



The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science

IRAS Newsletter

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Fall 2013

SUMMARY of the 2013 conference of the INSTITUTE ON RELIGION IN AN AGE OF SCIENCE, held July 27-Aug 3 at Silver Bay, Lake George, NY

Under the leadership of co-chairs Pat Bennett and Sol Katz and their committee, the 2013 annual IRAS conference addressed *Scientific, Spiritual, and Moral Challenges in Solving the World Food Crisis*. Taking note of the central place food occupies in human life, including its historical, cultural, and religious importance, we joined our speakers in an exploration of the inequities and challenges posed by eating. Today, and for the foreseeable future, nearly half of the world's people will have their potential curtailed by issues relating to food affordability, safety, and access. Serious problems with food production and price increases currently leave about one billion people experiencing hunger, and many of them facing starvation. Another billion spend over half their entire income on food, but still have only marginally enough to eat. Yet, concurrently, at least another billion people in the world are experiencing problems from consuming too much food and/or from dietary imbalances and safety problems, resulting in serious chronic diseases and infections.

During our week we explored questions such as:

- What are the origins and evolution of human diets and the food system, and how does this knowledge provide new insights about our contemporary food problems?
- What is the status of world food resources? How does it relate to macro and micro food problems locally and nationally in the United States and throughout the world?
- How does food serve as a symbol and a substance of various religious traditions? Has the loss of social traditions surrounding food production, preparation and consumption contributed to the problems noted above?
- How can the human food system be made more sustainable? How can healthy diets be safely and economically made available to all humanity? How can new scientific and medical knowledge optimally help with sustainability, safety, and access?
- What are the tensions created by climate change; population growth; demographic change; global trade and commodity pricing; market and business forces; water management; energy resources; food to fuel; new GMO technologies; agricultural

practices; land use and agricultural practices; increased meat, dairy, and egg production; food sovereignty at local, national, and international levels; increased socio-political interests; and the demands for human rights and just food policies?

- What secular and religious ethics and values can help to balance and/or solve food problems at all levels of the food system? What human and institutional resources are now available or need to be developed to catalyze meaningful solutions to food problems?
- What are the potentials of a combined science and religion approach to achieving sustainable solutions to world food problems?



This year, IRAS leaped into the 21st century by launching a conference website, irasconference.com, with daily uploads, and by making some tentative twitter forays. While reading text and watching videos can't fully duplicate the conference experience, you are enthusiastically invited to visit irasconference.com to share in the conference, virtually. It's a big step to begin bridging the space between what happens at our summer conferences and an Internet audience. It's in keeping with one of our conference goals: to take our learning back home, into the world, in practical ways. On the site, you will find summaries and videos of plenary sessions, poster sessions, speaker bios, and key conference takeaways, such as:

“Why the World Needs to Make Food Issues the Priority” and “The Evolutionary Origins Of The Human Diet: Implications For Solving Contemporary Problems Of Food Security, Safety And Sustainability” -- Dr. Solomon Katz

“The Dual Burden of Obesity and Undernutrition” -- Sandra Hassink

“Food Sovereignty and Environmental Nutrition”-- Dr. Barrett Brenton

“The Human Right to Food”-- Ellen Messer

“US Food System and International Law”-- Robert Lawrence

“Looking Back on Religion and Science from Ian Barbour’s 90th Birthday, July 30, 2013” -- Dr. Ian Barbour

“Bioprospecting or Biopiracy” -- Sehdev Kumar

“Food Security and Agricultural Innovation” -- Anita Spring

“Global Food Waste” -- Steve Finn

“Ending Hunger Requires a Leap of Faith”- Bill Clark

Our wonderful Poster Sessions, also online at irasconference.com, included:

- ***“Incorporating pedagogy in critical issues related to the cocoa industry, an Ecuadorian field study”*** -- Deanna L. Pucciarelli
- ***“Food, Religion, and the Embedded Mind”*** -- Chris Anderson
- ***“The Traditional Grace Revisited: Giving Thanks for our Food in an Era of Agribusiness”***-- David Larrabee
- ***“The Yoga of Eating: Gastro-Theology in the Hindu Diaspora”*** -- Alysia Radder
- ***“Why Vegetarianism Now?”***--Mark Causey
- ***“Recovering Abrahamic virtues: Hospitality in times of climate change”***--Nancy Menning
- ***“From Islands to Archipelagos. An Economics of Goodness”***--Tom O’Donnell
- ***“The Techno-Human Condition in Religious Context”***--Mladen Turk

