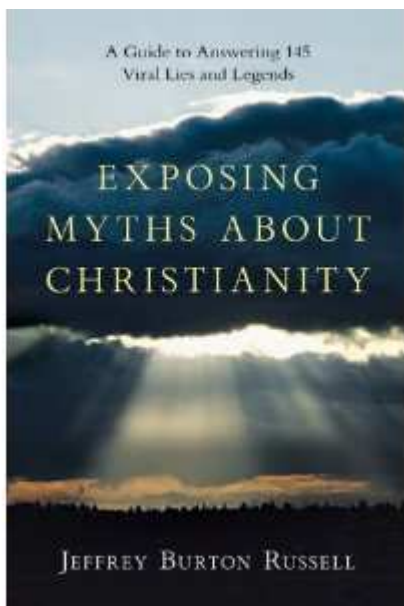


Exposing Myths About Christianity: A Historian Answers Culturally-Rampant Lies and Legends about Christianity and Science

📅 Sunday, 20 May 2012 | 🧑 Written by Jason Hine



On Saturday May 19 2012, roughly 40 people gathered at Shoreline Church in Santa Barbara for a fellowship potluck meal and a lecture by Jeffrey Burton Russell on Exposing Myths about Christianity: A Historian Answers Culturally-Rampant Lies and Legends about Christianity and Science.

The meeting began with a fellowship potluck at noon. Michael Everest opened the meeting at noon by describing the ASA and the Southern California Christians in Science local section. this was followed by the singing of a hymn, after which Stan Anderson introduced main speaker Jeff Russell.

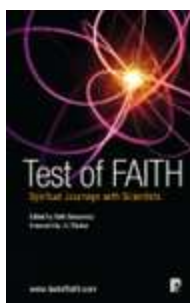
Jeff's talk covered a range of myths including the story of Columbus and the flat earth, the Galileo affair, the idea the Christianity is violent, modern ideas of progress, and miracles. After the talk Jeff fielded a variety of questions, mainly dealing with the Galileo affair. After the talk Jeff stuck around to talk with attendees and sell "at cost" copies of his new book, *Exposing Myths about Christianity: A Guide to Answering 145 Viral Lies and Legends*.

Many thanks to Jeff, Michael, Stan and Stephen Contakes for their parts in making this event happen!

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Our Fall 2011 Meeting: Test of FAITH Presentation and Panel Discussion

📅 Tuesday, 18 October 2011 | 🧑 Written by Steve Contakes



On Saturday, October 15, 2011, we met at St. David's Church in NorthHollywood for a short time of worship and a presentation of the Faraday Institute's *Test of Faith*, part 3.

Before the meeting we enjoyed a great time of conversation and a wonderful collection of gastronomic delights at an informal pot-luck dinner in the Church fellowship room from 5:30 – 6:30 PM.

The formal program began at 6:30 when Tom Ferko gave a short introduction to the ASA and its S. California Christians in Science local chapter and encouraged attendees to consider joining the ASA. After this introduction we engaged in a short time of worship led by Jason and Kathy Hine.

At 7 PM Tom introduced Ruth Bancewicz who briefly described the [Faraday Institute](#) and the [Test of Faith](#) study materials. Afterward, we watched part 3 of the *Test of Faith* video. This was followed by a panel Q&A session. Tom introduced the Q & A by sharing some biographical info on each panelist. The panelists were:

Ruth Bancewicz, a geneticist on staff at the Faraday Institute;

Stephen Contakes, a chemist at Westmont College;

Maurice Lee, a theologian with a background in computational neuroscience at Westmont College.

Members of the audience brought up a number of thoughtful questions about the creation of life in the lab, origin of life chemistry, the theology of creation, neuroscience and the soul, emergence, evolution, the resurrection, Genesis 1 & 2, and the public image of science. This led to a fun and vigorous discussion among the panelists and with the audience. At the close Jim Buchholz highlighted the upcoming ASA national meeting at Point Loma Nazarene University with its special theme of Science and the Media. He encouraged local section members to both attend and consider giving presentations.

Afterwards, Ruth gave a brief presentation about the *Test of Faith* video, book, and study materials. The presentation, which began at 8:30 PM, included a description of the materials and suggestions for how they can be used.

After the formal program, Ruth and the panelists stuck around for further discussions with members of the audience. Many thanks to Ruth and the Faraday Institute for their thought-provoking work, and to Ruth, Maurice and Stephen for serving as our panel during Q&A.

