

Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular World

Colleagues,

Three days hence Marie and I, God willing, fly off to Indonesia for my three-month stint as pastor in the English-language Christian congregation in Bali. We hope to have Email access, but at present details are fuzzy. If you need to know, consult ThTh co-host Robin Morgan. She'll know as soon as we know. Should Email fail, here are the snailmail and phone/fax facts: Hotel Dhyana Pura, P.O.Box 1010, Interport Ngurah Rai, Seminyak, Kuta, Bali, Indonesia. Phone: 62 (=Indonesia) 361 (=Bali) 730-442 (=Hotel) Fax: 62 361 730-463.

Today's "Auf Wiedersehen" piece is another one on faith and science. When we get back, D.v., from the other side of the world in November, I'm slotted to emcee a series on this topic in our local congregation here in St. Louis. That's why I've been snooping around in the genre.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

"Is science uncovering the face of God in our post-secular world?" That is the question Glynn's going after. His answer is a feisty "Yes!"—and he's not a crazy, a TV evangelist, or a monkey-trial madman. His gig is science, the heavy egg-head stuff that's been the prize fruit of the Enlightenment. That Enlightenment science gave us moderns the message—gleeful for some, doleful for others: "Sorry, folks, there is no evidence for God out there."

But here at the end of the millennium "it ain't necessarily so."

That song from Porgy and Bess is now being refocused. Sportin' Life originally sang those words about "the things that you're liable to read in the Bible." But in these last days, Glynn says, those words now apply to what in days past we were "liable to read in science." You know, when Christian kids went to college it was "the things that vexed when we opened our texts" – in biology, psychology, geology, and of course philosophy and lit crit. Says Glynn: T'ain't necessarily so.

So what's happened to the "atheist scientists" we all know about, many of whom are still around? [There's pluralism in their midst too.] Glynn tell us. He's been there; done that. And now he's "back" to Christian faith, but he's not jettisoned his scientific and intellectual smarts to do so. 'Fact is they've pushed him to see the evidence for God in today's postsecular world. And that evidence is IN the stuff the scientists, using their hard-headed research tools, are telling us they are finding.

But it's not just Glynn. Quote the dust jacket:

"A startling transformation is taking place in Western scientific and intellectual circles. Recent discoveries in physics, medicine, psychology, and other fields paint a radically new picture of the universe and humanity's place within it. Central is the dawning realization that the cosmos, far from being a sea of chaos, appears instead to be an intricately tuned mechanism whose every molecule and every physical law seems to have been designed from the very first nanosecond of the big bang toward a single end—the creation of life." In this provocative book, Patrick Glynn lays out the astonishing new evidence that led him away from the atheism he acquired [after a boyhood of Jesuit education] as a student at Harvard and Cambridge. The facts are fascinating: Physicists are discovering an unexplainable order to the universe; medical

researchers are reporting extraordinary healing powers of prayer and documenting credible accounts of near-death experiences; and psychologists are finding that religious faith is a powerful elixir “for” [not “against,” Dr. Freud!] mental health.

“God: The Evidence demonstrates that faith today is not grounded in ignorance. It is where reason has been leading us all along.”

Folks with a Reformation twist to their heritage will see evidence in this book that Glynn is indeed a Roman Catholic who's now returned from that atheistic far country. Any signal of the supernatural that scientists are finding (e.g., the healing value of faith, “any kind of faith,” the documented healthy consequences of practicing the “ethics of Jesus”) has him turning cartwheels. Well, almost. Granted, what he shows us is not to be pooh-poohed. But it's still a stretch to get from scientists “finding room for God” all the way over to faith in a crucified and risen Messiah.

In Lutheran lingo the stuff Glynn gleans from postsecular scientists is data about deus absconditus, the hidden God. Not hidden so that there are no signals from this deity. Yes, signals aplenty. But signals that this deity is merciful to sinners? No. Even if the world out there is not “all red in tooth and claw,” the evidence for messages of mercy and rumors of redemption are either non-existent, or at best very ambiguous. If “science is uncovering the Face of God,” there is still a veil over the face's that's been detected.

But you can build Christian (=Christ-specific) bridges to those data. Someone way back in Christian history [2 Corinthians 3] once put it this way: “The veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.” That's our next agenda.