

ISCAST is a network of people, from students to distinguished academics, exploring the interface of science, technology, and Christian faith.

A Personal Reflection on COSAC 2018

Richard Gijbers

This was my eighth Conference on Science and Christianity (out of the eleven we have had) and what a journey it's been! Alister McGrath on the Bankruptcy of Scientific Atheism, Simon Conway Morris on Christianity and the Origin of the Species, Sam Berry on Christianity and nature, Nancey Murphy on Disenchantment, George Ellis introducing us to complexity and emergence, and so it flowed.

This year's conference featured Jennifer Wiseman speaking on "The Heavens Declare...". It was in the same tradition of past COSACs: an international keynote speaker, presentations by ISCASTians representing a range of sciences, lots of discussion and everyone catching up with each other.

But it was different also. It was

- **Larger:** over 160 people attended!
- **Fuller and busier:** more than 40 presentations.
- **Younger:** more than 44 students contributing and thrashing things out with their peers and elders.
- **Newer:** with many for whom this was their first COSAC bringing enthusiasm and excitement that there were people exploring all sorts of dimensions of science and Christianity.
- **More diverse:** 30% were women (a small number but growing!) and 8% from outside Australia. The presentations also included more from than just the physical sciences (including two from economists posing as scientists!).

Over 92% of those surveyed thought COSAC was either excellent or very good. Most of the comments related to the diversity: age, gender, cultural background, and theological tradition. For many this was celebrated. For others there was more we needed to do.

In summary, from my perspective:

- **Involving younger delegates was great.** Chris Mulherin drove this vision hard and it bore fruit. My thanks to the students and young people who came and contributed, as well as to the older ISCASTians who listened, shared and (perhaps) learned from them. This was my #1 highlight!
- **The program was packed.** Many appreciated this as it meant a wider range of topics. Others wanted more time for networking, changing over, and just chilling.
- **We need to develop an agenda that deals with female and non-WASP topics.** This has bugged us for years and it is not for want of trying. We need to try some more. At least the complaints mean that there are those there who notice this.
- **Theological and ecclesiastical traditions other than for evangelical protestants,** particularly in our worship and reflections. It would be tragic (I feel) if we ended up worshipping separately to provide for this diversity. Is it possible to have a satisfying ecumenical service?
- **Coping with Young Earth Creationism.** All too often YEC is presented as "all or nothing", and yet so many feel that it is both poor science and poor theology. We grieve at the way this debate is conducted and many on both sides have been hurt. I expect that this is an issue that will remain with us for some time yet.
- **The keynote speakers set the tone marvellously!** Jennifer's lectures and those wonderful images of galaxies and nebulae! Enough said. Ken Freeman, Peter Harrison, Jonathan Clarke. My thanks to each of you.

ISCAST (and COSAC) is continuing to evolve but as long as scientists (both eminent and run-of-the-mill), stand up and say: "I am a Christian", no one can say that you cannot be a scientist and a Christian at the same time!

In this Issue:

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Some Feedback from COSAC 2018

The comments on this page are samples of the feedback we received, unedited.

Opportunity to meet other Christians who were scientists as well and to hear where science may have been adding support to the information in the Bible.

I appreciated the keynote addresses from Jennifer Wiseman and Peter Harrison particularly; the worship sessions; also a number of the shorter parallel sessions; the greater number of attendees with a greater age range than in most previous COSACs, and the venue.

Suggest get science fiction experts to present.

A little disappointed at the end by the lack of respect shown to those who take other views of creation.

Good to have minibus shuttle.

Educators in uni and schools, scientists, philosophers, and arts grads and students.

The awesome interaction of Science and Faith I have never experienced before! Purposeful science, earnest devotions, heartfelt worship... with a generous sprinkling of humour! The general academic world can surely learn from ISCAST. Absolute best bit was the podcast/radio recording with the three astronomers -- highly entertaining, engaging, educational.

More time for discussion - many of the parallel sessions felt rushed with little time for dialogue.



Reintroduction of the fun Saturday night.

I am unhappy with the Worship component of COSAC. It is dominated by what I shall call a "Protestant" way. This is not necessarily a negative, but there was no space for a more "traditional" Eucharistic ceremony. For example, could Rev Stephen Ames have done an Anglican Mass on Palm Sunday?

I would like to see some of the Teilhard de Chardin and the modern uptake of that. I missed that whole tradition.

It is all very welcoming but the culture is solidly evangelical and male. It would be nice to see a more diverse culture which would include people outside of evangelicalism and which was more hospitable to women. I have not heard so much male gender language in three days for a very long time!!

ISCAST plays a very important role in seeking to educate church and the wider community to see a positive link between Christianity and science in the face of a good deal of misinformation and opposition to science.

My first conference and very worthwhile. Agree with bringing school students along and comments from two of them at final session very impressive.

Some Videos from COSAC 2018 ...



