

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

The Way of the Snake and the Dove

Jonathan Clarke offered the following thoughts at our most recent board meeting. We present it here for the whole ISCAST family to consider. Ed

I would like to share some thoughts that have been increasingly on my mind over the past few years. ISCASTians have been no stranger to controversy. Vigorous and sometime heated exchanges over how Christians should understand the first chapters of Genesis, respond to medical challenges associated with abortion or euthanasia, or to technological innovations such as nuclear energy or cloning are familiar to us all. As individual Christians in science and technology, many of us have occupied a space that is sometimes seen as a no-man's land between opposing camps, as compromisers and traitors to one (or both) sides, or as bridge builders between rival communities that see no need for a bridge.

I think it is true to say that we have seen some fruit of our work in these areas over the past 15 years. By the grace of God, through engagement with churches, institutions and the media, by scholarly articles, public meetings, visiting speakers and conferences, we have been able to raise the level of public and Christian discussion in many areas. Not that we can rest on our laurels, or assume that we have in some sense arrived, but we can and should give thanks that we have been able to have an impact in both churches and the broader community.

As we look to the future, are there further frontiers where ISCAST can play a role? In the wider field of science and society I have been disturbed by an apparent trend to increasingly vitriolic discussions. One area has been in regard to the attitude of self-appointed apologists of science such as Dawkins and Tyson whose disdain for religion seems now to be spreading to a wholesale rejection of philosophy. Another has been the politicisation of science, where positions on whole disciplines and technologies have become shibboleths. These include the use of solar and wind power, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), forest management, coal seam gas, and many others. A particular stand on, for example, wind turbines or GMOs, is taken to indicate an entire package of ideology, and the individual and position condemned or praised accordingly. There is, it would seem, to be no room for nuanced or common understanding across political divides.

Why is this so? Why, for example, are the small number of geologists who don't accept plate

tectonics still accepted at professional meetings, still able to publish in peer reviewed journals, and, while generally thought as wrong and sometimes the butt of jokes, are generally respected? Is it because plate tectonics has not become loaded with social and political baggage, whereas coal seam gas or forest management are? If this is so then the community has lost much because co-opting of complex questions by political agendas is a near-guarantee that the issues will not be discussed correctly and confusion, not light, will result, with barriers being erected between people of good will across social and political spectra.

Is there a role for ISCAST in such discussions? Are there lessons in our discussions on the interpretation of Genesis and engagement with the new atheists which we can apply to water management or the development of northern Australia? Is this a discussion space, where we can pattern Christ-like behaviour to the wider world as a form of incarnational expression, or do we risk losing our focus or speaking in areas where we have no real expertise? Certainly some of us are or have been professionally engaged in such topics in the past. Even if we do not move in this direction as an institute, we need to be aware of the needs and roles of our members active in these areas.

Are the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:16 relevant to our ministry in such areas? "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as wise as snakes and as peaceful as doves." Here Jesus uses two quite different images, one pagan, one biblical, to illustrate Christian witness in a hostile world. Snakes were often used as wisdom figures in the (pagan) Greco-Roman world, while the dove symbolised the end of judgment in the story of Noah and is used to symbolise the Spirit of God who renews and sustains creation.

Regardless of whether ISCAST moves into new fields or stays on familiar territory, both the organisation and its component ISCASTians will need both the wisdom of snakes and the peacefulness of doves through the anointing of the Spirit. We do have the promise of the consequences of such actions – we will be handed over, and brought before the authorities, but we also have the promise that the Father's Spirit will speak through us, regardless of the consequences.

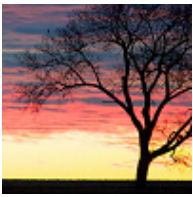
As we plan the direction of ISCAST let us be both warned and encouraged by these words.

In this Issue:

- News Items
- Journal Abstracts
- Event News

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.



God & Nature Magazine

God & Nature magazine is a literary resource promoting conversation beyond the origins controversy in science

and Christian faith.

[Read more](#)



Having a Sense of Purpose May Add Years to Your Life

Feeling that you have a sense of purpose in life may help you live longer, no matter what your age, according to new research. The research has clear implications for promoting positive aging and adult development, says the lead researcher.

[Read more](#)



Churches Empowered When Informed About Science

From the Templeton Report...

Science is often presumed to be a tricky matter for people of faith. Pew Research has found that Americans can feel uncomfortable accepting scientific discoveries when they are perceived to contradict their religious beliefs. But Scientists in Congregations is discovering that the apparent opposition can be overcome.

[Read more](#)



Minority View Should Not Frame False Dichotomy

The relationship between faith and reason—particularly between faith and science—goes to the credibility of being a Christian in the

modern world. It is important that a minority view within Christianity is not allowed to frame a false dichotomy between religion and science, writes Fr Chris Middleton SJ, Principal of St Aloysius College in Sydney.

