

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.

## ISCAST Digest—Lennox training day reports

*ISCAST had a starring role (alongside John Lennox) in the recent "Faith has its Reasons" conference in Melbourne. The following report includes material by Chris Mulherin (ISCAST's Executive Project Officer), which appeared in The Melbourne Anglican in September.*

500 people packed Glen Waverley Anglican Church to hear John Lennox, Oxford professor of mathematics and Christian apologist. Lennox spoke twice in the morning while the afternoon was dedicated to various workshops ranging from medical and sexual ethics through sharing faith in the workplace to thinking about the so-called conflict between science and Christian faith.

As well as Lennox's talks, one of the highlights of the day was the Q&A panel of scientists organised by ISCAST. Five scientists spoke briefly about their science and about the integration of their scientific vocations with their Christian faith: Professor Michael Clarke, head of life sciences at La Trobe University; James Garth an aerospace engineer; John Pilbrow, ex head of physics at Monash University and past ISCAST president; Mick Pope a meteorologist also engaged in theology of the environment; and Christina Smith an astrophysicist. Predictably, none of the panel saw a conflict between their science and their faith.

Feedback about the day was overwhelmingly positive: "a feast of intellectual wisdom imparted by spiritual men and women in a congenial atmosphere", said one person, and, "an intellectually stimulating, thought provoking day." And someone particularly taken with the ISCAST panel said, "Having younger scientists, including such an eloquent female scientist as Christina Smith, was excellent and could be a model for use at universities for inquiring students."

"The best thing," said organiser Tracy Lauersen, "is knowing that we have over 500 people who are now more confident in their faith and equipped to engage well with others on this important topic."

And what about the main attraction, Lennox himself?

John Lennox is a comfortably built Oxford academic who charms his audience with a grandfatherly demeanour, muted Irish tones and an incisive wit. He is also a mathematician, which, as he reminded us, is a person who talks in other people's sleep.

Lennox is one of the big names on the Christian apologetics circuit, battling scepticism globally and particularly taking on the so-called New Atheists. He does live shows around the world and there's no shortage in cyber space of Lennox debating such atheist 'greats' as Richard Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens.

In Melbourne this time the theme of his conference talks was the relationship between science and Christianity (always pronounced in two parts: Christi—anity) as he spent time carefully explaining many of the misconceptions and contradictions lying behind the idea that there is a conflict between science and Christian faith. There was no lack of anecdotes to illustrate the message, often drawn from his own conversations with sceptics or fundamentalist Christians and rounded out

with his repeated refrain (hear the Irish inflection): "So you see ladies and gentlemen..."

To Christians who insist on interpreting the Genesis record literally, the response is blunt: "Jesus is not a door." After which Lennox explains that the Bible is full of figurative and metaphorical language which no Christian dreams of taking literally, so why should anyone think that Genesis 1 and 2 are meant to be day by day descriptions of the beginnings of the universe?

Lennox warns about expecting proof in areas of faith and in other endeavours too. "Proof only occurs in pure mathematics," he says, and not in any other discipline; "not in the physical sciences and not in everyday life." But that doesn't mean we can't be sure enough about things to stake our lives on them; we put our trust in aeroplanes and in the love of a spouse. What we have in such cases is 'forensic proof'—proof beyond reasonable doubt.

As for the extreme claims of some atheists that science is the only road to knowledge—a philosophy known as scientism—Lennox spoke of the differences in types of explanation. An answer in terms of physics to "Why is the water boiling?" is adequate at one level. But it leaves out essential elements. "Because I want a cup of tea," is also part of the fuller account for the boiling water. So it is with the universe and the human race; while science can go so far, it cannot offer answers to the questions of meaning and purpose; "God and science are not logical alternatives, they are logically complementary."

Not only is there no conflict between science and Christianity—evidenced by believing scientists over the ages—but, says Lennox, science arose in part because of the Christian worldview that understood nature to be governed by the laws of a rational God. Lennox cited Peter Harrison, the Australian historian of science, recently returned from Oxford, who argues that monotheism and then Christianity had an enormous effect on driving science. "We owe science in the modern sense to Christianity," he says, but "science has now outgrown its cradle."