Of course, the conference stretched beyond posters and plenaries to mealtime and porch discussions, VV Raman’s wonderful morning chapel talks (you can find his blog at <http://acharyavidyasagar.wordpress.com>), evening conferee-led services, swimming, boating (or capsizing during a sailing lesson on a windy day), exploring nature, weaving, singing in the choir (once again aptly led by Jane Penfield), and playing and singing music after evening chapel. Our tradition of “free universities” continued as “TalkShop” and “Bite Size” offerings. In honor of Silver Bay’s identity as a YMCA camp, our talent show included not only poetry, music, dance, and humorous skits; it also included a reprise of last year’s toga and tie-dye wearing YMCA dance. It was, perhaps, one of the finest, funniest, sweetest talent shows I can recall. The depth and playfulness of the IRAS community appeared in full force, reminding me that to be together, in many ways, is one face of the sacred.





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*Conference organizers would no doubt appreciate hearing from anyone who has done follow up work on food and/or wants to, including follow-up work on a potential conference declaration. Two of our conferees, Peter and Valerie, have followed up with a commitment to start eating a vegan diet, to cook every recipe in leading vegan chef Isa Chandra Moskowitz's book, *Appetite for Reduction: 125 Fast and Filling Low-Fat Vegan Recipes*, and to begin a blog about their experience. The blog, which will be fully up and functioning on Tumblr soon after Thanksgiving, is called *adventuresinveganeating*. Check it out, get ideas, and share your own experience!*  
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WHO ARE YOUR IRAS COUNCIL MEMBERS?

EX-OFFICIO VOTING MEMBERS

Barbara Whittaker-Johns - President
Varadaraja Raman - Immediate Past President
VP for Religion - Whitney Bauman
VP for Science - Solomon Katz (and Honorary VP)
VP for Interdisciplinary Affairs - Ursula Goodenough
VP for Conferences - John Teske
VP for Development - Ted Laurenson
Treasurer - Roberto Bercaw
Secretary - Dan Solomon
Conference Coordinator - Steven Gaudet
Editor of *Zygon* - Willem Drees
Representative of CASIRAS - Karl Peters (and Honorary VP)



REGULAR VOTING MEMBERS

Jane Bengtson, Patricia Bennett, Roger Brown, Michael Cavanaugh, Jeffrey Dahms, Marion Griswold, Katharine Houk, Joan Hunter-Brody, BJ Jamestone, Stanley Klein, Ruben Nelson, Edmund Robinson, Eugene Troxell, & Jennifer Whitten

NON-VOTING POSITIONS

Lyman Page, Parliamentarian~*~Marjorie Davis, Historian and Honorary VP~*~Nancy Anschuetz, Honorary Conference Coordinator~*~Philip Hefner, Honorary VP~*~Solomon Katz, Honorary VP~*~Karl Peters, Honorary VP



Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science - On the Brink of Our 49th Year

A subscription to *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* is included in your IRAS membership. As of January, 2014, members will be able to choose between print and online access together, or online only. We see a major trend towards digital usage, as we had over 100,000 articles downloaded via the Wiley Online Library in 2011. At present, *Zygon* is in 9,000+ academic libraries - mostly online. I've started to send occasional tweets; our twitter account is @Zygonjournal.

The September, 2013 issue had three major thematic sections. The first five articles reflected upon the writings of Gordon Kaufman, a major liberal theologian who worked for many years at Harvard. One is authored by Karl Peters, developing a Christian naturalism. These papers came from lectures at the Annual Meeting of the AAR in 2012. The next section is on Islam and biomedical ethics. Some consider specific cases - alongside one on organ donation there is another article that reflects in particular on womb transplantation, which in some cases is an acceptable alternative to IVF. The third set of papers is on religion and embodied cognition, with a substantial review article by IRASian John Teske.

The December, 2013 issue will go online during November. It will have various individual articles, plus a set of three on causality and emergence. The March, 2014 issue is in preparation, with a major piece on human nature as 'imago Dei', individual articles, and a book seminar on Owen Flanagan's book *The Bodhisattva's Brain*, which relates philosophy of mind and a naturalized Buddhism to his experiences in Mind and Life conferences with the Dalai Lama. In March, 2014, we will also have two contributions by major figures in the field, our former editor Philip Hefner and Ian Barbour. They offer their understanding of the field, and of *Zygon's* mission in that context - thereby beginning our 49th year of publication with reflections that lead up to the celebration of our first half century.

