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The mission of the CHARIS Ecumenical Center is to build up the Body of Christ by

- providing a balanced array of continuing education for clergy and laity
  - promoting ecumenical collaboration and interfaith dialog
  - assisting the community in exploring emerging issues in faith and life
  - serving as a regional resource for churches, lay church staff, and others
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### CHARIS Director to retire; office moves

Dr. Arland Jacobson has announced that he will be retiring on December 31, 2008. Jacobson began as CHARIS Director in 1983. CHARIS itself was founded in 1970. Jacobson is the fourth director of CHARIS, and the longest serving director. A search for a successor will begin in the fall of this year.

Jacobson taught at Concordia College and at Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles) before accepting the CHARIS position. An ELCA pastor, he served parishes in North and South Dakota. Jacobson did graduate work at Luther Seminary (St. Paul, MN), the University of Chicago Divinity School, and Claremont Graduate University (Ph.D.). He recently co-edited (with James Aageson of the Concordia Religion Department) a book entitled, *The Future of Lutheranism in a Global Context* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

To add a little excitement to this last year, the CHARIS office will be moving from its current location in the "Outreach Building" at Concordia across the street to the Grant Center. Our postal address and telephone number will remain the same. But that is a temporary move. In the late summer or early fall, we move again, this time to a renovated portion of the old Riverside School in Moorhead, which Concordia purchased.

### Muslims Issue "A Common Word"

In October 2007, a letter signed by 138 Muslim scholars and leaders representing all major traditions in Islam was sent to Christian leaders throughout the world. Called "A Common Word Between Us and You," it focused on the double commandment of loving God and loving the neighbor. Since then, the number of Muslim signatories has risen to 241. There have been a number of responses by Christians, including the leaders of the ELCA, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the Anglican Church. Other responses have been made by individuals (e.g., Karen Armstrong) and by, for example, a group of scholars organized by Yale Divinity School. There have been several Jewish responses as well.

The open letter was organized by the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan, which enjoys the patronage of HRM King Abdullah II. The letter and the responses are available on a special website devoted to the letter, [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com).

### Is Luther to Blame for Fundamentalism?

Is it the case that "the Lutheran moment was the source of fundamentalism"? James Simpson, a professor of English at Harvard, thinks so. His book, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Harvard Belknap Press, late 2007) makes this argument.

Luther, he says, detested the private interpretation of the Scripture, claiming that "Scripture interprets Scripture," even though in reality everyone interprets it differently, so apparently a lot of people just don't get it. This approach, says Simpson, unleashed a host of devils, culminating in 150 years of religious wars in Europe. Luther's ideas were carried to England by William Tyndale, whose English translation actually predated Luther's (1525 against Luther's 1534 German translation). Simpson tries to show that this myth of the self-interpreting Bible, linked to belief in the literal inerrancy of the Bible, set the stage for fundamentalist readings of Scripture and for the scourge of fundamentalism today.

There is a polemical edge to this argument. Simpson thinks that historians who have long believed that Luther and the reformers, by relying only on the Bible and thus freeing Christians from the shackles of Roman Catholic authority, set the stage for liberalism have gotten it all wrong. The reformers (the "English Fundamentalists" in the title of Simpson's book) set the stage for fundamentalism, not liberalism.

Not everyone has been convinced by this argument. The great literary critic, Frank Kermode, in the *New York Review of Books* (Dec. 6, 2007, p. 51) thinks that Simpson is too focused on this argument about fundamentalism having its roots in the Reformation: "His obsession with this notion goes some way to spoiling his book." But not ruining it.

Simpson, himself a Protestant, seems to take the side of the Catholics, and Thomas More in particular, namely that Scripture interpreted without the aid of Christian tradition results in chaos leading to schism and even violence, as interpreters, each confident of their reading of Scripture, fight one another and condemn each other to perdition. The argument about the unaided interpretation of Scripture has been rekindled in this interesting book. Kermode, for example, notes that Simpson "has much of interest to say about this different view of authority and the alleged dangers of treating the Bible as self-explanatory or susceptible to naïve interpretation."

## Darwin's Religious Life

Charles Darwin once trained for the ministry, and he struggled with his faith throughout his life. A new documentary by a biology professor in the same state where the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial" was held in 1925 explores Darwin's religious evolution. David Wollert, who wrote and produced the film, teaches at Northeast State Technical Community College in Blountville, Tennessee. In the film, he reflects on Charles Darwin's complex personality and his digression from his earlier years as an orthodox theist to his latter years as an agnostic. Even though Darwin had trouble understanding God, he paradoxically continued to support Christian causes such as shelters for alcoholics and missionary and evangelistic efforts of his day. The DVD is available from Blank Slate Studios (<http://blankslatestudios.com/>) for personal use for \$24.99 plus shipping. The title of the documentary is "Paradise Lost: The Religious Life of Charles Darwin." The film was named "Editors' Pick" by *Library Journal*, the official journal of the American Library Association.

