

B.C.

Order must be 'already built in'

Catholic physicist speaks at TWU on harmony of modern physics and ancient faith

By C.S. Morrissey
Special to The B.C. Catholic

"Most of the beauty and order in nature is hidden from our eyes," but the deeper one goes, "the more orderly nature looks," said Dr. Stephen Barr in the first of two lectures. He was speaking on Reductionism, Cosmic Order, and Beauty in the Laws of Nature.

The particle physicist and cosmologist from the Bartol Research Institute, University of Delaware, gave two public lectures April 3 in which he spoke of the historical importance of faith in fostering scientific inquiry. The researcher and teacher of theoretical physics was here to meet with faculty from Trinity Western University and Redeemer Pacific College.

A prominent Catholic scholar, Barr is on the editorial board of the journal *First Things*, to which he is a frequent contributor. The journal recently published an exchange between him and Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schonborn of Vienna on evolution. He is also the author of *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith* (2003) and *A Student's Guide to Natural Science* (2006).

Despite this manifest order, "The lesson that many materialists draw from modern science is that the universe began with chaos, and that order and structure emerge spontaneously from disorder: 'Or-



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Catholic intellectuals discuss philosophy and science: Christopher Morrissey of Redeemer Pacific College (left), and Stephen Barr, Professor of Physics at the University of Delaware.

der comes at the end.' The laws of physics are seen as explaining this emergence of order and thus as being an alternative to God as an explanation of the world," said Barr.

"This upside-down view of what the laws of physics really are leaves out of the account one of the deepest lessons of modern science," he argued. In fact, order does not emerge from chaos; rather, order only unfolds from a deeper and implicit order "already built in," he said.

Arnold Sikkema, an Associate Professor in the TWU Physics de-

partment, spoke briefly after Barr and, agreeing with his philosophy of physics, initiated a discussion of technical details of interest to the large crowd of scientists and philosophers present.

In the evening Barr spoke on *Modern Physics and Ancient Faith: a Paradigm Shift in Thinking*. He argued that the supposed conflict between science and religion has really been a conflict between "scientific materialism" and religion.

"The science-versus-religion myth is based on an outdated view of scientific history and a skewed

interpretation of what science has actually discovered," he said.

"Scientific materialism is a certain kind of story told about science, but not the only significant one on offer," he said. He outlined a serious challenge to some of the popular promoters of atheism within the scientific community.

He told the history of the relationship between Christianity and science, pointing out that only with Church-sponsored medieval universities, staffed by clerics, did a stable body of intellectual communities come into being for conducting steadily advancing scientific inquiry.

Barr also explained that the Galileo affair was a gross aberration in the Church's relation with science. As proof, he extensively detailed the contributions of 19 Catholic priests throughout history who, although not as well known as layman Galileo, nevertheless were indispensable to science's history. This showed how unusual the Galileo event was. Barr called it simply "a colossal screw up" which departed from the norm.

Barr also discussed five great discoveries of the 20th century, primarily in physics.

- The Big Bang, suggesting a beginning for the universe.
- New mathematical physical laws with amazing beauty, symmetry, and order.
- "Anthropic coincidences" fine-tuning the universe to make it suitable for human life.
- 20th-century quantum mechanics' overthrowing of physical determinism.
- Godel's theorem, suggesting the limits of any merely mechanistic view of man.
- He argued that these stunning discoveries "are more consonant with the traditional Jewish and Christian view of the cosmos and of human beings than with any materialist philosophy."
- Dr. Barr also lectured publicly at UBC on April 4. He came to TWU under the auspices of the Vancouver Area Science and Religion Forum (a local chapter of the Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation). □



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No need for 'the pill,' says specialist

Oklahoma-based obstetrician/gynecologist Dr. Mary Martin became a convert to the Billings Ovulation Method of Natural Family Planning because she was dissatisfied with prescribing the birth control pill to treat a wide range of fertility and women's health problems.

Dr. Martin, Dr. Jan Hemstad, and Registered Nurse Darcy Hemstad will present a 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. seminar May 24 on NFP at the Fairmont Empress Hotel in Victoria. Topics will include the Billings Ovulation Method, polycystic ovary syndrome, fertility problems, thyroid disorders, endometriosis, breastfeeding, premenopausal symptoms, and how to give up contraceptive medications.

The cost is \$35 per person

or \$50 per couple before May 1, \$20 more for registrations after that date. A complimentary breakfast and lunch are provided. Info and registration: Billings Centre of Fertility Education / Vancouver Island, 369 Arbutus Ave., Maple Bay, B.C. V9L 5X6; Sue, 250-709-9081; jandsfryer@shaw.ca; www.billingsmethod.com.

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