With the help of many reviewers, the review process via the online submission system goes well. Most submissions have a first decision (which may be the invitation to revise and resubmit) within two months; a few take somewhat longer. We currently have an acceptance rate, including those accepted after one or more revisions, of about 50 %.

Last but not least, Wiley Blackwell has made articles available for free, as online 'virtual issues'. They can be found in the Online Library, at [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-9744](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-9744). We now have virtual issues titled *Intelligent Discourse on Intelligent Design*, *Ian Barbour in Zygon*, *Asian Religions and the Sciences*, and *Techno-Secularity and Techno-Sapiens*. Check them out, and pass the news on to friends and colleagues who might not be IRAS members yet. Oh, by the way, it is cheaper to be a member of IRAS and thereby receive *Zygon* than it is to have a personal subscription to *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. Thus, an opportunity!

--Willem B. Drees, editor of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*. www.zygonjournal.org

Call For Papers:
The Future of Science and Religion in a Globalizing World
The 60th Anniversary Conference of
The Institute on Religion in an Age of Science
August 2-9, 2014
[Star Island, New Hampshire](#)

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of IRAS (and the upcoming 50th anniversary of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* in 2015), we will consider the relevance and significance of religion and of science--and of IRAS--in a world that has changed in many ways since the mid-twentieth century.

In light of developments in the sciences, religious studies and society, we will explore new and enduring questions: "Can either science or religion, or both taken together, enable us to organize and govern ourselves in harmony with the Earth with enough wisdom to cope with the emerging conditions of the 21st Century? If so, what do we require in our understandings of religion, science, ourselves, and the cosmos? Which insights stand the test of time? What about our inherited enterprises of science, religion and society must be re-conceived, re-thought and renewed? Do discreet categories of 'science' and 'religion' even make sense in today's globalized world? How do we conceive of hybridity in terms of meaning-making practices and identity construction within pluralistic societies?"

Plenary Speakers include: Nancy Abrams and Joel Primack, Zain Bagir, Whitney Bauman, Willem Drees, Sarah Fredericks, James Haag, Mark Jeurgensmeyer, Karl Peters, Michael Ruse, and Lea Schweitz.

We invite paper proposals and poster presentations on the themes of the conference and on religion, science, and globalization in general. Papers will have 50 minute time-blocks. Posters will be displayed and available during the conference. All paper proposals and posters will be peer-reviewed.

This year, we are pleased to offer some **awards** for those who are new to IRAS or Star Island (or who have not attended in the past two years). For the best proposals, the award is full room and board and partial travel to Star Island. In addition, we have several awards that will cover half of the costs of room and board for the week-long conference. More information about this year's conference (including information about the plenary speakers) can be found here: <http://www.iras.org/2014-conference.html>.

Proposals should include:

- A cover letter with your contact information that indicates whether your proposal is an individual paper or poster session. The cover letter should also include whether or not you would like to be considered for one of the above-mentioned awards.
- An abstract of no more than 150 words
- A narrative of no more than 500 words (roughly two, double-spaced pages)

The **Deadline** for proposals is **February 1, 2014** and decisions will be made by **March 1, 2014**.

Submit all proposals as **Microsoft Word attachments** to Pauline Candaux at pcandaux@gmail.com. Please put "(your Last Name) IRAS Proposal" on the subject line of every communication.

In order to introduce discussion regarding next summer's IRAS Conference, I asked Whitney to write an article on what "globalization" means and the challenge it offers to work in science and religion. --Karl Peters



Science and Religion in a Globalizing World **Whitney Bauman**

Perhaps nothing has made its mark on the contemporary psyche as much as the process of globalization. Whether we are talking about economic, political, or cultural aspects; whether we are talking about the historical antecedents in various waves of colonization; or whether we are talking about the technological and scientific shifts in our relationship to one another and the rest of the natural world, globalization seems to be a locus of concern that spans just about every discipline.

