

**ISCAST BULLETIN 25**

**(incorporating VISCAST News)**

**December 1998.**

**Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology**

*The views in this Bulletin are those of the individual authors or the editor.  
They do not necessarily reflect the official views of the ISCAST Board*

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**Editorial:**

**When Christians Disagree - handling controversy**

*But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. James 3:16-17 (NIV)*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Eph 4:15 (NIV)*

*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. Matt 3:7-8 (NIV).*

Controversy is an essential part of any academic pursuit. The scientific method is essentially a critical method. Our experimental results are subject to scrutiny by the scientific community. They test what is true and hold fast to what is good.

However scientists are human. Pride, jealousy, power play and politics can all enter into our research endeavours, colouring our evaluations of our colleagues' work and their's of ours. There can be considerable difficulty in working out why some ideas are criticised and others praised.

Similarly controversies can occur within the Christian community. This occurs especially where Christians honestly hold differences of opinion. Controversies will always occur when people are passionately committed to truth and especially when they have a passionate commitment to moving an organisation like their Christian group forward. The trouble is of course in these controversies, I hold God's opinion whereas you just hold your own.

We in ISCAST have been involved in our share of controversy. Some of it has been constructive but some (and regrettably I have participated in these) have shed more heat than light. How can we debate and yet honour God? What are the principles of Godly controversy?

**Perspective.**

Paul exhorts Timothy to keep the eyes of his congregation on the main game. They are not to "devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies". For these promote controversies rather than God's work-- which is by faith. Paul has a specific purpose in mind, not necessarily a functional goal but a relational goal - that of love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

An ISCAST fellow has recently argued that principle ethics by itself is not sufficient and that the virtues (like the pure heart, good conscience Paul here refers to) are an important part of medical ethics. The exercise of these virtues is an important part of our conduct as Christians and as scientists as well as in our congregations. These relational virtues will help to keep our controversies in perspective.

**Mutual respect**

It is easy to project impure motives on those who disagree with us. It is easy to be suspicious. It is true however that there are some (myself of course excepted) who are moved by base motives. Once suspicions arise they easily grow. Some decisions are baffling and some decisions feed a conspiracy theory.

However if our fellow Christians appear strange, it's important to remember that they are holding themselves open to God and are asking for his guidance and blessing. Recognising the other's commitment will go a long way towards building bridges rather than spurring suspicion.

Mutual respect however also demands that we really do listen to the other point of view - not the superficial listening of the mere words but the full intent, however imperfectly expressed.

**Commitment to truth**

As Christians and as scientists this almost goes without saying. We cannot simply let everyone have their own opinion, for there are bigger issues at stake. In the words of Lesslie Newbigin we hold our beliefs "with universal intent". Truth is not just the truth we believe but the truth we as scientists and Christians believe will be discovered and can be objectively found.

However we also need to stop kidding ourselves that we have all the truth ourselves. There may be others with a different perspective on truth who will complement our understanding. Further we need to realise that the truth we have believed or even the truth our tradition has held for so long may need to be modified in the light of new discoveries. Examples abound from within the science -faith debate. They teach us to hold our beliefs lightly and to be open to change.

By the same token though our commitment to truth calls us to hold fast to that which is good. Some things don't change. Paul could say "I know whom I have believed" ..... and I am confident in Him.

**Commitment to love** Christians have been touched by the unmerited favour of God in Christ. Because he loved us we are called to love with that same costly love. This is love

not just of the deserving but also of those who do not love us. and especially of our enemies. This active concern must always colour our debates which should be conducted with respect for those whose ideas we are opposing. It also calls on us to provide the most charitable interpretation on the seemingly incredible statements made by opponents, and an attempt to see where they are coming from and why they have said what they have said.

### **Building up of the body**

Cheap point scoring at the expense of the unity of the body is tawdry. It is possible to have a vision of the body which may not be shared by others. In that event it is important to listen and if necessary let go. There are numerous examples within congregations of people holding congregations to ransom by threatening resignation, withdrawal of support or by bullying others into their ways. Bodies with powerful members using their powers of veto are particularly abhorrent. On the other hand there may be times when there are substantial disagreements about styles of practice which may mean that, like Paul and Barnabas, it is time fellow Christians go their separate ways and do their work with new partners in new vineyards.

ISCAST too has centripetal and centrifugal forces. We need a healthy debate to determine where we are going, what is the best way to get there, and whether there is a need to maybe spawn new different organisations which can more freely pursue varying tasks in the science-faith debate.

