

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.

Devotions prepared for the ISCAST Board Retreat of March 2nd, 2013

By Peter H. Barry and adapted for the ISCAST Digest

- What has God done for us as our Creator?
- What has God done to bring us into fellowship with Himself?
- What should our personal response be?
- How should we in ISCAST communicate with those in our world?

A. What has God done for us as our Creator?

Hebrews 1: 1-3 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

Genesis 1: 26 We read that human beings are made in the 'image of God'. [Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.]

Psalms 8: 3-6 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.

What does 'being made in the image of God' mean? Quoting from the Test of Faith course, this means (1) the 'gift of a personal relationship with God' and (2) having a responsibility to 'rule' over the earth. It also seems clear to me that from what scientists have learnt from the book of nature, that 'being made in the image of God' must also include the ability that we human beings have 'to think God's thoughts after him' - to be able to discover the underlying laws and processes that control the universe and biological life and their evolution over the ages - to be able to understand and describe these processes in mathematical equations, to make valid predictions and manipulate scientific processes. God has been incredibly gracious in giving us human beings the ability to do such things. The tragedy is that some

people, like Stephen Hawking, now consider that because we understand how natural processes work there is no need for a belief in God - because they consider that God is only invoked to fill gaps - to fit in to what science cannot explain, a view unfortunately also held by some Christians. ISCAST has an important role to counter such erroneous views.

Prayer: *We do thank you Lord for your creation. We thank you for your graciousness to us human beings that in your creation you provide so much for us. We thank you that you give us the ability to understand your creation and to use it to make technological and scientific advances to improve the health and material standard of living of us human beings, though, we are also aware of the potential danger of the misuse of such advances. As Christians, we do acknowledge and thank you for your graciousness and care for your people and for the abilities you have given us.*

We should periodically take time to prayerfully reflect on all that God has provided for us in His creation, not forgetting the abilities He has given us, and thank him for it.

B. What has God done to bring us into fellowship with Himself?

Philippians 2: 5-11

- Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
- Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
- but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!
- Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What has God done for us? He has made a way for us to come into fellowship with Himself. He has done this by Jesus paying the penalty for our sins. He then sent the Holy Spirit to move us to accept his free gift and to guide us in our daily living.

What was the cost? What must it have been like for Jesus to give up so much, to take on our human frailties, to be separated while on earth from the really close relationship with God his Father that he had

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Devotions prepared for the ISCAST Board Retreat, *continued.*

enjoyed before, and then for him to go to the cross for us, to be scourged, nailed, abused, to then take on the burden of our sin and be completely separated from his Father for a time, so that he could die and pay the penalty for that sin? We can maybe get some idea of the cost to Jesus both at Gethsemane and in his cry from the cross to his father "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). All this was to show us what God is like, how God wants us to relate to him, how Jesus can redeem and save us from our sin, and with Jesus' resurrection to show that this is all part of God's plan and that death is not the end. "This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

Prayer: Lord, help us to appreciate the cost to God and Jesus of his incarnation and crucifixion for us. Lord, help us to personally appreciate the benefits of a restored relationship with you, to experience your love to us personally, together with all the many practical blessings that result directly and indirectly from that.

We should take time to prayerfully reflect on God and Jesus, and on all that Jesus has done for us by coming to live on earth, to die for us and be raised again and to ponder on the promise that by placing our faith in Him and in his sacrificial death on our behalf, we can come into a personal relationship with Him. We should then thank God for all these things.

C. What should our personal response be?

On one Saturday this February, at our local church's men's breakfast we had a study on the very challenging passage in Luke 9:57-62, based on a talk by Oswald Chambers, entitled "The Will in Christian Discipleship".

57. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him [Jesus], "I will follow you wherever you go."
58. Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."
59. He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."
60. Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."
61. Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but

first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

62. Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

What does it really mean to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Oswald Chambers speaks of a man with a weak will as being one who "...is without any impelling passion, he is the creature of every dominating influence; with good people he is good, with bad people he is bad, not because he is a hypocrite, but because he has no ruling passion, and any strong personality knits him into shape." Is serving Jesus our top priority? Has our passion for serving Jesus waned? Clearly these are questions that we need to appropriately address.

We should prayerfully reflect on what it really means to follow Jesus, to put Him first and have a passion for wanting to serve Him, and then with His help seek to put this into practice daily.

D. How should we in ISCAST communicate with those in our world?

In particular, how do we, as Christians, and ISCAST seek to demonstrate that modern scientific discovery and the Christian faith are not mutually exclusive?

How do we meet the challenge of the New Atheists who argue that the Christian faith is no longer relevant in the light of modern science? God is considered to be irrelevant by many people today. What are the reasons and what can we do to counter such views?

What are some of the other issues and questions? Theistic evolution and a literalistic view of the biblical creation accounts; The Big Bang and creation; Prayer and miracles; Does neuroscience explain away spiritual experience; Ethical problems in biomedicine (e.g., stem cell research – attitude of Christians, cloning); The degradation of our environment (e.g., pollution, climate change, soil degradation, water problems, etc.)

