

“The earth showeth His handiwork.” In a human hand?

Colleagues,

This may sound like a shaggy dog story, but don't give up. There's gold at the end of the tale.

Richard Parsons (M.D.) and wife Rosalie (R.N.) enrolled in one of the earliest Crossings semester-long courses we offered. Must have been in the 1980s. Its title was “Bringing God's Peace to Earth.” The Grounding text was Luke's Christmas Story. The 6-step Crossings paradigm for that text then already was the one you saw here six Thursdays ago on Christmas Day: “Night, Fear, Lost,” and then “Savior, Joy, Glorifying.” See www.crossings.org/thursday/2008/thur122508.shtml for details.

Sitting around the table with Dick and Rosalie and the rest of us in that basement classroom at St. Mark's Lutheran Church were Gloria Lohrmann, nuclear-freeze leader in St. Louis, and next to her Larry Lemke, head-honcho at McDonnell-Douglas Aircraft for their F-15 (or was it F-18?) fighter project—both very smart (natch!), both articulate. You can imagine some of the conversation that ensued as we all sought to link Luke's “peace on earth” with Gloria's and Larry's daily work—as well as with the daily work all the rest of us were doing.

To fill out the cast of chracters for what follows I need to add the name of Charles Austerberry, Ph.D. student in microbiology at Washington University, who soon thereafter got involved in Crossings ventures here in town.

Back to the Parsons. Not too many years later Dick became our

doctor, when one of the family needed help from his field of medical expertise. I'll give you a hint as to what that speciality was. Dick was part of the team that brought the first lithotripter [look it up] to St. Louis hospitals.

During the days of his caring for us I once asked him if modern medical technology had yet come up with a humanly-crafted sphincter [second clue, look it up]. His answer: "Only God can make a sphincter."

Fast forward to January 2009. Gloria Lohrmann and Charles Austerberry married back in 1985. Their son is now a freshman at St. Louis University here in town. Chuck is now a seasoned microbiology prof at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. He's an activist in the public discussions about Darwin and Christian theology. He sent me a note when I once hyped Michael Behe—Roman Catholic microbiologist (Lehigh University)—in a book review I did of his "Darwin's Black Box. The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution." "Not so fast, Ed," Chuck said, "Behe's not got it quite right."

The conversation has continued.

Chuck drove his son back to St. Louis University last month after the Christmas break. After depositing him at the dorm, Chuck spent an overnite with us. The conversation continued. Just to keep me au courant he left some articles for me to read when he headed back to Omaha. Not exactly pabulum: Intelligent Design or Intelligible Design? Kenotic Trinitarian Panentheism. Chiasmic Cosmology and Atonement. God's Use of Chance. And a couple of articles on the pro- and con- debate continuing with Behe. As if I didn't have enough stuff piled around to keep me busy.

Renewed conversation with Chuck—great fun!—resurrected Dick Parson's bon mot from long ago about sphincters. [Whether that

memory maneuver in my head signals intelligent design, intelligible design or God's use of chance, I cannot tell.] After which came this thought: Why not ask Dick to write something on the topic—maybe even start out with that sphincter quote?

Dick and Rosalie are now retired from their professional callings, but he keeps his hand in theology and all sorts of other stuff. So does Rosalie.

So I did ask him to say more about that sphincter sentence. Below you have what he sent me. Forget sphincter. Think about a bowl of oatmeal!

Peace and Joy!
Ed Schroeder

A BOWL OF OATMEAL

Rosalie and I attend concerts of the St. Louis Symphony on certain Friday mornings. This past Friday Emmanuel Ax playing the piano was a treat for us. As I sat there watching and listening to his music, I was astounded by how rapidly and accurately he is able to hit the proper keys at the right time.

Just think of all the electrical impulses generated by his ears listening to the rest of the orchestra and impulses generated by his eyes as he looks at the keyboard and peripherally sees the conductor with his baton! And even more, how those impulses are electrically generated by sophisticated chemical reactions from chemicals synthesized by special cells he has grown in this body.

If that isn't enough, think for a moment about how some chemicals and cells in his brain have the ability to regenerate

pathways previously learned (memory), then reenergize the nerves and muscles required to have his fingers to again push the proper keys with the proper force at the proper time to produce (again) the right sounds.

It gets more complicated. Think for a moment how the body is able to determine what is the proper amount of various hormones in this creature. Let's take thyroid hormone as one example. How does the body produce some special cells to monitor the proper level of thyroid hormone (TH)? Then how is this information transmitted to the pituitary gland located at the base of the brain? After this, how is it that certain cells in the pituitary produce thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH) which then affects the thyroid gland in your neck to produce TH in the proper amounts for the general good health of almost all the cells of the body? (For instance, if not enough TH, his mind and muscles would be slowed).

AND ALL THIS WORK CAN BE DONE BECAUSE MR. AX ATE A LOWLY BOWL OF OATMEAL (FOOD).

I believe this small example is so complicated that intelligent creation must be considered. I think that Darwin has some explanations that account for some adaptations seen in plants and animals; however it would take a very long time for "accidents" (mutations which survive) for such complexity to all come together across many species.

Yesterday we celebrated Holy Communion at St. Paul's UCC. It doesn't require much expansion of the thought about the oatmeal to include the body and blood taken into our own bodies during that special ceremony for our spiritual and bodily benefit and service to our Lord.

Some may say that these observations may be construed as "worshipping" the god of complexity. I mean it to be

observations of the power and involvement of our Creator in this universe.

Dick Parsons

2/2/09

P.S. from EHS.

Two things.

- A. A. Marie and I both are cared for by the same cardiologist, an orthodox Jew whose parents escaped the holocaust in Lithuania. During regular visits we sometimes ask questions about those detailed pictures of the human heart (ours!) on the office walls. When one of us—you can guess which one—pushes the envelope with How? or Why? questions about the complex details in those pictures, he responds with the Dick Parsons conclusion: “Only God”
- B. B. Back in my own grad school days in the 1950s (Hamburg University, Germany) someone gifted me with me a little book—in German, of course—of Luther’s own bons mots about creation. One of which was his marvel about a chicken egg: how the hen put it all together, fabricated a shell, got all that mysterious stuff inside, got the shell sealed so it didn’t leak, and then delivered all that to the outside world—another genuine chicken, yet all in slime and goo format. How Mama just sitting on the egg for three weeks would change slime-and-goo into a fuzzy breathing chirping biped, how chicken little got out of the incubator—and on and on. Luther’s conclusion—and title of the booklet—“Alles ist Wunder.” Everything is a miracle.