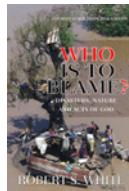
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The Pseudoscientists: Discussion with James Garth About Science and Religion

We told you we'd have him back, and we did! James Garth (our guest on Episode 110) returns to discuss in more detail with Jack the complex relationship between science and religion. Are they always in conflict? How does a Christian aerospace engineer such as James view science? Are faith and skepticism incompatible? Listen for our thoughts on these questions and more.

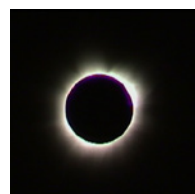
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Who is to Blame? Disasters, Nature and Acts of God

Bob White, a leading geophysicist, tackles one of the biggest conundrums in Christian thinking. He combines a profound knowledge of the science behind dramatic natural events with thorough research into their impact, and underpins it with a carefully reasoned theological response.

[Read more](#)



Do the Heavens Declare the Glory of God?

Do the heavens declare the glory of God? Does the firmament show forth His handiwork?

I'm sure Dr. Wofford would be shocked if I simply said, "Yes," and sat down. On the other hand, you would all be even more stunned if I said, "No, the heavens don't declare the glory of God," and sat down. So, I think you

can all safely deduce that there is something more to be said about the psalmist's ancient declaration.

[Read more](#)

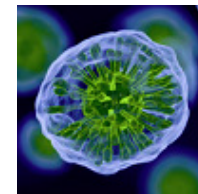


Are We Alone in the Universe?

Astronomers have become increasingly successful in identifying exoplanets (that is, planets which are outside our solar system). The

first confirmed discovery of an exoplanet was in 1992, and detection rates have accelerated rapidly in the last five years. This year alone, more than 700 have been identified.

[Read more](#)



Human Evolution: Genes, Genealogies and Phylogenies

Ever since I entered university I have been interested in cells and their large molecules—DNA, RNA and proteins. It is said that small things amuse small minds, and I must confess that my interest waned with entities larger than about 20µm. That's approximately the diameter of a cell. Naturally, I became a cell biologist.

[Read more](#)



Do the Miracles of Jesus Contradict Science?

Dr Mark Harris presents a lecture on "Do the Miracles of Jesus

Contradict Science?", followed by a question and answer session.

Dr Mark Harris is the course manager of the master's programme in Science and Religion at the University of Edinburgh. He is especially interested in areas of physics which have direct impact on religious belief, and vice versa. His main research topics are the interpretation of miracles and of creation.

[Read 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 Technology: 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; 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)



Science and God's Future

Graham Buxton,
June 2014

Author

Rev. Dr Graham Buxton is Director of Research Development at Tabor Adelaide, where he also serves as the Director of the Graeme Clark Research Institute. He teaches in the areas of practical theology, pastoral ministry and the science-theology interface. Graham is a Visiting Fellow at St John's College, Durham University in the UK, a Senior Lecturer at Flinders University in South Australia, a Fellow of ISCAST and has taught as an adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in California, USA.

Abstract

This paper considers the extent to which the scientific enterprise might contribute to the realisation of the future that God has prepared in the new creation of his promise. The argument presented draws on Tom Wright's proposal of four 'echoes of a voice' that resound in the human consciousness that have to do with the longing for justice, the quest for spirituality, the hunger for relationships and the delight in beauty—voices that help us to glimpse the glorious possibilities of eschatological life in God's new creation. The paper suggests that various dimensions of the scientific enterprise have something to say to us about justice, beauty and relationships.

[Read more](#)



Tribute to Allan Day

May 2014

Authors

John Pilbrow

Emeritus Professor of Physics, Monash University, and Fellow and former President of ISCAST.

Denise Cooper-Clarke

Voluntary researcher with ETHOS (Evangelical Alliance Centre for Christianity and Society), adjunct lecturer in Ethics at Ridley Melbourne, and tutor in medical ethics at the University of Melbourne.

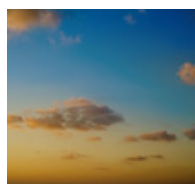
Alan Gijsbers

Assoc/Prof Gijsbers is a specialist physician in Addiction Medicine, an Honorary Clinical Associate Professor with the Department of Medicine Royal Melbourne Hospital, University of Melbourne, where he is the Head of the addiction medicine Service. He is also Medical Director of the Substance Withdrawal Unit at the Melbourne Clinic, Richmond and President of ISCAST.

