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ISCAST is a think tank of Christian academics, scientists, professionals and theologians who explore the interface and interactions between science & technology with the Christian faith.

Community Conversations in Science and Christianity

Those involved with ISCAST are deeply aware of the suspicion, even the hostility, with which science and its practitioners are often met in the Christian community. It's a situation which ISCAST aspires to remedy and so it was with no small excitement that we discovered the John Templeton Foundation addressing this very problem through their 2010 funding priority "Religious Leadership in an Age of Science."

Through this initiative JTF seeks to fund programmes advancing scientific literacy amongst religious leaders. The obvious response was to propose some sort of science education programme, yet it struck us that the problem really isn't one of access to scientific knowledge. After all, even religious leaders with advanced degrees in the sciences can struggle to make an impact.

So when we submitted our application for funding, we proposed something a little different -Community Conversations in Science and Christianity. Basically, a community conversation involves bringing together all those with an interest in the problem at hand and, with the guidance of a skilled facilitator, drawing together their combined wisdom to generate innovative solutions of direct relevance to local communities.

The same method has been widely used to tackle complex problems in other contexts: from HIV/AIDS prevention (United Nations Development Programme), to racial violence (Nelson Mandela Foundation), to Bushfire management (Department of Sustainability and Environment). Each of these organizations had discovered that traditional "expert driven" approaches generated hostility and mistrust within communities, largely because community needs and interests were being ignored or even challenged. But when they chose to enter into discussion with local communities fear and mistrust were broken down with surprisingly constructive results.

What might happen, then, if we were to emulate this model at the interface of science and Christianity? What if, in other words, we were to take seriously the idea of a conversation between scientific enquiry and Christian faith? Hopefully we would see the same dispelling of fear and mistrust and so genuine progress towards incorporating science and scientists into the life and thought of local Christian communities.

What we have proposed to JTF is a two-year programme in two stages. In the first year we intend to prepare two booklets, one outlining the idea of community conversations with particular reference to science and Christianity, and one containing a selection of thought provoking "conversation starters" drawn from the extensive literature on the subject. These will then be used as the basis for an initial trial conversation involving around 20 participants of whom around a quarter will be ISCAST Fellows and Associates.

After we refine the method based on our first stage trial, we will then launch a second stage of up to five community conversations in science and Christianity. We are actually on the look-out for ISCAST branches to host these conversations and we would urge you, wherever you are in Australia, to make your interest known to Richard Gijbers (admin@iscast.org) in the first instance.

Of course, we still have to await JTF's decision on funding, but that aside we anticipate that this project will help us hone an exciting new method for furthering a genuine conversation between science and Christianity so leading to a real connection with science within Australian churches.

An online version of this article with a bibliography of online materials is available on the ISCAST website (www.iscast.org/node/527)

Murray Hogg, Chair, ISCAST Vic Exec Committee

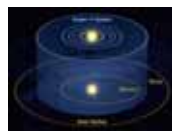
In this Issue:

- News Items
- Journal Abstracts
- Event News

www.iscast.org

News Items

Items of interest to the interaction between science and Christianity and of significance to the ISCAST family. Your submissions of these are welcome.



Exploring the Universe

Ruth Banciewicz discusses exoplanets, intelligent life, human significance and C.S.Lewis on the Science and

Belief blog. [More](#)



Only breed smart babies: Ethicist

AN Australian ethicist has advocated genetically screening embryos to create superior "designer babies" with higher IQs. [More](#)



Bishop John Warwick Wilson 1937-2011

Bishop John Wilson, former Bishop of the Southern Region, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, died recently after a long battle with cancer. We in ISCAST are all of course saddened by John's death. He was a good friend to ISCAST and attended many meetings over the years as time permitted. Both he and his wife, Jill, attended COSAC07 at Geelong, to hear Professor Alister McGrath speaking about the nature of reality. [More](#)

News items continued next page...

News Items



AAS Science of Climate Change Document

The Australian Academy of Sciences has produced a document called The Science of Climate Change - Questions and Answers which aims to explain the current situation in climate science, including where there is consensus in the scientific community and where uncertainties exist. [More](#)



New Book by Collins & Giberson

Famed geneticist Francis Collins and science/religion scholar Karl Giberson have just published The Language of Science and Faith: Straight Answers to Genuine Questions, a non-fiction volume for the general reader that tackles difficult and controversial questions in the religion-and-science dialogue in a style that is both intelligent and accessible. [More](#)



The God Experiment

Jeremy Stangroom interviews physicist Russell Stannard on the further development of his prayer experiment, in which two groups of heart surgery patients are compared, one prayed for, and the other not. [More](#)



Exoplanets, Life and Human Significance

Prior to giving the Faraday Institute lecture on Tuesday 1st March, NASA astronomer Dr Jennifer Wiseman was interviewed by Woman's Hour about the search for exoplanets and how science and faith are integrated in her work and life. [More](#)



Responsible Dominion

Responsible Dominion: A Christian Approach to Sustainable Development is a book by Ian Hore-Lacey. Christian Book Summaries have provided a summary of this book which you can download from the website. [More](#)