Apologetics in a post-everything age

Presenter
Robert Martin

Abstract

The world has changed. We live in a post-everything, post-modern, post-Christian, world. This has implications for Christian apologetics. How do we do apologetics in a secular world of social media and a lost Christian foundation? In this presentation Robert will outline the key tenets of the secular age and share how we can engage with a thoughtful, reasoned, persuasive Christian apologetic.
[Watch here...](#)

spread greed and destruction through the universe with a sense that current humanity has no place in the cosmos beyond Earth. The first position appears to combine a strong sense of total depravity without a sense of grace. The second position is often associated with a lack of vision or potential and an exaggerated perception of risk.
[Watch here...](#)



Teaching warfare: The perpetuation of science-religion conflict in modern university textbooks

Presenter
Tom Aechtner

Abstract

The idea that science and religion are in a constant state of warfare is a narrative that has been actively challenged by historians for several decades. Nevertheless, the conflict model persists in various academic disciplines, and it is still frequently presented to university students as the authoritative account of religion-science history.
[Watch here...](#)



The anthropocene era in a Trinitarian frame: Reflections on Clive Hamilton's *Defiant Earth*

Presenter
Ian Barns

Abstract

The recent publication of *Defiant Earth* by Australian public intellectual Clive Hamilton is an important reflection on the emerging role of earth system sciences as a trans-scientific framework for the task of global governance in response to the advent of the Anthropocene. Hamilton has been an active contributor to recent debates about the naming, timing and appropriate responses to the Anthropocene.
[Watch here...](#)



The mathematics of forgiveness

Presenters
Cosimo Chiera and Thomas Edwards

Abstract

Abundant, if not heroic, forgiveness is one of the foundational charges of Christianity. Yet our understanding of how to bring this about is often clouded by a diversity of factors including our upbringing, social pressures, one's ability for distress tolerance, our capacity to generate empathy and even to manage fear. Moreover, who requires forgiveness? When great harm is done there are often multiple parties injured such that forgiveness needs to be offered to others and even to one's self.
[Watch here...](#)



From Eden to interstellar space: Radical departures form the familiar, to reality at the boundaries of the thinkable

Presenter
Sarah Beattie

Abstract

This paper will explore the theme of radical departure from the familiar as a hermeneutical approach to biblical narrative in order to examine biblical perspectives of reality and their relationship to contemporary perspectives of cosmology and consciousness.
[Watch here...](#)



Living with 'assisted dying': An introduction to the issues and ethics of voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide in Australia

Presenter
Denise Cooper-Clarke

Abstract

In the public debate, opponents of 'assisted dying' relied heavily on consequentialist arguments (the risk to the lives of the vulnerable), while proponents argued on the basis of the principles of respect for individual autonomy (the 'right' to choose) and of the obligation to relieve suffering, mainly through emotive appeals based on anecdotes of 'bad deaths'. This strategy enabled proponents to win over both public opinion and the parliamentary vote, despite the strong opposition of doctors as expressed by the AMA. Arguments on the basis of the principles of the sanctity of human life and of biblical justice were largely missing.
[Watch here...](#)



A sense of total depravity: Secular responses to exploring the 'final frontier'

Presenter
Jonathan Clarke

Abstract

Public discussions about the future of space exploration have revealed a consistent pattern in opposition from segments of the wider community. These often combine a view that space exploration and settlement will only

... And Something from the ABC.



"A Christian and an atheist walk into a bar..."

About

ISCAST president Assoc. Prof. Alan Gijsbers has a conversation on the ABC "God Forbid" program with Prof. Ross Fitzgerald, an atheist, about religion, drugs, and alcohol.
[Read more...](#)

Event News

Victoria



SU Vic: Science camp

When: July 1 to July 4, 2018
Where: Stringbark Lodge, Beenak Rd, Gembrook VIC
On science camp, yr. 11s and 12s will delve into science and

investigate God's creation. Guest speakers who are scientists and Christians will explain their journey with science and faith.

[Read more...](#)

NSW



NSW Chapter: Tony Morgan Memorial Lecture

When: Tuesday, June 5, 2018 - 19:30

Where: Main Common Room, New College, UNSW

Lecture Title: Unlikely Allies: Monotheism and the Rise of Natural Science

Speaker: Rev Dr Mark Worthing, Dr.phil

[Read more...](#)

Other News and Resources



New book by ISCAST fellow Brian Edgar

Author
Brian Edgar

About

ISCAST fellow Brian Edgar has recently published a new book titled *The God Who Plays: A Playful Approach to Theology and Spirituality*.

[Read more...](#)

ISCAST Board

The new Board elected at our AGM now consists of:

- Mr Hamish Blair
- Dr Jonathan Clarke
- A/Prof. Alan Gijsbers (President)
- Dr Lewis Jones
- Em. Prof. Michael Knight
- Rev. Dr Stephen Spence
- A/Prof. Michael Wong
- Mr Richard Gijsbers (Secretary, ex officio)
- Rev. Dr Chris Mulherin (Executive Director, ex officio)

Welcome New Fellows

Appointed at the Board meeting of 18 April.

- A/Prof. David Croaker
- Dr Roger Lewis
- Dr Chris White
- Dr Jennifer Wiseman (Distinguished Fellow)

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Annual Subscription by post: \$22 (Credit Cards add \$2 processing fee) **Total Due: \$** _____

Contact the ISCAST office for payment details.

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 community 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 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 \$22 pa and subscriptions can be arranged by contacting the ISCAST office.

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