### **Modes of persuasion**

Christians should shun ungodly methods of persuasion. Paul talks of denouncing shameful and underhanded ways and commending ourselves by the open statement of public truth. This is a call to open transparency. So often we use rhetorical devices like shame and sarcasm. The Christian church is riddled with god-dishonouring politics. The strong become bombastic and the weaker sibling takes hurt so personally that no one can say anything for fear of offence. We pray that ISCAST may by its deliberations reflect not only the truth of its stance but that that truth is tempered by God's grace.

By the way: I hope you will be as delighted by Frank O'Dea's article as I was.

Alan Gijsbers.

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### **Article THE CREATOR AT PLAY**

*I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.  
Proverbs 8:30-31*

Does God ever play? Does God enjoy having fun? In the above poem of praise to wisdom, the author of the book of Proverbs gives the impression that the creator really enjoys his work of creation. Some translations use the word "play" in these verses.

Playfulness is a most desirable quality. People who have become over-serious are encouraged to recover their childhood playfulness; in fact, without a playful element in our lives we can become emotionally ill. At the very least God must have all the best qualities that humans have, otherwise he/she is lacking some goodness.

Let's consider what it means to play. When children or adults play together there has to be freedom for everyone in the game. If one person so dominates that others are *forced* to act in a particular way, then this is not play, there is no real game, the activity is being manipulated. This kind of game doesn't last long because the players will quit out of frustration.

Of course, there have to be certain basic rules otherwise there is just anarchy, but within those rules, there must be freedom to make choices. I make a particular choice which sets up a configuration, then the other makes a choice based on what I have done. I don't know beforehand what the other will decide; the other doesn't know what I will decide. We are engaged one with the other, taking turns to choose. One tries to anticipate what the other will do but never knows for sure.

So, there is a degree of uncertainty as each attempts to challenge or outwit the other. When the game proceeds playfully, there can be a lot of fun; it's enjoyable. There is also a sense of competition but this can be overdone especially in our Western culture.

Take non-competitive play like a group playing jazz. Each is performing on his own instrument but listening keenly to what the other players are doing. At one point the saxophonist feels urged to extemporize, so the others are content to just play along quietly, keeping the rhythm, keeping to the same key, supporting the one who is spontaneous. These players are being creative and enjoying their musicianship. There is freedom but they play within the recognized limits of jazz music. This is measured freedom.

Perhaps we can see the creation of the world in this way. God is *the* creator, the one who began the whole process of making this universe. He/she is also the one who made the rules such as the laws of gravity and the laws of biology... Nature is a product of God's creativity, but also becomes a player in her own right, not as a god or goddess for I'm using the term 'nature' in the sense we mean when we say things like, "Isn't nature wonderful the way penguins can endure the Antarctic winter!" or "Nature has enabled many Australian native plants to cope with bushfires".

What then is the relationship between God and nature? I don't think that God simply set the universe in motion and went off for a holiday leaving nature entirely to her own devices. On the other hand I don't see God as manipulating creation every step of the way - this would be the God of the puppet strings, controlling every single event. There is a

middle way. God has given nature the freedom to follow her own course, that is, God allows evolution to develop at least partly through chance.

John Polkinghorne suggests there is both chance and necessity in evolution. "A fertile world must be neither too rigid, nor too loose. It needs both chance and necessity. Chance is the engine of novelty. Necessity is the preserver of fruitfulness". Chance lies in such events as the random clustering of stars, climatic variations, earthquakes, mutations... In the game that we are imagining, nature makes these choices.

Necessity is the regulator of the laws of gravity, chemical reactions, relativity... These are the rules of the game and they do not change. There is an *interplay* between chance and necessity which produces a fruitful universe.

In the field of biology, a mutation may occur through happenstance, perhaps radiation makes some alteration in an animal's genes. If this mutation offers the animal some evolutionary advantage and can be passed on to its progeny, then something novel has come into the world.

Polkinghorne uses the word "interplay" as the connection between chance and necessity. Chance and necessity are playing a game. This is a variation on the theme of nature and God playing out their game. The result is the wonderful, fruitful world we see around us.

In the jazz image, God plays the piano, nature plays the sax; God supplies the basic rhythm, nature adds some variations here and there and God delights in the result.

We marvel at the brilliant colours of the rosellas which come to feed on our balcony. We can say that the birds evolved in this way because this particular blend of colours provided an evolutionary advantage. I think this falls short of being a sufficient explanation when we see the range of colouring in all the different kinds of rosellas and then realize that rosellas are only a small fraction of the birds in the world. What an extraordinary diversity! What wonderful combinations of colours!