Part of the reason for this concern is a shift in the very way we understand our ways of making meaning in the world.¹ The majority of humans throughout history, prior to the colonial era and to a large degree prior to the 20th century, lived their lives in relatively isolated islands of meaning. By this I do not mean that there was no cross pollination of ideas: indeed part of the study of globalization forces us to re-think history as well and see moments of "interaction" (such as the trade route along the Silk Road, the *convivencia* in Southern Spain, and waves of colonization both in the so-called "east" and "west"), as vital periods of history rather than as anomalies to otherwise "separate" historical trajectories and traditions. Rather, I mean that before the increase in speed brought about by communication and transportation technologies, the majority of peoples lived their lives "as if" their religious or cultural values and world views were the truth of the world. Indeed, the very idea of truth as universal found in so many extant philosophical and religious systems may be a contextual artifact of this relative isolation. This, however, does not mark the contemporary process of globalization.

¹ See, e.g.: Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religion in Global Civil Society* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Globalization (as Zygmunt Bauman has noted)² is marked by fluidity, hybridity, exchange, and multi-perspectivalism. In other words, due to advances in communication and transportation technologies, medical technologies that allow for longer life-spans, and production technologies that have allowed for resource extraction on an unprecedented scale,³ we have access to many different ways of understanding the world and we are also more aware of the limitations of our own and other's perspectives. This process, then, transforms the way in which we understand "traditions" and "disciplines." In the case of religious studies, the "comparative" approach in which discrete traditions enter into dialogue and conversation with one another is in its last stages of usefulness. Now, Christians in the United States practice Yoga and meditate, Muslims in Indonesia may visit Hindu fertility temples, many religious peoples have also incorporated much of the knowledge that stems from "modern science," and more and more people consider themselves "spiritual" but not religious. In the case of sciences, science can no longer be seen as some sort of reflection upon a world of nature that is knowable apart from humanity and cultures: we can never get outside of our social, historical, and cultural conditioning to some "objective" view of nature. Furthermore, the spread of humans across the planet means that there is no part of "nature" that is not also touched by human culture. Some argue that this "post-modern" condition means the end to all grand narratives, whether scientific, religious, or other.

Whatever else globalization means, it means that categories for thinking about "religion" and "science" based upon the modern separation of humans and nature or thought and matter, the internal separation of religions into various traditions, and the attempts of various sciences to either reduce life to a single explanation or provide a Theory of Everything, no longer hold much explanatory value. In the light of globalization we are, rather, hybrid meaning-making creatures that draw from multiple knowledge systems in order to make sense out of our worlds. Religion and science can no longer be confined to models that suggest that they are not always and already implicated in the other's construction. Accordingly narratives of secularization or enlightenment that suggest science will bring about progress (and the eradication of religious ideas) are also exposed as naïve: as Bruno Latour suggests, "we have never been modern."⁴ There are, rather, multiple ways in which religions and sciences come together to construct meaning, there are multiple sciences (not just western), there are multiple secularities (not just the one that understands religion as somehow private and removed from the public sphere), and there are multiple ways in which we can co-construct our worlds according to these meaning-making practices.

² Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998).

³ Teresa Brennan argues that our "technological pace" is outstripping the "planetary pace," and thus we are faced with planetary ecological and social ills. See her book: *Globalization and its Terrors: Daily Life in the West* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

⁴ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

It is our hope that this conference will begin to explore some of the ways in which our current truth regimes are materializing on the planet (in both good and bad ways socially and ecologically speaking), and how some possible alternative truth regimes might co-create a planetary future that promotes planetary thriving (and not just human thriving).⁵ If we take Niels Bohr's interpretation of indeterminacy to heart (rather than Heisenberg's uncertainty), then the ways in which we co-create the world help to shape the way in which the world becomes.⁶ This is not idealism, but perhaps better described as in line with the "new materialism": one that understands human thought as emerging from the planetary community and returning to affect that community rather than as an all-encompassing ideal imposed upon the planetary community (ala Hegelian Idealism).⁷ The future is open and uncertain, and awareness of that changes the very nature of truth claims made in the name of both science and religion.



⁵ The "planetary" trope is developed from the ideas of Gayatri Spivak, *The Death of a Discipline* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁶ Karen Barad provides a lengthy discussion of Bohr's epistemological implication in her book: *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷ Many are writing in the vein of the "new materialism." See, e.g.: Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

Letter from IRAS President, Rev. Dr. Barbara Whittaker-Johns November 20, 2013

Dear IRAS Members, Friends, and Future Members!