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Human Genome, Human Origins, Human Nature - Our Evening with Jeff Schloss

 *Monday, 04 April 2011* /  *Written by Steve Contakes*

On April 2 2011, Jeff Schloss gave a talk to the Southern California local chapter entitled “Human, Genome, Human Origins, Human Nature.” About fifty people attended Jeff’s talk, which was preceded by an informal potluck dinner and a short time of worship. In his talk, Jeff explained how recent

advances in the biosciences relate to theological understandings of human origins, behavior, and uniqueness.

Jeff began by telling us that he would be speaking on the issue of how God communicates life to us. Modern bioscience is doing a “theology of the word” in that it considers what sort of information directs living things' goals. He then described the human genome project and how it raises questions about who we are – specifically about the role of genes in human origins, human behavior, and human uniqueness.

Before unpacking his topic Jeff described two possible relationships between science and worldview. First, we can move from science to conclusions about God (natural theology – or natural atheology). The modest version sees the hand of God in how the universe normally works (anthropic fine tuning) – or atheology (Dawkins, Weinberg). In a bolder sense we see God in gaps in natural regularities that demonstrate God’s presence and intervention. There are legitimate concerns with a God of the gaps – it is not necessarily false. The NT declared the resurrection of Christ. However, such arguments are risky. The atheistic counterpart is the no god of no gaps argument, as exemplified by Ernest Haeckel. But this is a logical fallacy - the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.

Many Christians debate the role and validity of natural theology. For example, Pascal and C.S. Lewis did not claim that nature by itself couldn’t teach us truths of God. However, Lewis noted that once we believe, nature can be used to teach us about God. This brings us to the other relationship between worldview and science. My belief (worldview) influences my science – *i.e.* the range of possible hypotheses. Al Plantiga calls this theistic or Augustinian science. This can be seen in the work of Steven Jay Gould whose Marxist pre-commitments influenced his writings and Simon Conway Morris whose Christian and Platonist beliefs led him to a radically different view of the same data.

Jeff then challenged us to apply our understanding of how worldviews relate to commitments to the question of genes and human origins. The first question is whether all humans have the same origin (e.g. the monophyletic vs. polyphyletic views). Christians have never bought the polyphyletic view. This could cause a scientist to look for evidence of a single human origin. The genetic diversity of humans is less diverse than a single troop of baboons in one area. Alan Wilson found evidence that everyone got their mitochondrial DNA from one person – “Mitochondrial Eve”. Indeed, there is strong scientific evidence we came from a single small population at a single point in time. It also looks like modern Jews share a common mitochondrial genetic origin at about the time the Bible predicted. Arabs don’t share mitochondrial genetic origin but there is Y-chromosome sharing.

Another question is whether humanity shares primate ancestry. The big questions are (1) whether we have intermediates and (2) whether they are transitional forms. The fossil record has a large number of intermediates. However, paleontologists don’t agree on the interpretation of the intermediates – which intermediates are transitional forms of each other. Contemporary genome data show similarities between humans and chimpanzees – both overall and in the non-functional text (e.g. synonyms and pseudogenes) support the common ancestor hypothesis, as do karyotype studies. If this is true, what does this mean about Adam and Eve? Is Adam a historical theological, the first “man” of humankind, the

federal head, the 1st ensouled person, an ancestor but not progenitor of humanity (not the only living human at the time), or the progenitor of all humanity. The evidence for chromosomal fusion may support the idea that Adam was an ancestor but not progenitor of all humanity. For example, just all Jews have both Abraham and Rebekah's father as progenitors of the Jews, so Adam can be the ancestor but not progenitor of all humanity.

The question of genetic determination of human behavior is complex. For example, genetic evidence for a "God gene" is very weak while evidence for a monogamy gene seems credible and is growing. Our natures even at the organic level are broken and in need of empowerment and enabling.

What about the question of human nature? Does evolution explain human nature? Mainstream biologists have found out that human behavior is anomalous. Humans cooperate with those with whom they do not share a genetic relationship and from whom they do not expect a compensatory return. Altruism and enemy love doesn't seem explainable on the basis of natural selection. Even Richard Dawkins concludes that we are unique. Jeff then reminded us that our Christian witness is bound up with our love for one another.