Lennox was also keen to emphasise similarities between science and faith; Christianity, like science, is based on trust and on evidence. He was quick to point out that there are different types of evidence but that biblical faith and science share this in common: they are both based on commitment to truth, and believing according to the evidence. Lennox quotes Einstein who said that he couldn't imagine a scientist without faith in the rational intelligibility of the universe. And Anglican priest and physicist John Polkinghorne says that physics is powerless to explain its faith in the intelligibility of the universe; such a belief is taken up by the scientist before starting to do science.

In summary, the "Faith has its Reasons" day was an overwhelming success, particularly from an ISCAST perspective of showing and telling the clear compatibility of the gifts of science and Christian faith.

### In this Issue:

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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.



### Enslaved by Our Technology?

Human curiosity and creativity have produced ever more powerful technologies. At their best, these technologies are great enablers. However, what if we are losing our grip on these inventions? Critics fear that our technology can undermine our sense of individuality, encroach on our privacy and even threaten our humanity. Are we becoming enslaved by our technology?

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### Morality and Our Lives With Animals

The traditional point of view in western intellectual thought – and one which is reflected in our own day-to-day views – is that of human exceptionalism, or anthropocentrism: the belief that humans are the central and most important beings on the planet.

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### Science Advice to Governments Comes of Age at Auckland Conference

Responding to the increasingly global nature of societal challenges, practitioners of science advice to governments formed a global network to share practice and strengthen their ties, at the first global conference on science advice to governments, which was held in Auckland, New Zealand on 28-29 August.

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### Evolution, God and the Problem of Evil

Simon Conway Morris holds a Chair in Evolutionary Palaeobiology at the University of Cambridge.

His research interests include the study of Burgess Shale-type faunas, the first appearance of skeletons, and the Cambrian explosion.

[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.



### Palliative Care: What It Is and What It Is Not

Palliative care has its modern roots in the UK with the establishment of St Christopher's Hospice in 1967 by (Dame) Cecily Saunders. Saunders had become concerned about poor medical care being provided to dying hospital patients. With the developments occurring in medicine at that time, the focus had shifted away from the needs of those who could no longer benefit from the evolving technology and life-saving treatment.

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### Wading Through the Chemical Soup: How Science Can Miss the Point

Poorly constructed messages that ignore the public's fears about the impact of chemicals in our environment sidelines science from the debate, argues Paul Willis.

There's been a bit of activity of late surrounding popular concerns over chemicals and their proliferation in our lives.

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### Why Theology Matters Even If There's No God

Even if there is no god theology still offers great insight into modern thinking and, yes, even science, as the late Wolfhart Pannenberg proved, writes John Dickson.

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### Karen Joy Fowler

Guest presenter Scott Stephens talks to American novelist Karen Joy Fowler, whose new novel explores the minefield of scientific ethics. Karen is widely-known for her bestseller, *The Jane Austen Book Club*.

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### Scientific Passions

The nerd world felt a slight disturbance in the force a few weeks back, when the hottest new science popularizer, Neil deGrasse

Tyson [host of 2014 PBS series *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*], argued that philosophy yields little value compared to science.

[Read more](#)



### Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's Creation

The international conference, *Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's*

*Creation*, is being hosted by Tabor Adelaide from the 10th-13th March 2015.

Despite growing awareness of environmental issues, especially over the last decade, the overall situation is not improving.

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### Big Picture or Big Gaps? Why Natural Theology Is Better Than Intelligent Design

I want to talk about this whole idea of a theology of nature, or "natural theology," both as a way of doing apologetics but also of engaging with some issues in science and religion. So, I predictably am going to begin with a quote from C.S. Lewis. Many of you will recognize this; it's a very well known quote. It comes from the end of his 1945 lecture, "Is Theology Poetry?" This is the final sentence in the lecture:

*"I believe in Christianity as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else."*

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### Religious Responses to Natural Disasters

Talk given by Dr Erin Joakim at Summer Course 9, 2014.