What an adventure being President of IRAS has been during recent months – since Thursday, August 1, 2013 to be exact – toward the end of the Annual Conference week, held this year at Silver Bay in NY. Since then, much about our community has come into focus, which I will share with you here.

I. Some Recent Background of New Developments in IRAS

Some of you are aware that for first time since its beginning in 1954, the years 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013 saw the annual IRAS summer conference held at venues other than Star Island – the Chautauqua Institution and Silver Bay Conference Center. Next summer, the 2014 Conference will again be held on Star Island. The reasons for trying alternate venues in those four years were complex, partly economic, and came on the heels of the Island having to cancel conferences, including ours, in 2007, when fire code regulations were not met. Those in leadership positions who navigated these painful transitions did so admirably.

Over the course of these recent years, and in spite of exciting and meaningful conference themes, the leadership of IRAS began to voice with increasing clarity the need for us to address aspects of our membership and our financial stability as a volunteer organization. Issues of membership included discussion of our having lost most of our youth and some of their families when we left Star Island, and the need for maintaining and increasing the presence of scholars across a wide age-span, especially those of a younger generation.

The need to address these immediate practical issues has proved to be a blessing, for it has brought into focus a desire to seize this moment as one in which we might “refresh” IRAS’ purpose and future. This focus has, in turn, interacted with two other events in a way that seems to be creating a context far more rich and helpful than we might have anticipated, for re-imagining our future.

First: **2014 is the 60th Anniversary of the origins of IRAS.** Though we did not originally plan to incorporate observance of that milestone in the 2014 conference, the vision to do so emerged when our planned conference for 2014, at the last minute, ceased to be a possibility. While the 2014 Conference, which is described in this Newsletter, is broad in scope, it includes opportunities for IRAS to “seize the moment” to consider the healing potential of both the religion and science nexus today, and of IRAS, in a globalizing world.

Second: in addition to the significantly increased accessibility on Star Island, the new Island leadership and the Star Island Corporation have worked with the leadership of IRAS in such a collaborative and encouraging way, that we have an economically viable opportunity to hold the 2014 conference again at Star Island, the place where IRAS first came into being. This is the place where 60 decades of people of all ages, from all academic and professional backgrounds, have experienced an intellectual and spiritual community in which they found renewed meaning in their lives and in their work in the world, by engaging in the religion and science dialogue.

II. Selected Aspects of the New Developments in IRAS as a Community

Introduction

As I mentioned above, Aug. 1, 2013, at about 2:30 PM, the Presidency of IRAS was transferred from V.V. Raman to me by vote of the IRAS Council. I was not quite prepared for the indicators, suddenly obvious at that 2:30 meeting, that IRAS might be catapulting itself into a new era – with much of the chaos that ensues following unexpected change – a last-minute change in conference theme and venue for 2014, an urgent need to deal with finances and membership, etc.

Fortunately, I have been in IRAS long enough to know whom to call upon for help in such situations. Also, we have been blessed by the emergence of Ruben Nelson as an extremely talented

cohort in helping me lead the “refreshment” process. Ruben was a speaker at the 2012 conference and has become very involved as a new member of the Council. Ruben, who lives and works in the Rockies, just west of Calgary, is Executive Director of Foresight Canada. He works on futures research and strategic foresight to enable others “to explore, make sense of, and respond strategically to the turmoil of change.”

Working Groups

In the weeks following the 2013 Annual Conference, Ruben and I and others worked to create a **Draft Memorandum on Temporary Working Groups** to address some of the issues, as described or implied above, facing IRAS. Those of us involved in shaping this proposal agreed that once it took shape and began to be implemented, we wanted to share it with the entire membership. This article is a start in that direction. We titled the document “Taking Steps to Refresh IRAS’ Future,” and described the Rationale, in part, this way:

IRAS, the community and organization to which we are committed and for which we share responsibility, has long been the locus of imaginative, thought-laden and passionate conversations about the state and well-being of our culture, its citizens, and their science and religion. We have much to be proud of.

And, we all know that as we turn 60, there is work to do.

The three Working Groups which have been formed, their tasks, and their Chairs are:

The Futures Working Group, chaired by Karl Peters and Whitney Bauman

Develop for Council’s consideration a) a statement of the deep strategic work facing humankind during the early decades of the 21st Century, and this as a context for (b) a fresh statement of IRAS’ core strategic commitments and their implications for the life purpose, goals, structures, members and activities of IRAS. This work shall be undertaken as a strategic foresight exercise.