After their presentations, Jeff answered audience questions about the scientific understanding of love, how does the genetic view of human brokenness accord with the biblical picture of the goodness of creation and the nature of the fall, the fossil record, biblical interpretation, the revelation of God in the natural world, the empowering of the Holy Spirit, how we were made, and evolutionary developmental biology. Sometimes Jeff admitted he wasn't sure about the answers to some of these issues but he always pointed us toward faith and trying to illuminate the theological issues involved. Notably, Jeff kept reaffirming human uniqueness - humans are unique in having qualities that can't just be reduced to matter. We seem to be built to live the way scripture tells us to live but that it's a messy story.

After the formal program, Jeff engaged in further discussions with members of the audience.

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January 2011 Meeting with Hugh Ross and Jeff Zweerink on the Multiverse

 Monday, 24 January 2011 /  Written by Steve Contakes

On Saturday, January 22, 2011, we met at St. David's Church in North Hollywood for a short time of worship and an exciting presentation by Hugh Ross and Jeff Zweerink of the *Reasons to Believe* ministry.

Before the formal program, we enjoyed meeting and catching up with one another over a pot-luck dinner mixer in the Church fellowship room.



We enjoyed a great time of food and fellowship before Hugh's Presentation

The evening began when Steven Blake gave a short introduction to the ASA and its S. California Christians in Science local chapter after which we enjoyed singing worship hymns together.

Hugh Ross spoke on "Designer for Life: God or the Multiverse?" After giving us a historical perspective on the multiverse concept and its relevance to design arguments, Hugh explained that it's possible to construct Christian understandings of the multiverse concept and that atheistic (really deistic) arguments based on the multiverse concept go well beyond the available cosmological evidence.



Hugh and Jeff answered audience questions after the meeting

Jeff Zweerink began by describing his initial encounters with the multiverse concept as a graduate student. He then unpacked the science behind the multiverse concept and explained the difference between Level I, II, and III multiverse concepts. Jeff explained that the multiverse hypothesis cannot obviate cosmological arguments for faith since multiverse cosmologies still postulate a beginning. Instead, he explained that the multiverse concept simply changes the nature of the design argument, although it does introduce questions of identity, justice, and free will which Christianity can address theologically.

After their presentations, Hugh and Jeff answered audience questions on a wide variety of topics, including scientific evidence for and against multiverses, the characteristics of other universes in each multiverse model, and evidence for the constancy of physical laws over time.

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What are they Saying About the Soul? Our Evening with Joel Green

 *Monday, 04 October 2010* /  *Written by Steve Contakes*

On October 2, 2010 we met at Steve & Sonya Blake's home in Van Nuys for a short time of worship and a lecture by Joel Green of Fuller Seminary.



We began our time with an informal potluck dinner mixer on the back patio.



Tom Ferko and Steve Blake told the approximately forty guests about the ASA.

After a short time of worship, Joel spoke on “The Bible, Science, and the Soul: What are they Saying about the Soul?” Much of his lecture focused on the issue of what it means to be human. After discussing how this question is treated in the scriptures, literature, and film, Joel discussed how advances in neuroscience and molecular biology explain many of the functions associated with the soul in post-Descartes Western Christianity in terms of biological processes. Rather than bemoaning these developments, Joel argued that the scriptures are consistent with a monist perspective and that neuroscience raises many fruitful theological questions about the nature of spirituality, salvation, ecclesiology, and missions, among others. For example, because both the scriptures and neuroscience support the idea that spirituality is embodied, conversion and spiritual transformation should not be viewed as involving our “inner selves” but our whole selves. Neuroscience’s understanding of the importance of community reaffirms the importance of spiritual community – *i.e.* the church – in our spiritual growth. After unpacking his monistic view, Joel discussed several difficult questions including what it means for us to be made in God’s image, the relationship between humans and animals, and life after death.



Joel told us how neuroscience and contemporary Biblical scholarship are changing traditional conceptions of the soul.



After Joel's talk Steve Blake and many audience members asked him questions about the theological implications of his claims.

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A Discussion of Timothy Larsen's article, "War is Over, If You Want It: Beyond the Conflict between Faith and Science"

 *Monday, 07 June 2010* |  *Written by Steve Contakes*

Our June meeting was held on Saturday June 5, 2010 at the home of Steve and Sonya Blake in Van Nuys. After a 'potluck dinner' we discussed Timothy Larsen's article "'War is Over, If You Want it': Beyond the Conflict between Faith and Science" from the September issue of ASA's Journal, 'Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith'. This article is available as a PDF online at: <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2008/PSCF9-08Larsen.pdf>