Clearly, it is also important that the way in which we approach such issues, does not add to the problem. We need to pray that we handle these issues in a humble, gracious, honest and caring way, without compromising our beliefs, as I believe Dr Darrel Falk does particularly well in his book "Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology"

and which are embodied in the beliefs and ethos of the Biologos Foundation (biologos.org/about) which has similar aims to ISCAST), of which Darrel was a former president and also an ISCAST speaker.

How can we best meet the needs of students and teachers, who are battling with these questions, in a somewhat different theological and scientific environment than the one in which many of us grew up? What role is there for approaches such as those like the Test of Faith courses and their resources and presentations?

We should take time to prayerfully reflect on how we and ISCAST can best deal with issues such as those above. We should consider how, with God's help, we can show that modern scientific discovery and the Christian faith are not incompatible, and how we can break down barriers on the above issues between Christians with differing views and between Christians and non-Christians.

Acknowledgments: Some helpful editorial suggestions and comments by Assoc. Prof. Robert J. Stening and Dr Jonathan Clarke have been much appreciated.

References:

Oswald Chambers: The Will in Christian Discipleship. From: *The Moral Foundations of Life: A Series of Talks on the Ethical Principles of the Christian Life*. Copyright © 1936 Oswald Chambers Publications Association.

Darrel Falk (2004) *Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology*, InterVarsity Press.

Test of Faith Course (2009) - Course and resource material on science and faith from the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion (see: www.testoffaith.com for further details).

Bible passages are from the New International Version (NIV, 1984).

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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.



The Libet experiment and its implications for conscious will

Peter G.H. Clarke explores the controversy around the Libet experiment. A famous experiment of Benjamin Libet and his colleagues has been interpreted as showing that our brains initiate voluntary movements before we are aware of having decided to move, and that this calls into question the efficacy of our wills. [Read more](#)



A theory of everything won't provide all the answers

We shouldn't be obsessed with finding a theory of everything, says Lisa Randall, one of the world's most prominent theoretical physicists. [Read more](#)

Note: Due to the special reports included in this edition, the usual amount of news items has been drastically reduced. Please visit the ISCAST [website](#) and [Twitter](#) for more news items.

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.

ISCAST - Where To from Here? Report on Board Retreat of 2 March

Richard Gijbers

The ISCAST Board with representatives of various Chapters met to develop an ISCAST agenda within the framework of our Vision, Mission and Core Values. Our experience is that identifying areas of priority/opportunity takes us a long way to achieving them. We identified ten areas that require attention. Your feedback and offers of help will be much appreciated. The areas are (in no particular order):

1) A CEO/ Roving Ambassador/ Project Officer

So many of the things we want done need someone to do them. Things like actively supporting the Chapters, representing ISCAST to the news media (including blogs) and so on.

Employing such a person will incur a cost, not only for the salary but also for travel, office facilities and so on. We will require some form of team support from members to raise this money. Such a person would transform ISCAST, being a focus for and generating activity in the areas we are now only dreaming of.

2) Setting up an ISCAST Fellow travelling program

Many of our Fellows (and others) have material that they can share with other Chapters for their benefit and for the benefit of the Fellows themselves (*"experts are not without honour save in their own Chapters"*). Is there a way in which we can identify topics and speakers and set up a travelling fund so that they can visit Chapters?

3) Regenerating our agenda

We recognised that we need to broaden our gender and ethnic mix. Our current "mix" constrains our agenda and the issues we consider. In turn, this restricts our membership and our effectiveness. Women and students in particular are under-represented. We need to explore how to be more inclusive in our agenda and membership.

We also recognised that this narrow agenda was essentially built in to the founding aims and structures of ISCAST and we need to explore ways to address this.

4) Re-starting the Communications Working Group

Under Patsy Robertson the CWG achieved much in setting up our website, establishing the Digest, creating the *"Christian Perspectives in Science and Technology"* online journal, and starting our social media (Ning, Twitter and Facebook).

We now need to set a new agenda and a new suite of projects including:

- creating a separate CPOSAT website;
- raising the level of activity on Twitter and Facebook;
- becoming more active in dealing with the news media;
- encouraging more activity on blogs such as the ones members themselves are running but also the public ones such as The Conversation.

We also need to ensure that existing activities are sustainably supported. The first priority is to recruit a new chairman for the CWG and then recruit members from all over ISCAST (not just from Victoria).

5) Establish strategic links with schools

The schools sector is an area of great need for wisdom and intelligence in dealing with science and religion issues. There has been much effort put into separating science and religion in school curricula but, while perhaps avoiding conflict, this is creating a vacuum that teachers are ill-equipped to address.

Some denominations and schools are seeking to address this by creating their own course material and ISCAST is in an ideal position to offer input. We could provide speakers, advice on curricula, invite teachers to ISCAST events, set up strategic *"Community Conversations"*, develop resource material and provide the Test of Faith material as a resource.