The Financial Stability and Membership Development Working Group, chaired by Ted Laurenson and Jane Bengtson

Ensure that IRAS becomes and remains financially viable and is able to effectively seek, secure and retain members. It shall also understand and guide the creation of all of the systems, structures, processes and relationships that are required in order for IRAS to become and remain financially viable, including those required to seek and secure funds and to seek, secure and retain members.

The Communications and Culture Working Group, chaired by Jennifer Whitten, Lyman Page and Muriel Blaisdell

Understand and guide the creation of all of the systems, structures, processes, relationships and culture that are required in order for IRAS to function as an effective and efficient organization. This shall include deepening our sense of community and compassion for one another, and thus making us more effective and efficient in implementing our short-term goals and our long-term purposes for the generations to come.

The majority of co-chairs and working group members are part of the Council—including voting and nonvoting members. Some are not on the IRAS Council, but are IRAS members who bring to the groups a particular background. Ruben and I and Marj Davis, as IRAS Historian, are serving as resources for the groups. Each group will be reporting to the Council at the regular mid-winter meeting of the Council – Jan. 9-13 in Portsmouth, NH. – and each group’s work will be shared at next summer’s conference.

All of you are invited to send comments and/or questions to the designated contact for each group:

For the Futures Working Group – Karl Peters - kpeters396@cox.net

For the Financial Stability and Membership Development Working Group – Jane Bengtson - jmbengtson@stoel.com

For the Communications and Culture Working Group – Jennifer Whitten—gettingmoresettled@yahoo.com

Venue Committee

When, this past summer, it became clear that the conference proposal originally slated for 2014, on Transhumanism, could not be technologically supported by Silver Bay, discussion ensued about again exploring a college campus setting for future conferences. Hence it was necessary to appoint a new venue committee. Three of its members have just returned from visiting a suggested college campus. Meanwhile, three members of the Venue Committee have been in close communication with Joe Watts, the new CEO of the Star Island Conference Center. Many details, financial and otherwise, have been worked out regarding our time on the island this coming summer; and Star Island has offered supportive proposals in the instance that we decide to hold our conference there in 2015 and beyond.

III. What Brings Us; What Keeps Us?

Ask anyone in the IRAS community what brought them to a conference, why they joined IRAS, or what keeps them involved, and invariably you'll hear a story. You might hear sincere generalities such as "the intense intellectual dialogue," "the quality of the speakers," "the sense of community," "inspiring surroundings and worship," "a chance to articulate my own faith, or theology, in the context of a scientific world view," "the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the wonders of science in a number of different realms."

But more often than not, such a general description will be followed by a pause, and then, if you are a good listener, by a story, perhaps one with several chapters, of how it happened that they became, and remain, committed. Theologian and long-time IRAS leader Philip Hefner has suggested that if the scientific epic of cosmic evolution is the warp of our world view, then our various religious and faith traditions may be seen as the woof; and he has a great appreciation for the power of stories in those traditions, as well as the power of stories of meaning from our own lives.

It is important to the building of community that we share these stories with one another, for IRAS is a time and place of creative pluralism – where individual thoughts and stories count, and indeed create a whole which is greater than the sum of the parts.

In that vein, I will share my story:

Chapter 1 – What Created My Need to Be Part of IRAS

What first brought me, not to IRAS, but to Star Island in 1954, the year IRAS originated on Star Island, was my father's role as speaker at a UCC week. He was President of Bangor Theological Seminary in Maine, and I was ten. Along for the week, besides myself, were my mother, my younger brother, and my maternal grandmother, "Mega". I still have the postcards she wrote home to my Aunt Barbara about sitting in the rockers on the porch, watching the sunset, and singing "Goodbye Sweet Day." And I have a copy of the printed program for that week – "The Vacation Conference with a PURPOSE!!"

Our family stayed out back in the "parsonage" and I spent many hours playing canasta on the porch, in the green rockers, with Mega and her cohorts, when I wasn't swimming off the dock or combing the beach for treasures. Where I didn't go, and longed to go, was out back on the cliffs – per threat from my father of being sent home on the next boat if I did.

