

## Article

### *Twenty-Five ASA Fellows and Editors Tell of PSCF Articles That Changed Their Lives*

However, the more I studied biology and geology in college, the more I became convinced that living things had a long, complex history on this planet. As I explored these scientific ideas, my professors at Calvin College (now Calvin University) also helped me to see that this did not necessitate a loss of faith—that I could continue to be a strong, committed Christian, even as I studied evolution.

But as I began to intentionally integrate my faith and scientific studies, I began to encounter difficult biblical and theological questions that I was not quite sure how to deal with. My professors were immensely helpful as I thought about these issues, and one of them steered me toward *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*. I found the section in the library where back issues of the journal were shelved, and I spent countless hours poring through articles related to evolution and Christianity. These articles helped me to see that I was not alone in having these hard questions—that, in fact, many Christians were thinking through some of the same things that I was, which was an immense encouragement to me as I graduated from Calvin and went on to do a PhD at the University of Michigan.

During my first year as a graduate student in paleontology, I joined the American Scientific Affiliation as a student member and attended my first ASA meeting. I looked forward to each issue of *PSCF* that arrived in my mailbox, and I can honestly say that the ASA and *PSCF* were helping my faith to continue growing alongside my development as a scientist. But that did not mean all of my questions went away. In fact, some of them even became more acute, particularly questions related to the predation, death, and extinction that were so evident in the fossil record. How could those things be part of a God-ordained and God-sustained process? These questions nagged at me as I completed my dissertation and prepared for my first faculty position, but I simply had not had the time or space to devote as much careful thought to these questions as they deserved.

It is in this context that I remember receiving the June 2011 issue of *PSCF*. I had just defended my dissertation, my wife was pregnant with our oldest son, and we were preparing to move to Illinois. Despite all the busyness, I couldn't help but flip through *PSCF* when it arrived. There I found an article from Keith Miller called "'And God Saw That It Was Good': Death and

Pain in the Created Order." Keith's earlier work had been very helpful to me in my undergraduate years as I wrestled with the compatibility of evolution and Christianity, and I remember having a brief (but very encouraging) conversation with him at the first ASA meeting I attended. I knew that he had spent a lot of time wrestling with many of the same questions that I had, and in this piece, I encountered such thoughtful engagement with several immensely difficult questions related to the goodness of creation, the effects of sin, and the roles of pain and death in God's creation.

Over the years, I have thought about these questions fairly often, and I even had the chance to explore these issues more deeply through a program sponsored by Scholarship and Christianity in Oxford back in 2018–2019. I have lost count of how many times I have returned to Keith's article to refresh my memory on some of its most salient points, but even as I read it today, with some questions answered to my satisfaction and some that may never have explanations on this side of eternity, I see this piece as a resplendent example of what Christian scholarship can be: careful, thoughtful, and humble, yet courageous in engaging with some of the most difficult questions that Christians can ask.

In its 75 years of publication, *PSCF* has published so many examples of this kind of scholarship; I look forward to what will come in the next 75 years. I imagine that I will continue to find articles from issue to issue that clarify things for me, stretch me, and invite me to consider various topics in new ways. But I also know that there are all kinds of questions that we haven't even thought about yet, and I cannot wait to see what the next generation of Christian scholars has to teach us through the pages of *PSCF*.

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## 2011

ARIE LEEGWATER, "A Brief Excursion in Chemistry: 'God-Talk' in Chemistry?," *PSCF* 63, no. 3 (2011): 145–46.

The challenge that I found most perplexing, when I began my career as a chemistry faculty member at a Christian college, was that of how to "integrate"

my Christian faith into my teaching. The issue wasn't so much that there wasn't a connection between Christianity and chemistry. Rather, it was that the resources I found assumed that chemistry was either unimportant or only useful as a resource for apologetics. This contrasted sharply with my own perception of chemistry as a rich source of insight into how the world works; a resource that contributes to human welfare in ways that reflect Jesus's teachings about what humans are called to do. Chemists produce medicines, polymers, and biochemical knowledge to heal the sick; fertilizers and other agricultural chemicals to feed the hungry; solar energy and green chemistry technologies to care for the environment; and a myriad of synthetic and semisynthetic materials that are used to clothe, house, and feed the needy. Further, chemists sometimes have to navigate problems such as pollution, toxicity, climate change, and disease in the course of their work, which call for wise Christian discernment.

Arie Leegwater's September 2011 editorial, "A Brief Excursion in Chemistry: 'God-Talk' in Chemistry?," helped enlarge my understanding of science and faith to include more of what chemists do. Building on the work of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger and twentieth-century historians of science, and elucidating factors which shaped science's development, Leegwater suggested that scientists' religious beliefs and commitments (which all scientists possess, whether theistic or not) are evident in what scientists do. In other words, a perspective on science does not just involve questions of ethics and the compatibility of propositional truths, it also takes place through the "problems [scientists choose], how they are formulated, the experimental evidence marshaled, and [how theories are perceived]."

Although Leegwater did not say so directly, his examples suggest that chemists' "God-talk" also includes their scientific efforts to benefit humanity, navigate tradeoffs associated with chemical hazards, and shape the character of their communities. Each of the chemists he discussed was both a scientific pioneer and an activist who sought to align human society with his vision of the good. The physicalist Wilhelm Ostwald led the German Monist League and promoted the renunciation of church membership; the secular humanist Linus Pauling became an antinuclear peace activist; the devoutly Methodist Charles Coulson conscientiously objected to war

research, served as a lay minister, cultivated scientific talent in the developing world, and served as president of the poverty-relief charity Oxfam.

Subsequently, I discovered that Leegwater's point was somewhat foreshadowed by Willem Drees's earlier suggestion that science and religion relate along more dimensions than the propositional, cognitive, and ethical (*Religion, Science, and Naturalism* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996]). It was also echoed and amplified by Peter Harrison's 2011 Gifford Lectures, in which Harrison demonstrates objective and propositional understandings of "religion" to be a product of the Enlightenment that distorts. To help ensure that our perspectives represent science and Christian faith well, we might take Leegwater's editorial to heart.

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## 2012, 2019, 2020, 2013

**Theme issues: Responsible Technology, PSCF 64, no. 1 (2012); Artificial Intelligence, PSCF 71, no. 2 (2019); Transhumanism PSCF 72, no. 2 (2020); and JAMES K. A. SMITH, "Science and Religion Take Practice: Engaging Science as Culture," PSCF 65, no. 1 (2013): 3-9.**

I recall when I first encountered *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* as a young professor. I had observed that integrating faith and technology was not trivial, and that it was sometimes done in a shallow and unconvincing manner. But *PSCF* provided evidence that Christian scholarship in science and technology could be done in a deep and thoughtful way.

Some *PSCF* articles that stand out to me are the ones found in special issues dealing with technology, specifically the issues on Responsible Technology (March 2012), Artificial Intelligence (June 2019), and Transhumanism (June 2020). An example of one such article is by David Winyard titled "Transhumanism: Christian Destiny or Distraction?" I found this article an important corrective to recent voices that seek to place transhumanism within a Christian context. I am grateful that the mission of ASA and *PSCF* includes engaging topics in computer science,