Neuroscience And The Soul

Dr Nancy Murphey surveys the history of personhood on the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences website, and asks whether

modern reductionist accounts of what it means to be human are fundamentally incompatible with the Christian faith. [More](#)



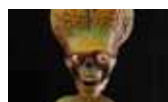
McGrath wins 2011 Christianity Today Award

Alister McGrath's recent book "The Passionate Intellect" has won the 2011 Christianity Today Book Award for Apologetics / Evangelism. [More](#)



From Where I Stand: Evolution conference invites us all to a 'new beginning'

Sr. Joan Chittister's latest column has been posted to NCRonline.org. [More](#)



Preparing for a Close Encounter

An extraterrestrial-themed edition of the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A has been published. In it, scientists examine all aspects of the search for extraterrestrial life. [More](#)



Universe captured in mind-boggling detail by Sloan Digital Sky Survey

Astronomers from the Sloan Digital Sky Survey release SDSS-III, the most detailed picture of the universe ever made. [More](#)



The Ethical Dilemmas of Euthanasia

Dr Megan Best, a bioethicist and palliative care doctor in Sydney writes about the complex issues in the euthanasia debate in 'Life's End', the latest issue of CASE magazine. [More](#)



It is not only humans that matter to God

Scripture supports the view that care for creation is an act of worship, argues Meteorologist Mick Pope in The Melbourne Anglican. [More](#)



Astrotheology: Religious Reflections On Extraterrestrial Lifeforms

Ted Peters writes on the possible implications of discovering that we are not alone in the universe for the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences. [More](#)



Everything you think you know about the Dark Ages is wrong

Author Nancy Marie Brown has released a new book entitled The Abacus and the Cross: The Story of the Pope Who Brought the Light of Science to the Dark Ages (Basic Books; December 2010) which explores the fascinating story of "The Scientist Pope", Gerbert of Aurillac, Pope Sylvester II. [More](#)



The Cover Up: Wendy Sharpe and the poetry of Genesis

CPX Fellow Bronwen Hanna reflects on what art and Genesis have to communicate about what it means to be human. [More](#)



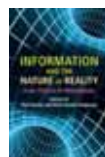
Freedom And The Soul

A blog from the Thomas More Institute explains the traditional Christian understanding of the soul, and hence of human freedom. It is argued that determinism is an inadequate conception of the human person. [More](#)



Christians In Science Conference

CiS held a conference entitled "The Christian Roots Of Modern Science - Learning from the Past" on Saturday 30th October 2010, at St Paul 's Church, Robert Adam Street , London. The audio files are now available for download. [More](#)



New Book: Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics

Many scientists regard mass and energy as the primary currency of nature. In recent years, however, the concept of information has gained importance. [More](#)

No access to the internet and want more information? Contact the ISCAST office (see back page) and we will forward the full item to you. Postage and handling fees apply.

Christian Perspectives on Science and Christianity: Journal Abstracts

The ISCAST Online Journal – Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology is a forum for those exploring the interaction between science, technology and the Christian faith. Submissions are invited and they may be academic articles, less formal discussions aimed at non-academic readers, opinion pieces, or book reviews. Articles and discussions will be refereed. The intended readers are Christians interested in science and technology, and scientists and technologists interested in the Christian faith. Specialist knowledge is not assumed. Below are selected abstracts from the journal. (see www.iscast.org/journalpage)



Review of P W Singer's Book 'Wired for war: The robotics revolution and conflict in the 21st century'

Penguin Books, 2009, 512 pp.
ISBN 10: 0143116843, ISBN 13: 978014311684

Reviewed by

James Garth, March 2011

Review Extract

In *Wired for war*, political scientist and author Peter W Singer (not to be confused with the well-known Australian philosopher and ethicist of the same name) has crafted an expansive, riveting, provocative and at times explosive account of the game-changing revolution currently unfolding in robotics technology and its application to 21st century military and paramilitary operations.

Like a high-altitude UAV loitering over a battlefield, Singer provides the reader with a panoramic view of a rapidly-changing technological landscape, frequently zooming in to a multitude of specific development programs and the colourful personalities that are driving them. From unmanned mine-hunting submarines, past the ominously-named SWORDS, to insect-like robots called 'PRAWNS' that swarm to provide reconnaissance or overpower an adversary, we are guided through a dazzling array of automated systems that Singer compellingly argues are changing the face of warfare.



Leviathan: A reflection on 'natural evil' and the goodness of creation

Jonathan Clarke, March 2011

Author

Jonathan Clarke PhD is a research geoscientist, a Fellow of ISCAST, and a Director of ISCAST, Canberra, ACT act@iscast.org

Abstract

We live in a world where natural variability and catastrophic events are often understood by Christians as the result of 'natural evil' in a fallen world. The presence of many of these processes over the 3.5 billion years of recorded geological time shows that these are an integral part of the way the world works. Furthermore earthquakes, volcanoes, floods and other catastrophic events also provide

fertile soils, mineral deposits, great beauty and other things which Christians accept as blessings of a good creation. In this reflection I suggest that a faithful response to these issues can begin to be informed by an understanding the relationship between God and the monsters in the Book of Job.