## A Pastoral Spirituality Rooted in Worship

In a fairly thin book (160 pages), retired professor of liturgy, Gordon Lathrop (Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia), presents a grace-filled essay on what it means to be a pastor. Called *The Pastor: A Spirituality*, the book has two parts.

Part One has chapters on presiding in worship, preaching, administering the sacraments, and service to the poor. Part Two is called "Living from the Liturgy: A Little Catechism for the Pastor." It has chapters on study and prayer, daily living, and dying (baptism, the Supper, and the Keys).

The book clearly reflects both Lathrop's Lutheranism and his life of reflection on worship. But in the Preface, he calls the book "an ecumenical reflection on the identity and central tasks of the ordained leader who lives and works in relationship with a current, public Christian assembly." He hopes the book will lead to a "deeper heart for the pastoral undertaking in a difficult time." "It is meant as the outline of a particular spirituality that might be a lively, graceful, engaged, and humble way for pastors to be and to walk in the world." The book is published by Fortress Press.

## Poverty and Racism linked

A new policy paper has been produced by Catholic Charities USA. Entitled "Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good," the paper is only about 25 pages long, but succinctly makes the case for the necessity—theological as well as factual—for addressing the twin challenges of poverty and racism. For example, the paper cites U.S. Census figures that indicate an overall national poverty rate of 12.3%, but a 24.3% rate for African Americans—compared to 8.2% for whites. Chapters focus on the link between poverty and racism, racism as a theological issue, the nature of racism, the reality of economic privilege, the legacy of the past, and a call to action. While addressed to Catholics, the paper should be of general interest. It can be found at the website of Catholic Charities USA ([www.catholiccharitiesusa.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org)).

## In Their Own Words: Theologians Reflect on Their Lives and their Intellectual/Faith Journeys

A number of theologians have written about their journeys of faith. Some of these stories are available on the web, others in print. Here are some. The list is by no means complete!

**Karen Armstrong.** *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness.* Knopf, 2004.

**Gregory Baum.** *Amazing Church: A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-Century of Change.* Orbis, 2005.

**Gregory Baum,** ed. *Journeys: The Impact of Personal Experience on Religious Thought.* Paulist, 1975. Autobiographical essays by Monika Hellwig, Andrew Greeley, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Charles Curran, Richard McBrien, Gabriel Moran, and others.

**Frederick Buechner.** *The Longing for Home: Reflections at Midlife.* HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

**Marcus Borg.** "Me and Jesus—the Journey Home" at [www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R\\_Articles/Borg\\_bio/borg\\_bio.html](http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R_Articles/Borg_bio/borg_bio.html).

**John Cobb.** "A Critical View of Inherited Theology" at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1729](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1729)

**John Dominic Crossan.** "Almost the Whole Truth" at [www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R\\_Articles/Crossan\\_bio/crossan\\_bio.html](http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R_Articles/Crossan_bio/crossan_bio.html). His book length autobiography is *A Long Way from Tipperary: A Memoir.* HarperCollins, 2000.

**Diana Eck.** *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras.* Beacon, 2003.

**Mircea Eliade.** *Journal* (4 volume autobiography). University of Chicago Press.

**Kosuke Koyama.** "Christ's Homelessness" at [www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=170](http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=170)

**Hans Küng.** *My Struggle for Freedom: Memoirs.* Eerdmans, 2003.

**Richard Lischer.** *Open Secrets: A Spiritual Journey Through a Country Church.* Doubleday, 2001.

**Richard John Neuhaus.** *As I Lay Dying: Meditations on Returning.* Basic Books, 2002.

**Joseph Ratzinger** (now Pope Benedict XVI). *Milestones: Memoirs 1927-1977.* Ignatius, 1998.

**Edward Schillebeeckx,** OP. "Dominican Spirituality" at [www.op.org/international/english/Documents/Articles/schillebeeckx.htm](http://www.op.org/international/english/Documents/Articles/schillebeeckx.htm)

**Dorothee Soelle.** *Against the Wind.* AugsburgFortress, 2004.

**Barbara Brown Taylor.** *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith.* HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

**Paul Tillich.** "My Search for Absolutes" at [www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1628](http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=1628)

**Geza Vermes.** *Providential Accidents: An Autobiography.* Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.

**Robert Webber.** *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail. Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church.* Jarrell, 1985. Webber's own story, and the stories of others.

**N. T. Wright.** "My Pilgrimage in Theology" at [www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright\\_My\\_Pilgrimage.htm](http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_My_Pilgrimage.htm)

Also see the "Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology" edited by Wesley Wildman and his Weird Wide Web. Some recent theologians include Mary Daly, Stanley Hauerwas, and John Cobb; some sketches are not biographical nor autobiographical.

