

A Christmas Message from the UBC Graduate & Faculty Christian Forum.

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The Forum has heard from four courageous Christian thinkers during 2024. The tone was set by Christopher Watkin from Monash University, Australia on February 14. The title of his talk was *The Bible as a Tool for Changing Culture*. Abigail Favale from Notre Dame University, Indiana followed on March 13 with a talk entitled *Examining the Sources of Gender: Why Sexual Difference Matters*. Bill Cavanaugh, from De Paul University in Chicago, on September 24 spoke effectively on *Secularization and Idolatry in Amazon's World: A Theological Analysis of the Consumer Economy*. Finally, Denis Alexander from Cambridge University, UK on November 7 expounded on the intriguing topic *Finding God Through Dawkins: A Dramatic Irony*. There is one theme that binds these talks together and it seems especially appropriate at the Advent and Christmas seasons: i.e., the ongoing relationship between Christianity and culture. Each presentation asked: What is the relationship between the Christian enchanted/transcendent imagination and contemporary society's rationalized world with its reduced, immanent frame of time-space-energy-matter?

Dr. Watkin showed how St. Augustine's engagement with late Roman society can inform our posture towards late modernity. He encouraged us to *out-narrate the current cultural narrative*. Abigail provided a sketch of two distinct paradigms: the *gender paradigm* and the *Genesis paradigm*. She skillfully demonstrated the implications of a godless gender paradigm over against the Biblical paradigm where God-created sexual difference is appreciated. Bill argued that modernity is not the condition of being *disenchanted* but merely the condition of having *learned to describe the world as disenchanted*. Worship, he contests, has not actually waned in our supposedly 'secular' world. Rather, the target of worship has changed, so that we worship the things that we have created. Denis addressed the decline and fall of the New Atheism movement, citing the loss of both meaning and the grounds for morality, the overreach of the atheist worldview, and the vitriolic style and tone in Dawkins' claims in his famous book *The God Delusion*.

There is much more substance in what we learned from our brilliant speakers, but one simple point remains. There is a desperate need for us to think more deeply, critically, and theologically about the big issues of our day. How do we relate the Christian faith and worldview to modern culture and its discontents? Do we accept uncritically the way in which gender has driven a wedge between our bodies and our identity? Do we recognize the emptiness and dangers of the many idols that we naively worship? Finally, do we alert our friends to the contradictions and weak arguments of atheistic propaganda, and point the way to genuine faith?

Our collective thanks to Gord for keeping the the program organized and relevant and to all supporters of the Graduate and Faculty Christian Forum. Your support of this important work is highly valued. Thank-you.

Have a Blessed Christmas 2024, Olav.