Foreword

Emeritus Professor Allan Day, who died recently, was a distinguished physiologist who served as Professor of Physiology at the University of Melbourne from 1967 to 1998. Allan was not only a leader in the faith-science conversation in Australia, but he also brought to the conversation many insights gleaned from attendance at international conferences and through the many significant friendships he made with some of the key players.

[Read more](#)



FAQs About Climate Change

Author

Rev. Chris Mulherin

The Rev. Chris Mulherin is an ordained Anglican Minister who is completing a doctorate in science and religion. He has been appointed as the first ISCAST Executive Project Officer.

Excerpt

I grew up fascinated with Hans Christian Andersen's story about an emperor in denial who was duped into wearing no clothes—although I admit it was his nakedness rather than his psychological disabilities that captured my interest. I'm afraid that when it comes to climate change, our new prime minister

is dressed in little more than his infamous Speedos.

It is time to name climate change denial as the disorder it is and to deal with the indisputable facts of the matter. According to almost all scientists working in the field, human beings are causing significant planetary warming and the consequences will be dire if the global community does not take more urgent action to reduce emissions.

[Read more](#)



Divine Disclosure in the Modern Scientific Age: Towards Clarifying the Question

Author

EC Thompson

Craig Thompson is a Minister in the Uniting Church in Australia.

Abstract

Enquiry into the relationship between divine disclosure and scientific discovery concerns itself with the range of human freedom in relation to the world in which we find ourselves. It is because this life is necessarily a common one that the modern question about revelation generates the energy it does: what one believes affects another. Addressing the question of revelation in the modern age, then, requires that the political dimensions (in the broadest sense) of human life be part of the attempt to describe and, to the extent that it is possible, resolve the question of the relationship between divine revelation and scientific discovery. In this paper it is argued, first, that there is an unfounded tendency to presume that scientific discovery and divine revelation are the same kind of things, and an attempt is made to distinguish them.

[Read more](#)

*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

ISCAST Melbourne Annual Lecture and Symposium 2014

Theme: *Annual Lecture* - "Putting Science in its Place: Deepening the Public Conversation about Climate Change"

Symposium - "Putting Science in its Place: the Role of Science and Technology in Confronting Today's Environmental Crises"

Date: 4 to 6 July 2014

Venue: East Camberwell Baptist Church cnr Hunter and Highfield Roads, Camberwell, Vic

Time: Annual Lecture at 8pm Friday. Registration from 8am Saturday and Sunday for the Symposium

Keynote Presenter: Ian Barns

Ian is a commentator on social and cultural issues and their relation to the Gospel. His passion is to see the community's concerns about the environment going beyond the mere technological and addressing the core values and mores of our society that caused the issues to arise in the first place.

[Read more](#)

Seminar - Anglican Precursors of Current Ecotheology

Topic: Anglican Precursors of Current Ecotheology

Date: Thursday 19 June

Time: 7.30 – 9.30 pm

Venue: St Peter's Hall, Eastern Hill

Cost: \$15 (concession: \$12)

Speaker: Dr Duncan Reid

The Rev'd Dr Duncan Reid served as the Dean of the United Faculty of Theology in Melbourne from 2002 to 2005. He is currently the Priest in Charge

of St George's Flemington and a chaplain at Camberwell Girls Grammar School. He is a member of the International Commission for the Anglican-Orthodox theological dialogue.

[Read more](#)

ISCAST-CASE (Sydney) Lecture

Lecture Title: God and Natural Disasters

Date: Thursday 24 July 2014 at 7.30 pm

Venue: Main Common Room, New College, UNSW. Entrance is at 330 Anzac Parade, Kensington

Speaker: Dr Jonathan Clarke, BSc (Hons), PhD

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.

[Read more](#)

Cosmic Chemistry in Melbourne

Date: Fri 8 August, 7.00 pm – 9.00 pm

Venue: Melbourne City Conference Centre Auditorium

Speaker: Prof John Lennox

Prof John Lennox will address the question "Do science and God mix?", followed by a discussion with a moderator. Finally, questions from the audience will be answered on stage.

[Read more](#)

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Keep an eye on the website for events

www.iscast.org

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Subscribe or renew your subscription to the Digest at www.iscast.org/Digest_Registration.

Executive Project Officer Team Support

Chris Mulherin has been appointed as the ISCAST Executive Project Officer. Chris will be actively leading ISCAST and developing and executing our strategy in accordance with our mission statement: "To develop and advocate a Christian perspective in the science-religion dialogue within the science community, the Christian community and society generally in the Australasian and international communities." Please donate to Chris' work in this area.

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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" (the ISCAST 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 are published to foster the discussions and debate. ISCAST does not necessarily endorse the opinions expressed here.

Details of events published are 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 pa and subscriptions can be arranged by contacting the ISCAST Victoria office.

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