Fast forward to 1964 – I was 20, had graduated from college, had just begun studies in theology and psychology at Union Theological Seminary in NYC, and had met and published a paper on the theologian Paul Tillich. However, since it was 1964, and I was a female, I had--according to the dictates of culture at the time--just married my first husband, an MIT Merit Scholar in Physics, who decided a better use of my time would be to put him through graduate school, which I did, by beginning a career in education. However, this did not alleviate my longing to engage in a lasting community of deep and meaningful inquiry.

Chapter 2 - What Brought Me

By 1984, I was just completing my M.Div. at Harvard, having returned to a version of my original plan of 20 years earlier. I was in a course called "Reconstructing a Concept of God," led by the late Gordon Kaufman. By then I was grounded in a theistic version of Religious Naturalism – or,

perhaps, Panentheism – which included no supernatural or Christo-centric concepts. But I had not yet encountered the religion and science dialogue in a meaningful way. Then we were assigned E.O. Wilson’s “On Human Nature” – intended, I think, as a foil for the traditional Christian beliefs of many in the class.

That book, as Tillich’s “Systematic Theology, Vols. 1 and 2” had done twenty years earlier, created a shift, a literal rearrangement in my brain, the physical sensation of which I recall to this day. It was the pages on the religious impulse being located in our genes that did it, and that dog-eared, red-inked book remains one of my treasures. It was a breakthrough of joy, even though I had no one at that point with whom to share my joy.

Within a few weeks, and for the first time, I came across the “Blue Book” in which Star Island’s summer conferences are listed. I discovered the IRAS listing, signed up for the 1984 conference, found a community with whom to explore questions and share discoveries, and have never looked back.

Chapter 3 - What Hooked Me and Reeled Me In

That summer’s theme offered me a chance to share my newfound excitement about religion and science with others - “Recent Discoveries in Neurobiology: Do They Matter for Religion, the Social Sciences and the Humanities?” was chaired by Philip Hefner and Victor Turner. The following summer, 1985, the conference was chaired by Ralph Burhoe (official founder of IRAS) and Solomon Katz. The theme was “Can a Scientific Understanding of Religion Aid the Processes of World Peace?” I recall being impressed and touched that Sol passionately engaged everyone at the end of the week in crafting a statement of resolve which emanated from the work of the conference, and was for public dissemination. When my husband Frank and I took a rowboat over to Smuttynose Island, I was equally impressed to find the busy co-chair of the week, Sol Katz, leisurely snorkeling about that island of great murderous history. Little does he know how that scene hooked me.

I was a new minister that year in the UU church of Amherst, MA. The following summer, I was asked to lead a Candlelight Service and, in my anxiety to do well in this academic community, had packed a footlocker of books to further prepare for the 20 minute service. But whatever I had planned, my roommate declared it was going to be replaced by words of grace. The late John Fryer, who for many years was IRAS’ Music Director and organist at the old pump organ in the Chapel, sat in a pew, on an aisle, for my Candlelight. Indeed, there was grace in the moment when John, who was large, fell out of his pew into the aisle in laughter. That was the first time I realized I could be funny, and I’ve claimed that right ever since.

After the Candlelight, Marj Davis and Philip Hefner approached me. They were co-chairs of the following summer’s conference, “Gender Bias: Its Reality and Effects in Religion and Science.” They inquired whether or not I, as a new minister, would be interested in giving the Chapel Talks for their conference in 1987. Only one other woman, Margaret Bowker in 1983, had been Chaplain, and they were trying to unite their conference theme with bringing more gender balance into IRAS. Like many organizations, by the early 80s IRAS had grasped the need for a culture shift, and was working to enact it. I said yes, and spent the entire year preparing.

What a joy that week was, in 1987 – an opportunity which was life changing for me. I now had a lasting community in which to grapple with an intellectual and spiritual approach to questions of meaning, to a far greater degree than is possible in the daily life of parish ministry. None of this would have happened without the warm welcome and support offered by so many IRAS members.

Chapter 4 – The Reasons I Stayed

Organizations, blessedly, always go through periods of change and “refreshment.” Changes continued to occur in IRAS – “refreshment” similar to what is on the horizon for us now, perhaps. Gender balance increased, so that most conferences were chaired by a male and a female, instead of by two men; beginning in 1989, an equal number of men and women served as President. Similar shifts occurred in other IRAS leadership positions and in the composition of speakers.

