

# Article

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

engineering, and technology for those of us working in those disciplines.

Another article that stands out to me is one by my colleague, philosopher Jamie Smith, who wrote an article titled “Science and Religion Take Practice: Engaging Science as Culture” (*PSCF* 65, no. 1 [2013]: 3-9). In this paper, Smith makes the crucial point that science is a human cultural activity with important implications for the dialogue between faith and science.

I do not always agree with the articles I read in *PSCF*. Even so, I appreciate how the very title of the journal captures a form of intellectual humility. It is not *The Perspective on Science and Christian Faith*, but rather *Perspectives* (plural) on Science and Christian Faith. The journal exhibits “faith seeking understanding” and provides a forum for Christian scholars to humbly interact and sharpen each other, as iron sharpens iron (Prov. 27:17).

May *PSCF* continue to serve the ongoing dialogue about faith and science—as well as technology, modelling both intellectual rigor and humility, for many more years to come.

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## 2013

**HEATHER LOOY, “Psychology at the Theological Frontiers,” *PSCF* 65, no. 3 (2013): 147-55.**

With increasing frequency, my conversations with colleagues turn to recent studies illuminating the magnitude of the mental health crises facing Americans, especially students. Although my stripes as a psychologist are as a researcher, not a mental health care professional, I engage these conversations within the broader academic discipline of psychology, a field within which promised solutions to these mental health problems lie. Admonitions to improve mental health with self-care or mindfulness abound; moving beyond pop psychology deepens and nuances these admonitions in ways that highlight well-researched pathways toward (and away from) mental wellness. Yet, the question remains: with all

we know about mental health, why can we not seem to do anything to improve it for more people in more places?

Although the cultural and educational landscapes seem different than in 2013 when Heather Looy published “Psychology at the Theological Frontiers,” I find myself bemusing the reality that her argument is fundamental to this question. She critiques psychology’s penchant for *bad reductionism*, an assumption that the answer to a specific empirical question is a complete articulation of all that is important. She underscores the position that knowledge, like the people who generate it, is situated and embedded within contexts and cultures that shape the production, interpretation, and meaning of that knowledge. She asks how we can engage biological mechanisms without reducing individuals to their biology—or even to an overly atomistic view of persons, separated from relationships with others and the world. Importantly, Looy reminds us that serious engagement with these critiques, positions, and questions does not threaten potential contributions of psychological science, but instead invites distinctly Christian reflections in and on psychology.

I thought of this need for Christian reflection throughout psychological science in a recent conversation about student mental health with a colleague who wondered, as Looy did, how we can use our psychological and theological knowledge to find “ways to live well and faithfully in our current context” (p. 154). Psychology has tools to offer individuals and communities who are suffering. But do those tools trace the boundaries within which human flourishing occurs? Said another way, if Christianity is true, then there are particular ways of being and living in the world that align with our creatureliness, and there are ways of being and living in the world that do not. I assume that flourishing is not possible when living outside the boundaries of our creatureliness, that these boundaries trace the range of possibilities for mental wellness and flourishing, and in doing so, also articulate the limits.

As *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> year, I reflect on the value of its contribution. *PSCF* empowers and equips Christian thinkers to collaboratively articulate the boundaries of flourishing, boundaries that benefit from empirical, psychological, and theological excavation.

Looking back on Looy's 2013 contribution, I see an example of how we, as Christians, can use all the tools in our epistemological toolbelt to leverage the contributions of science and theology humbly and confidently for the benefit of our neighbor and our world.

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## 2014

**OWEN GINGERICH, "Do the Heavens Declare the Glory of God?," *PSCF* 66, no. 2 (2014): 113–17.**

A scientist once mentioned to me that he didn't want to tell his young son that God created the universe. If he did so, the scientist explained, it would take away the awe and wonder he wanted his child to feel. I was taken aback when I heard this. I have given many talks where I showed beautiful images from space, motivated in part by my role – albeit modest – on the Voyager spacecraft sent to the far reaches of the solar system. I always assumed that they are a wonderful illustration of God's creation, never considering the possibility that anyone could come to the diametrically opposite conclusion.

My experience made me think more carefully about what the psalmist meant when he wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God." Owen Gingerich frames the passage in the form of a question in the title of his *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* essay, and I immediately sensed that Gingerich appreciated my challenge by its very first lines. "[A] congregation would be shocked if [Gingerich] simply said 'yes' and sat down. On the other hand, [they] would all be even more stunned if [he] said, 'No, the heavens do not declare the glory of God,' and sat down. So, [he thinks] you can safely deduce that there is something more to be said about the psalmist's ancient declaration."

Gingerich begins by reminding us that our predecessors did not see the universe as we do. From reckonings made in the sixteenth century, the sun was estimated to be much closer than it actually is. The "shell of stars" just beyond that encloses our solar system is impressive, but God, to quote Gingerich, was "not so far away." We now know

that our universe stretches to a horizon nearly 14 billion light years away. Such a vast distance would have been inconceivable to the psalmist. Perhaps only modern science then, and not the faith of the ancients, can let us appreciate how truly awesome our universe is.

Not so fast, Gingerich warns us. Modern science also tells us what we need for our existence. For example, carbon and oxygen are the building blocks of life as we know it. The so-called energy levels in the carbon nucleus, however, are just right for oxygen to be formed in stars and end up on Earth. Similarly, physical constants also have been constrained within very tight limits for life to exist in our universe. To a physicist like me, such details are as awe-inspiring as the starry skies in displaying what God has done.

Fred Hoyle, the famous cosmologist and "public skeptic" as Gingerich calls him, writes, "There are very many skeptics of the universe where you either have to say there have been monstrous coincidences, where there might have been, or, alternatively, there is a purposive scenario which the universe confirms" (*The Origin of the Universe and the Origin of Religion* [Wakefield, RI: Moyer Bell, 1993], 83). Unlike Hoyle, Gingerich asserts that he isn't "sitting on the fence" when it comes to purpose behind the universe. He concludes by simply saying that "the sheer beauty of the heavens declares the glory of God!" I still lecture on how the majesty of God's universe reflects this, but thanks to Gingerich's essay, with a richer and more humble understanding of why.

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## 2018

**ALAN DICKIN, "New Historical and Geological Constraints on the Date of Noah's Flood," *PSCF* 70, no. 3 (2018): 176–93.**

Alan Dickin's article about Noah's flood filled in the last opening of a puzzle for me. I have viewed this flood as a local one for a long time. But there was a problem. If it was local, why are flood stories found globally? Alan explained this convincingly. Briefly, there was a flooding of the Euphrates River brought about by a combination of a rising sea level