might be outside one's usual comfort zone and that is multiplied when the team is cross-disciplinary. Understanding each other can be elusive as jargons clash. The involved fields might feel incommensurable. Writing by committee can be a miserable experience if energy is drained in constant compromise until no one recognizes, in the developing

# Editorial

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manuscript, anything in particular that any one author wanted to say.

However, making the effort to cooperate can build insightful, indeed exciting synergism. We are not alone in finding the character necessary to do it. The lists of virtues in the New Testament are mostly of *community* virtues, qualities that help us to live and work well with each other. Colossians 3:12 reads, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience." Indeed the presence of God is described as most evident in those who live the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22). These are not bad characteristics to find in a research partner, or in oneself, by God's grace, for any cooperative endeavor. For success in the work we do in *PSCF*, expectant prayer for such godly characteristics for each member of the team,

can be as crucial as academic rigor. "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21).

Again, in our peer-review system, single authors are welcome and are evaluated in the same way as teams of authors. But it is not surprising for interdisciplinary work, that well-developed teams are disproportionately successful in achieving the thorough accuracy and nuance that is required when working with multiple disciplines. ASA/CSCA is a community in which not only task friendships are established, but also personal and lasting friendships. We are in this endeavor together. When you write for *PSCF*, please consider the possibility of teamwork from the beginning, seeking out those you might work with to the benefit of our readers and the larger kingdom.

James C. Peterson, *Editor*

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## A Physics Challenge

Science is constantly moving. **Robert Mann**, professor of physics at the University of Waterloo and former president of both the Canadian Association of Physicists and the Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation, has written an intriguing description of the latest developments in physics along with insights and challenges that these may raise for Christian faith. It can be read at [www.ASA3.org](http://www.ASA3.org) or [www.CSCA.ca](http://www.CSCA.ca).

This article is intended as an invitation. Readers are encouraged to take up one of the insights or challenges, or maybe a related one that was not mentioned, and draft an article (typically about 5,000 words) that contributes to the conversation. These can be sent to Mann at [robertbmann@sympatico.ca](mailto:robertbmann@sympatico.ca). He will send the best essays on to peer review, and then from those we will select some for publication in a physics theme issue of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*. For full consideration for inclusion in the theme issue, manuscripts should be received by Mann electronically before December 31, 2012.