Review of Bradley Monton's book 'Seeking God in Science: an atheist defends Intelligent Design'

Broadview Press, 2009, 180 pp. ISBN 10: 1551118637, ISBN 13: 9781551118635

Reviewed by

Murray Hogg, December 2010

Review Extract

After a preliminary read, I regard this as one of the most interesting treatments of Intelligent Design theory on offer. I found it surprising for a number of reasons:

- 1) the author (Bradley Monton, Prof. of Phil., Univ. of Colorado, Boulder) is an atheist who doesn't reject ID outright;
- 2) it treats ID as a serious philosophical/scientific hypothesis worthy of serious analysis rather than knee-jerk acceptance or rejection; and
- 3) it takes a rather broad view of ID – one which doesn't restrict itself to an evaluation of ID as concerned with biological phenomena only.

The book really is a work of philosophy rather than science, and I think those who approach ID purely as a scientific hypothesis will wonder, at points, just what precisely Monton is on about. The first chapter, in which Monton seeks to formulate a clear definition of ID, scientifically focused readers may find frustrating. Those with a more philosophical bent will have far less problem. The two central chapters on the legitimacy of treating ID as science and an analysis of some plausible ID arguments cover familiar topics in a quite unfamiliar, and thoroughly thought provoking, way. The last chapter on the teaching of ID in schools is concerned mainly with ethical and pedagogical concerns rather than with legal concerns arising from the US Constitution. It may, accordingly, help those in a non-US context process the issue in locally relevant ways.



How to read the Bible in the 21st century

Frank O'Dea, December 2010.

Author

Frank O'Dea was a parish priest in Perth. His principal ministry now is working with a team of lay people putting on Life in the Eucharist programs.

Abstract

This paper give some history of how the Bible has been understood over the centuries. The rise of science and the Enlightenment made some people think that the only truth is what science and reason can prove. This has led to much abuse of the Bible. We need to recover the truth that is also found in parable, poetry and metaphor. We must understand the literary form used by each author. We need prayer to get a deeper understanding of the Scriptures.

This paper was presented at the ISCAST Intensive, 'Who says? The use and misuse of the Bible in an age of science and technology', held in Melbourne, October 2010.



On prophets, kings, priests and counsellors

Richard Gijbers, December 2010.

Author

Richard Gijbers, formerly a forester involved in policy development and planning; currently a consultant assisting organisations with strategic development and information management. A Fellow of ISCAST.

Abstract

The church is putting much effort into developing a theology of the environment. This is in response to concerns about challenges such as deforestation and global warming, and the realisation that the church needs to add its voice with that of others to express their concern and to contribute to addressing these problems.

I argue that there are at least four roles that the church can play in taking up this responsibility and that we cannot focus on just one. These roles are: prophets, priests, kings and counsellors. I briefly describe each role and exhort Christians to understand the role they play and to exercise it with care and responsibility.

Do you have an article to submit to Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology?
Contact the editorial team via www.iscast.org/journalpage

Event News

Test of FAITH Course in Gippsland

Date: Commencing 18 March 2011 at 7:30pm

Venue: Warragul Anglican church

The course will run for four weeks (on Fridays) and is open to all who wish to attend.

Fire in the Belly

Date: 19 March 2011

Prof. Andrew Wood on "Low-level Effects, Cheshire Cats and Junk Science:- How do we prove that everyday technology is 'safe'?"

Venue: John and Jillian Quartel's home, 2a Barloa Road, Mont Albert Vic 3127

Come at 6:30pm for dinner (bring your own food to share). The meeting will start at 8:00pm.

ISCAST (VIC) Annual Lecture 2011

Date: 19 August 2011

Venue: St Paul's Cathedral, Flinders Street, Melbourne

Keynote Speaker: Nancey Murphy

Professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. She received the B.A. from Creighton University (philosophy and psychology) in 1973, the Ph.D. from U.C. Berkeley (philosophy of science) in 1980, and the Th.D. from the Graduate Theological Union (theology) in 1987.

Topic: Did my Neurones Make Me Do It?

Lectures will also run in other states. Keep an eye on the website.

Of Interest

Joan Chittister's blog: <http://ncronline.org/blog/5>

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This is an official organ of ISCAST (The Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology), a not for profit organisation registered in New South Wales, Australia).

It is published quarterly in both hard copy and digital formats. It includes news items of relevance to both the ISCAST family and to the engagement of science and Christianity in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

It also includes abstracts of articles submitted to "Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology", ISCAST's online journal and the latest information of events hosted by ISCAST Chapters around Australia and New Zealand.

Items published on the ISCAST website and in this Digest explore the interaction between science and the Christian faith and will be published to foster the discussions and debate. ISCAST cannot endorse any or all of the opinions expressed here.

Details of events published will be correct as at the date of publication but you are encouraged to check the website or with the relevant contact before the event.

Hard copy versions of the Digest are available at the cost of \$10 pa and subscriptions can be arranged by contacting the ISCAST Victoria office.

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