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## 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](http://www.iscast.org/journalpage))



### The Christian challenge of our time: the conversation with science

Chris Mulherin, August

2014

#### Author

Chris Mulherin is an Anglican minister completing a doctorate on science and faith. He works part time as the ISCAST Executive Project Officer.

#### Excerpt

In an increasingly global and secular scientific culture the cutting edge of Christian engagement is the conversation with science. In fact, the progress or decline of Christian faith in the 21st century depends in large part on its dialogue with science.

For Christians, the current cultural skirmishes might seem to be about the best expressions of human sexuality or religious education in schools, but there is an underlying issue that those ones depend on and which is far more important; it is the prior question of whether the Christian faith can even be taken seriously in a scientific age...

[Read more](#)



### Seeking sustainability

Ross Macmillan, August 2014

#### Author

Ross Macmillan is a Senior Fellow in Agricultural Engineering, University of Melbourne and Fellow of ISCAST.

#### Abstract

Sustainability is a complex and subtle objective, the achievement of which will usually not be obvious. It is suggested that it may be better to think of seeking ways to avoid unsustainability.

This could be achieved in terms of the two main measures which characterise sustainability, viz., the shortage of the requisite source materials – which in some instances may be limited by the rate at which they are replaced in natural processes, and the presence of wastes and their serious effects – which might be related to whether they are

disposed of directly to the environment or treated locally.

Achieving community-wide sustainability is usually difficult as it involves many decisions at the human level and associated complex decisions at the technical and economic level. While international trade and aid both may assist in promoting sustainability, ultimately the level achieved depends on direct and indirect personal choices which in turn partly depend on the religious and world views of the community.

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### In the Eye of the Storm - book review

John Pilbrow, August 2014

#### Author

John Pilbrow is Emeritus Professor of Physics at Monash University and a Fellow of ISCAST.

#### Excerpt

Whether you accept that climate change and global warming are real or

remain sceptical, here is a book by a world authority (and professing

Christian), that leaves no room for complacency. The author, Sir John

Houghton, is an eminent atmospheric scientist who played a major role in

putting Global Warming onto the world's agenda and in helping establish

the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Houghton traces his path from academic scientist (and Oxford professor),

whose own research has contributed much to our understanding of global

warming and climate change, to the public figure who served as CEO of

the British Met. Office. The science of global warming and climate change

is explained simply for the general reader.

[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. Second, it is argued that the politico-religious character of all human existence creates a more significant problem for common claims about scientific worldviews than does science, properly conceived, create for divine revelation.

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### Evangelical fundamentalists and the science of climate change

#### Author

Revd Dr Sidney Green is a retired Anglican Priest

#### Abstract

It is impossible to ignore the existence of a powerful, well-financed group of evangelical fundamentalist Christians who deny the scientific evidence for global warming

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Contact the editorial team via [www.iscast.org/journalpage](http://www.iscast.org/journalpage)

## Event News



### Conference On Science & Christianity • Register Now



**Date:** 1pm Sat 7 - 2pm Mon 9, March, 2015 (during long weekend)  
**Venue:** Geelong Conference Centre, Victoria  
**Keynote presenter:** Prof. Bob White FRS, Director of the Faraday Institute in the UK  
**Topic:** "Creation in Crisis: Science, Theology and Action"

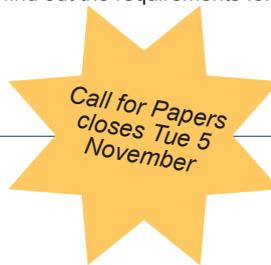
People are anxious. What are we doing to our planet, God's creation? Are we, through ignorance, greed, or just plain necessity, destroying our life-support systems? With so many mouths to feed, are we driving ourselves to oblivion? And yet, we have faced such crises before; the River Thames clean up in the mid 1900s and the reforestation of the Nepal Himalaya are but two examples where seemingly impossible ecological disasters have been averted through science and a population committed to addressing the challenges. Can we do this again? The ecological challenges we are facing confront not only our livelihoods and the scientific enterprise but how we see and understand ourselves as a species and as creatures before our creator.

Call for Papers now open, please download the document below to find out the requirements for presenters at COSAC. [Read more](#)

[Visit our website for all event listings.](#)

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## 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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