

Wonder, Beauty, and Meaning: Living at the Interface of Science and Spirituality

Wednesday January 21, 2015 12noon-1:30pm Room 54-915

Lunch Provided

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Have you ever seen a green sunset, or the moons of Jupiter through a pair of binoculars, or a blue heron flying low over a marsh? Have you ever been stopped in your tracks by the sound of a hawk, or the laughter of a child, or the incredible miracle of your own existence written in the DNA within every cell of your body? Have you ever been amazed at a mathematical equation that captures the way sound waves image the earth or the womb? Science is alive with the sacred and our lives are pregnant with purpose and meaning. And yet, we can sometimes compartmentalize our intellectual and spiritual selves into different boxes, imposing barriers that limit and constrain us. Many of the most exciting areas in science and engineering in recent years are at the interface of different fields, often involving the breaking down of barriers between science and engineering. The same is true in our own lives – we need to breakdown barriers and false compartments in order to live as whole human beings in mind and spirit. This is how we find the most happiness and fulfillment in life, the most meaning and balance. There can be tension in seeing how to balance our spiritual and technical lives - how do we avoid feeling the need to leave our spiritual lives at the door of the lab and pick them up when we go home at night? These questions were the foundation of an undergraduate seminar offered at MIT over a 10-year period. We discovered some very clear points of commonality between our work and our spiritual lives. Using personal experience, the lives of great scientists and mystics, and the insight of over 100 students from every religious tradition who took the seminar, we will look at five aspects of science and spirituality that can help integrate our lives: wonder, awareness, beauty, creativity, and meaning.



Dan Burns is a Research Scientist at the MIT Earth Resources Lab working in applied geophysics. He has been at MIT since 1994 serving as the Academic Officer for the Department of Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences for 3 years and Executive Director of the Earth Resources Lab for 10 years. He taught a freshman seminar in science and spirituality at MIT for more than 10 years and was named freshman advisor of the year in 2002. He is also an ordained Deacon in the Catholic Church and Director of Formation for Deacons in Boston. He holds a PhD from MIT in Geophysics.