Establishing gender balance in IRAS increased awareness of the need to address--not only adequate care for children of parents who were speakers, engaged conferees, and leaders--but also an important blessing IRAS had to offer: that of introducing, to school age children and youth, the concept

that meaning-making, whether or not it is part of a faith tradition, must now be done in the context of a scientific world view.

In 1989, my husband Frank and I had a newly adopted infant. Isaac weighed 3 lbs at birth, and had only reached 10 lbs by the time of that summer's conference, "Being Religious: Working at Self-Maintenance and Self Transformation," chaired by famed scholar Ward Goodenough, and me. At the last minute, Ward could not come due to illness, and there I was: a newbie, tossed into leading a conference with the help of a spouse and a baby monitor. By grace (naturalistically speaking), it worked. Frank placed one end of the monitor on the podium when I was speaking and held the other end with Isaac Anthony in the Snugli as they sat on the porch and listened.

By 1996, neuroscientist Rodney Holmes, father of two young children, had researched and established a program for children and youth, "Archi Pelagos," at the Annual IRAS Conference on Star Island. My son was fortunate enough to spend his school-age years in Archi Pelagos. It offered children and youth age-appropriate activities and learning in line with the conference theme. During intergenerational events, young conferees built relationships with adults in the wider IRAS sphere. To this day I encounter young adults who grew up in Archi Pelagos who now pursue work in some aspect of science and religion, or who articulate a world view shaped by religion and science, and credit their IRAS experience. It brings me joy that this is true of our now 24-year-old Isaac. And, as it has done for him, being a part of this community has energized and brought creativity to all the other work of my life.

IV. What Will Keep Us Keeping On?

As you consider becoming a part of IRAS, as you ponder your continuing or renewed involvement in IRAS, imagine the stories that are yours about what created the need for your involvement, about how you arrived, about what brought you in, about why you have stayed. What are the stories about how you will nurture this treasured community through a time of transition and renewed vigor? What are the stories of how you envision IRAS' blessings for individuals, or for a broken world?

These do not need to be accounts of IRAS single-handedly "saving" individuals, or the world. That's not how it works.

This past summer Ian Barbour was a speaker at our conference. He is a physicist and theologian, and was celebrating his 90th birthday. Barbour was a key figure in the early days of IRAS and its journal *Zygon*, and has received many honors in science and religion. He reflected on IRAS' recent conferences on emergence in a way which suggests how we might proceed, trusting both our diversity and our future.

Most directly and simply, emergence, whether in science or philosophy, theology or the arts, refers to bottom up causality, to systems thinking, to explanatory pluralism, to the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Think of the bottom-up power of acts of individuals like Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.

Emergence would suggest that saving individual lives or solving the world's problems wouldn't necessarily happen in ways you could predict. It might happen in part because of the kind of increased and scientific understanding that flourishes in some of our conferences. It might happen in part as the result of large-scale organized efforts in which IRAS plays a part.

But emergence, and Ian Barbour, suggest that healing will not happen from the top down. It will happen as and whenever we "confer" in communities of meaning of any sort – communities in which we strive to bring our scientific knowledge into dialogue with our various languages of ultimate meaning; communities which then become a microcosm of how such dialogue might happen in the world; communities in which we seek, both as groups and as individuals, one by one, step by step, to bring that true dialogue to the broken people and places of the world. In such dialogue we learn to trust that each of our individual acts makes a difference by joining together to create a whole, which is indeed greater than the sum of the parts. Ian Barbour might say this is because the creativity of God is indwelling in each of us, between and among us – perhaps like the concept of the Holy Spirit, or the sacred generativity of Martin Buber's I-Thou relatedness.

Take courage in facing how much the world suffers, for God suffers as and with the people of the world. Take the scientific knowledge and wisdom of your faith which empower you to know how such

suffering arose and how it might be healed. And then, heed words of ultimate meaning such as those by Reinhold Niebuhr –

“Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; therefore we are saved by hope.

Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we are saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we are saved by love.”



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On behalf of IRAS, we offer a note of heartfelt thanks and appreciation to V.V. Raman, who led us in his role of President through the last few years. V.V.’s term of leadership was, among other things, steady, encouraging of kindness and diversity among leaders and members, enriched by the “Perspectives” articles he and web master Larry Davis initiated on the web site, and enlivened by V.V.’s own periodic reflections on religion and science – concluding with his series of Chapel Talks this past summer. V.V., we are grateful!  
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