



museum of the Bible

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December 2, 2019

Rev. Dr. Keith Uffman
Webster Presbyterian Church
201 West NASA Parkway
Webster, TX 77598

Dear Pastor Uffman and Webster Presbyterian Church Session,

I am writing on behalf of Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC, where I serve as Senior Curator. Museum of the Bible is a non-profit institution dedicated to exploring the narratives, history, and impact of the Bible. It does not advocate for a particular church or tradition. Rather, it welcomes all people and seeks partnerships with institutions that can help tell the Bible's story from a range of perspectives. Since opening in November 2017, the museum has hosted over one million guests.

Recently, Museum of the Bible was awarded substantial grants by the John Templeton Foundation and The Blankemeyer Foundation for a multiyear initiative on the historical relationship between the Bible and the natural sciences. This initiative will include academic conferences, speaker series, and educational resources. The centerpiece, however, will be a year-long exhibition held at the museum in Washington, tentatively titled *Let There Be Light*. The opening date for the exhibition is scheduled for August 2020.

This exhibition explores the Bible's role in the historical relationship between religion and science. Many today see religion and the natural sciences as very separate subjects. For centuries, however, they were closely intertwined. Biblical narratives, such as the Genesis creation accounts, have been at the heart of this relationship. This exhibition examines how the Bible has inspired and framed the natural sciences and how, in turn, the natural sciences have encouraged people to engage with the Bible's narratives.

Using a thematic approach, the exhibition will be divided into six content areas. Each area will look at how people have used both the Bible and the sciences to answer one of life's "big questions," such as "what makes us unique?" and "how did it all begin?". These areas will be organized into a narrative arch that emphasizes the timeless nature of these questions, bringing figures such as Augustine into conversation with Einstein. Using a mixture of artifacts, videos, and interactive elements, we aim to create a lively exhibition that is both scholarly and accessible, appealing to a broad range of guests in terms of their educational, religious, and social backgrounds. Our goal is for guests to leave not only with desire to learn more about this important subject. We also want them



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to better appreciate the ways the Bible and the sciences have complemented each other in the past, so that they can better navigate the intersection of religion and science today.

We are currently in the development phase of the exhibition and are working to secure loans of artifacts for display. Already, we have commitments from institutions such as the Vatican Observatory, Cambridge University-Trinity College, Taranto Archeology Museum of Italy, NOESIS Science Centre and Technology Museum in Thessaloniki, Harvard University Museum of Scientific Instruments, and the University of Oklahoma. As you can see in the outline below, Area 5 will explore the question “What is our potential?,” examining how technology, or the application of our scientific knowledge, has impacted human society. One story we would like to explore is the Bible’s place in the Space Race. Your community played a large part in this story, being home to figures such as Buzz Aldrin. We are particularly interested in highlighting the story of Buzz Aldrin taking communion on the moon and understand you are caretakers of the communion chalice he used.

I am writing to formally enquire if Webster Presbyterian Church would be willing to loan Aldrin’s communion chalice for our exhibition. This amazing artifact would help illustrate the important role that religion played in the American space program and that religious communities like Webster played in the lives of American astronauts. We are certainly happy to pay for any conservation work that needs to be performed as well as shipping fees and insurance. We will also credit Webster within the exhibit and on any relevant marketing material.

A catalogue will be published to accompany the exhibition, of which I am serving as editor, including several essays written by the outstanding scholars and scientists who make up our exhibition advisory panel. Additionally, we plan to create an online version of the exhibition for those who cannot travel to Washington. Finally, as mentioned, we will hold a number of academic conferences and speaker series that will unpack certain themes in the exhibition.

I have included a more detailed exhibition description for your consideration. Likewise, I have included a copy of our facilities report. I hope this letter, along with the other material, helps communicate our vision and aims for this initiative. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions. It would be an honor to work with Webster Presbyterian Church and we are grateful for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Daved Anthony Schmidt



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Let There Be Light

The Bible and Science in Pursuit of the Big Questions

(Tentative)

About Museum of the Bible

Mission

To invite all people to engage with the Bible.

The Museum

Museum of the Bible is an innovative, global, educational institution whose purpose is to invite all people to learn more about the narratives, history, and impact of the Bible. It opened its doors in November 2017, just three blocks from the nation's capitol in Washington, DC.

Museum of the Bible provides unique and exciting opportunities for all people, regardless of their faith or tradition, to engage with the Bible. It welcomes dialogue and seeks to cultivate an open and inviting atmosphere where open discussion can take place, believing that inclusive storytelling and programming is the most effective way of keeping the conversation going once guests leave.

The museum's permanent and temporary exhibitions cover a wide range of topics related to the Bible, from its origins in the ancient Near East, to the production of illuminated manuscripts, to its use by modern evangelists. To tell these stories, it has exhibited artifacts and documents from the museum's collections as well as those from institutions around the world.

The Collections

Museum of the Bible's collections include a number of important private collections of biblical manuscripts, books of hours, Torah scrolls, printed books, hymnals, tracts, pamphlets, and other material. Combined, these allow the museum to tell the global story of the Bible as both a cultural object and a sacred text. In addition, the museum has entered into research and exhibition partnerships with important international institutions, providing its guests with an unparalleled opportunity to learn about the Bible's place within a wide range of traditions and communities.