## Unique Interfaith Center Coming to England

A center with facilities for Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Hindus is being built at the University of Surrey in Guildford, southern England. There will be separate spaces for Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Sikhs, and open space for Buddhists and Hindus. The center will cost 6.5 million pounds (\$12 million US), and recently received a 250,000 pound gift from the Anglican Diocese of Guildford. The Jewish space will have a kosher kitchen, and the Muslim space will have an ablutions facility. The Multifaith Centre is part connected to the Multifaith Chaplaincy at the university. While respecting difference, the center will facilitate bridge-building and dialogue across cultural and religious divides.

## Cremation Pro and Con

Various Christian and Jewish views on cremation are available on a website sponsored by Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. "Cremation vs. Christian Burial: Jewish and Christian Beliefs" is available at [www.religioustolerance.org/crematio.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/crematio.htm).

The controversy is especially poignant in the Jewish community, not only because of its long-standing opposition to cremation but because of the memory of the ovens at Auschwitz and other concentration camps. A crematorium opened in Israel in 2005; last year, it burned down one day after ultra-Orthodox activists discovered its location. It was the only one in Israel. Jewish law requires a body to be ritually cleansed and quickly buried, wrapped in shrouds and buried without a coffin. The practice in Islam is similar—and Christianity has long favored burial. Catholics allowed cremation only beginning in 1963, though burial is still preferred.

Stephen Prothero has told the often unpleasant story of how cremation came to be accepted in more than 25% of deaths in America in his book, *Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America* (University of California Press, 2002).

For Catholics, a small booklet (32 pages) is available which might also be helpful for others. *Called Honoring the Dead: Catholics and Cremation* by Richard Rutherford, it is published by Liturgical Press (2001).

Wikipedia has a very extensive discussion of all aspects of cremation, not only in the U.S. but elsewhere, and of how various religions view cremation.

## Dark, Irreverent Humor: the Darwin Awards

Need a break from the seriousness of your work? You might take a look at the "Darwin Awards" ([www.darwinawards.com/](http://www.darwinawards.com/)). These "awards" are given to people who, in an exercise of amazing stupidity, manage to dispatch themselves. The site has this self-description: "Named in honor of Charles Darwin, the father of evolution, the Darwin Awards commemorate those who improve the gene pool by removing themselves from it" (by doing really stupid things). For example, there's the man who awoke in bed to the telephone ringing, grabbed what he thought was the telephone, but instead put a Smith & Wesson 38 to his ear and pulled the trigger.

Stupidity may be in the eye of the beholder. Take a look at [www.shipoffools.com/](http://www.shipoffools.com/), a British site that offers "Gadgets for God," for example: kitschy but actual religious items you hope no one ever gives you. Lots of other stuff too.

## Participate in a Study of Religiosity

Rev. Marsha Cotting, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Ontario, is developing a research instrument to more accurately measure the wide range of Christianity out there. She'd like you to participate. She says it should take about ½ hour or less. Here is the description of the project provided by seminary officials.

"The Rev. Marsha Cutting of the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary heads a team of researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University, Liberty University and Boston University in developing the research instrument, called the Inclusive Christian Scale.

After responding to questions about their faith, participants will receive a score showing where their beliefs lie across six different emphases that an individual Christian might have: Congregational Involvement, Evangelical, Christian Conservative, Golden Rule, Activist, and Mystical. Participants are then asked how accurately they feel these scores reflect their own understanding of their faith.

"We need to have a good instrument that accurately represents the people we're trying to study," said Cutting, an associate professor of pastoral care and counseling at Laurier. "Our research on religion and its relationship to other issues is undercut if we can't do a good job of defining who is religious."

Researchers hope to attract participants representing different ages, genders and ethnicities. Those interested in participating can visit [www.religiosityscalesproject.com](http://www.religiosityscalesproject.com).

The instrument being tested in the study will be used in research that examines how religion relates to specific subjects such as health, prejudice or voting behaviour.

The Inclusive Christian Scale is the second part of the larger Religiosity Scales Project. It is designed to address the limitations of previous scales, which tended to be more conservative in nature and didn't accurately capture the full range of Christian faith."

## Presidential Candidates' Religion

All three of the major Presidential candidates profess membership in a Protestant denomination. **John McCain**, though a lifelong Episcopalian, now says he is a Baptist. His wife, Cindy, is a member of the 6,000 member North Phoenix Baptist Church (Southern Baptist). McCain claims to be active in the congregation, but is not a member. He is the only one of the three candidates to have been divorced. McCain married Carol Shepp in 1965, and divorced her in April, 1980. The next month, he married Cindy Lou Hensley, daughter of a wealthy Anheuser-Busch beer and liquor distributor (she is still head of this company, which her father founded).

**Hillary Clinton** has been a life-long Methodist, continuing to attend United Methodist churches even as her husband attended Baptist churches. She has long been very active as a United Methodist, including her years in college. She went to Wellesley College, where H. Paul Santmire, a Lutheran, was college chaplain, and a friend of Hillary's.

**Barack Obama** is a member of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, which describes itself as "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian." With 6,000 members (some say 8,000), it is the largest church in the UCC. There were unfounded rumors earlier that he is Muslim.



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