

**Across the Cosmos July 2024:  
Habitability for Your Cosmic Future: AstroAnthropology Meets AstroEthics**

Amidst the growing feelings of despair, frustration, fear, and division in the U.S. and around the world, I want to take a moment to commend the Clergy Letter Project for its efforts to bridge, rather than deepen, societal divides. Mailing costs for the monthly CLP e-newsletter are provided by the Center for Advanced Study In Religion and Science (CASIRAS), because we consider this a critical venue for communication. CASIRAS is closely related to IRAS, the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science.<sup>1</sup> Anyone who is interested in respectful and diverse conversations on issues at the intersection of science and religion can become a member of IRAS. Together, our organizations publish the open-access *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*.<sup>2</sup> I encourage you to consider becoming a member of IRAS, and to check out the excellent articles available in the *Zygon Journal*.

IRAS has held an annual conference on beautiful Star Island, New Hampshire since its inception in 1954. This month, I'd like to give you a very small taste of this year's exciting topics, as one who unfortunately couldn't be physically present, but listened to the presentations that were streamed on YouTube. You can access these presentations through the link provided below.<sup>3</sup> This year's conference explored the impact the discovery of extraterrestrial life (ETL), especially *intelligent*<sup>4</sup> extraterrestrial life, might have on religion,<sup>5</sup> as well as the impact prolonged exposure off Earth might have on human bodies and cultures.

Just a few highlights: CLP member Ted Peters discussed how theologians have thought about ETL throughout history; Seth Shostak discussed the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI); Harold Connolly talked about probing the Solar System's origins through sample return missions from asteroids; Paul Carr explored the question of non-human animal souls; Mark Shelhamer talked about what happens to the body in space; Jennifer Wiseman gave a beautiful tour of our Universe, with reflections on the feelings evoked by nature; Andrew Davis presented an "anthropocosmic" view of the Universe, combining process theology with an evolving cosmos; ordained astrobiologist Lucas Mix cautioned about the narrative that we must evolve in a specific direction (beware of "Developmental Soteriology" masquerading as science!); Shoib Ahmed Malik provided a very enlightening overview on Islamic thought regarding ET and evolution; and Brandon Ambrosino gave a wonderful ethics presentation from the perspective of being a gay Christian theologian.

CLP members might find the streamed presentations excellent as background material for science and religion discussion groups. I also humbly encourage you to read the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iras.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.zygonjournal.org/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6FXM1sr4qUqzz-7\\_VOcz-o7J5qW2C1Eb](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6FXM1sr4qUqzz-7_VOcz-o7J5qW2C1Eb)

<sup>4</sup> What qualifies as "intelligent" remains vague and poorly understood.

<sup>5</sup> This was mostly addressed in terms of Christian theology; however, scientist and theologian Shoib Ahmed Malik delivered a fascinating talk on past and current thinking in Islamic theology.

*Reflections* piece I wrote for *Covalence*,<sup>6</sup> which presents some personal thoughts on impediments to inclusivity in enabling the next generation of thinkers in science and religion. Perhaps you might have ideas on how we can collectively enable young people who are navigating these impediments going forward. If so, as always you should feel free to email me!

Until next month,

Grace

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