Institutional Partnerships

Museum of the Bible currently has signed agreements with the following institutions:

- Archivio di Stato de Roma
- American Bible Society
- Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
- Bible Lands Museum
- Biblioteca Rosenthaliana University van Amsterdam
- Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
- Hebrew University
- Israel Antiquities Authority
- Jewish Historical Museum
- Musei Vaticani



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About the John Templeton Foundation

The John Templeton Foundation serves as a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to the deepest and most perplexing questions facing humankind. It supports research on subjects ranging from complexity, evolution, and emergence to creativity, forgiveness, and free will.

The John Templeton Foundation encourages civil, informed dialogue among scientists, philosophers, and theologians, as well as between such experts and the public at large. In all cases, its goal is the same: to spur curiosity and accelerate discovery.

In order to catalyze such discoveries, the John Templeton Foundation provide grants for independent research that advances its mission. Its grants for public engagement help people worldwide engage the fruits of that research and explore the Big Questions.

The work supported by the John Templeton Foundation crosses disciplinary, religious, and geographical boundaries. Its grantees produce field-leading scholarship across the sciences, theology, and philosophy. From probing gravitational waves to updating the modern evolutionary synthesis, they have contributed to major discoveries in the basic sciences. Other grantees have opened critical new topics to scientific investigation, including prayer, gratitude, immortality, and imagination.

About The Blankemeyer Foundation

The Blankemeyer Foundation concerns itself with discovery (research) and change (engagement) regarding questions of the advent, stewarding and meaning of life and the human mind as unique locus of reasoning, relationship and religion. It seeks to become, what Pope Francis has called “artisans of the common good” as we foster the pursuit of truth. Inquiry will be focused within three foundational (Big) questions:

1. What can science and faith learn from each other, and how does society benefit from their mutual engagement?
2. Is there a best, right or true way to understand and express our humanity?
3. How do we understand and relate to the natural world?

Work supported by TBF spans geopolitical boundaries, academic disciplines and sectarian faith in seeking a better understanding of the Big Questions listed below with research questions and dissemination programs that are animated by our vision, mission, and values.



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About the exhibition

The Scholarly Committee

This exhibition will benefit from the knowledge and experience of a panel of advisors, each of whom have agreed to help develop and review the exhibition's content. This committee includes Ted Davis (Messiah College), Darrel R. Falk (Point Loma University), Se Kim (American Association for the Advancement of Science), Tremper Longman (Westmont College), Efthymios Nicolaidis (Science & Orthodoxy Around the World), Ronald L. Numbers (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Lawrence M. Principe (Johns Hopkins University), Andrew Root (Luther Seminary), Stan Rosenberg (University of Oxford), S. Joshua Swamidass (Washington University in St. Louis), Tomasz Trafny (STOQ Foundation), Annette Weissenrieder (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg), and Jennifer Wiseman (American Association for the Advancement of Science).

Working Title

Let There Be Light: The Bible and Science in Pursuit of the Big Questions

Dates

August 2020-August 2021 (exact dates to be determined)

Exhibition Venue

Museum of the Bible, Washington, DC

Abstract

This exhibition explores the Bible's role in the historical relationship between science and religion. Many today believe that religious faith and the natural sciences are very separate subjects. Indeed, many consider the Bible to be an obstacle to scientific progress. Yet, for centuries, faith and the study of nature were very much integrated. This exhibition sheds light onto this history by examining how the Bible's stories and narratives inspired and framed the natural sciences and how, in turn, the natural sciences encouraged people to engage with the Bible's stories and narratives. Our goal is for guests to leave not only with a desire to learn more about this important subject. We also want them to better appreciate the ways the Bible and the sciences have complemented each other in the past so they can better navigate this complex issue today.

Approach and Method

The exhibition approaches the relationship between the Bible and the natural sciences using the theme of "wonder," looking specifically at the "big questions" that emerge out of our sense of awe and curiosity with the natural world. We will organize the main body of the exhibition into six content areas, each of which will be dedicated to a "big question." Each area will be anchored by a key moment of discovery. However, it will also include important figures and events that preceded and followed that moment, ranging from ancient to contemporary times. The content areas will not be organized chronologically. Rather, they will be organized into a narrative arch that emphasizes the timeless nature of these questions, bringing ancient figures such as Augustine into conversation with modern ones such as Einstein.



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Outline

1. How did it all begin?
 - This opening area asks the biggest question of all, focusing on Georges Lemaître and the development of the Big Bang theory. Our understanding of how the universe came into existence has changed, but questions about why it came into existence remain the same.
2. What keeps the universe in order?
 - Turning from the universe's origins to its operations, this area focuses on Galileo Galilei. People have long marveled at nature's orderliness. Galileo's story reveals a crucial debate over the causes behind nature's laws as well as the limits of human knowledge.
3. Where did we come from?
 - This area dives deeper into nature's processes to discuss the origin of life, focusing on Charles Darwin. As with cosmology, life's origins and diversity have long been subjects that have elicited deeper questions about meaning and purpose in the world.
4. What makes us unique?
 - Bringing human beings into focus, this area looks at the story of Francis Collins and the Human Genome Project. Humanity is part of the animal world, but we also possess important qualities that set us apart.
5. What is our potential?
 - This area turns to how we have applied our unique abilities to shape our world, focusing on Francis Bacon and the use of technology. Our ability to harness nature has improved our lives, but it also calls into question the limits of human wisdom.
6. What is our place in it all?
 - The final area delves into our responsibilities as stewards of our world, focusing on John Muir and environmentalism. Human ingenuity has allowed us to take advantage of our planet's rich resources, but what is our role as caretakers of creation?

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