Many of us in our younger years also attended Science Camps where established scientists would present on their science and their faith. For some this was pivotal in our future thinking about our careers. The Board wants to pursue setting these up again.

6) Develop a coherent research strategy

Currently much of what we publish and many of our conferences focus on random topics related more to opportunities and who is available, rather than strategically building up a core of knowledge (one exception to this is probably Allan Day's science and faith course material published on the website). Of itself, this is not a bad thing as it gives many of our members opportunities to publish on matters close to their hearts and experience.

There is also scope to supplement this with projects and coordinated contributions to address specific issues. The Board recognised the opportunity to conduct research with other organisations (eg the Graeme Clarke Research Institute) and to be a resource for individuals conducting research.

At the very least we should register with the government as a research organisation.

7) Test of Faith

The Test of Faith material is excellent and many of us have used it in small groups and elsewhere. We should do more to encourage its use. Suggestions included:

- Inviting Ruth Bancewicz to Australia (possibly as a joint exercise with Koorong?)
- Encourage its use with:
 - School teachers
 - Church groups
 - Others
- Use this to extend the Community Conversations idea, going beyond the immediate agenda of ToF and explore issues and receive feedback from small groups.

- Extend education activities beyond ToF. One example was the University of New South Wales' course on science and religion developed by Robert Stening.

8) Explore funding options

Obtaining the funds we require to do these things will be a challenge. We believe that we will know when the time is right when the funds become available. The John Templeton Fund is an obvious source of funds but we have tried to tap this with mixed success. Our remoteness from the thinking in the US and the UK gives us a clear disadvantage in tapping these funds. Also, any work that heavily relies on such funding will have questionable long term sustainability.

Setting up team support to employ staff has already been suggested but we will need to be careful that we don't rob from Peter to pay Paul with regard to funding ISCAST programs.

At the very least we should plan to register for GST and as a Research Organisation.

9) The ISCAST name and branding

The full name of ISCAST is a mouthful and a source of merriment for some. At the same time it has become a strong brand that is well recognised and is built into our founding documents.

When we established our website we created a new logo and introduced the name

ISCAST: Christians in Science and Technology

While legally we will remain the Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology, the new unofficial name is easier to use and quirky enough to be memorable (the marketing people tell me that is a good thing).

10) Membership issues

There is a wide range of matters that relate to our membership. These include:

1. **Succession:** where is the next generation of leadership coming from?
2. **The mix of members:** How do we attract more female and minority groups as members? How do we address the in-built factors in our structures that attract largely white male scientists?
3. Connected to this is **ISCAST's exposure to Stockdale ACS** which is itself undergoing changes. A wider and larger membership will help buffer us from our exposure here.
4. **Patron:** Should we approach someone to be our Patron? There are a number of possible candidates for such a position that we could consider.

The agenda is broad and the biggest hurdle to our achieving it is not finance but getting people involved. "The harvest is plentiful..."
Luke 10:2.

Event News

COSAC 2013: FAITH, HOPE AND QUARKS

Scientific and Theological Perspectives on the Future

19-21 July 2013 Tabor Adelaide, South Australia

Keynote presenters:

- Rev Dr David Wilkinson, Astrophysicist and Principal of St John's College, Durham University
- Rev Dr Denis Edwards, Senior Lecturer, Department of Theology, Flinders University

For more information, contact: admin@iscast.org

Register
online:
[iscast.org/
COSAC2013](http://iscast.org/COSAC2013)

Public Lectures by David Wilkinson

Faith, Hope and Quarks: The Search for God in Contemporary Cosmology

- **Melbourne** - Monday, July 22nd
- **Sydney** - Tuesday, July 23rd
- **Brisbane** - Monday, July 29th

GCRI Free Public Lecture Series 2013

- **16 April** - Global Perspectives on the Science-Religion Dialogue (Prof. Velil-Matti Kärkkäinen)
- **29 July** - Apologetics in a Media-Dominated World (Prof. David Wilkinson)
- **1 October** - God and Natural Disasters (Prof. Terry Fretheim)
- **5 November** - Creation Care as a Life Principle (Dr Matthew Sleeth)

Further meetings (to be held prior to COSAC) to discuss the biblical and scientific materials.

Tabor Adelaide Pastors Conference

Responding to the New Atheism

- **25 - 26 July**

From Dawkins to Hitchens, the new atheists present both a challenge and opportunity for the Christian faith. David Wilkinson will review the main attacks, develop how Christian apologetics can not only respond but regain the initiative, and suggest practical ideas for pastors to enable and equip local churches.

More info: taboradelaide.edu.au

Science Week

- **10 - 18 August 2013**

For your diaries: more information to come!

Other News

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ISCAST
CHRISTIANS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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 \$15 p.a. and subscriptions can be arranged by contacting the ISCAST Victoria office.

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