I can see God and nature having a wonderful time together in evolving these creatures with such a kaleidoscope of colours. The God that I imagine is a God who allows these animals to evolve so that the world we live in is a beautiful world. It is possible that God sometimes deliberately plans wonderful surprises for humans who can appreciate such things as the extraordinary combination of colours in birds, fish, flowers.

To believe these things occur through nothing but blind chance is to remove the concept of play; it sours the delight that the human experiences when he/she sees a wattle bird hanging upside down to get his specially designed beak into the cones of the banksia seeds.

When I look at nature, I see wonderful examples of the Creator's playfulness.

Surely God was playing when he allowed the seahorse to evolve into the enchanting creature that it is. It swims upright, it curls its tail around objects so that it holds still for feeding or mating, it can change its colour in seconds to blend with its surroundings.

Contrary to the pattern laid down by the rest of creation, it is the male who becomes pregnant. The female releases eggs into a pouch in the male's abdomen, he fertilizes them, nourishes them and releases them into the ocean in a "birthing" when the time is right. I can imagine God saying, "This'll upset their neat systems of classification".

The migration of birds is one of the greatest wonders of nature. How do they find their way over thousands of miles of land and ocean? We still don't know all the answers to this question. Do they follow the sun and stars?

Navigators need to do a course in this science, learning how to use charts and instruments. With the help of complicated mathematics, they do find their way. There is some evidence that birds are sensitive to the earth's magnetic field and are able to steer a course in a similar way to human navigators, but without knowing maths and without charts and instruments. We have the advantage of large brains but birds have tiny brains so instinct must play a massive role in their migrations. No matter what the real explanation is, the fact that the Arctic tern can find its way over the enormous distance from the North pole to the South pole is an incredible feat.

If we were to look for an example of God playing games with us we could do no better than to reflect on the Underground Orchid. Who would ever have dreamed that there would be a plant that grows and flowers without ever seeing the light of day? There is such a plant - the Underground Orchid first discovered in Western Australia and subsequently in New South Wales. It goes through its whole life cycle including flowering underground.

There are two ways of looking at this phenomenon. We could say the plant just evolved that way and that being underground has some evolutionary advantage, but this view robs us of the sense of wonder at the phenomenon. On the other hand, if we accept that God is playful, then we could say that God enjoys doing something radically different and surprising. God may also take a delight in witnessing our astonishment in discovering this extraordinary creation just as a parent is delighted to see the excitement in a child who discovers her hidden Easter egg. Are we stretching the boundaries of theology too far when we speculate that God gets a thrill out of our discovering that there are plants that have been growing just under the surface of the earth for millenia and have become known to us only in the last fifty years?

My image of God allows that God may have enjoyed seeing an underground orchid evolve with or without his/her assistance. My image of God also allows that God got some pleasure out of seeing the astonishment on the faces of the humans who first discovered this remarkable event as well as the astonishment of people like myself who learn about it later.

The above samples of God's playful creativity could be multiplied many times over. God has been revealing the wonderful gift of joyful craftsmanship for millions of years in the book of creation, a very much older book than scripture. We would do well to relearn the skills of reading this book and learning to delight in the joys of the world around us.

By reading the book of creation we can gain a better image of the Creator. We can learn that God really had fun working with nature and we can add playfulness to the list of qualities we attribute to God, as the author of the book of proverbs did with his limited knowledge of the world.

Frank O'Dea.

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## **International News**

### **Science Master at International Conference**

*Russell Downie, of the Presbyterian Ladies College (Melbourne) attended the Science and Spiritual Quest conference sponsored by the Center for Theology and the Natural Science, California. This is an edited version of his report to the PLC staff.*

Most of the 400 who attended were scientists or theologians and quite a few "writers". This after all was in California. What could a school like PLC gain from sending me to a conference like this?

A Senior school is broadly about two things. It is about meeting adolescents who are making the biggest decisions of their lives, and it is about the getting of knowledge in a personal, thoughtful and responsible way. Science and Spirituality surely are about ways of knowing and about commitment.

On Sunday morning it was pointed out that that there has always been an interaction between science and religion, While, for some, resolution of the issue is often seen in terms of the defeat of one side by the other, around the world today, there is clear evidence of a rapprochement. Scientists of the highest calibre find that they can also have faith and increasing numbers of scientists and theologians are knocking on each other's doors and saying...."Can we talk?"

In the afternoon it was pointed out that science and religion have much in common.

- Both science and religion assert the objectivity of reality and that it can be known by all as true.
- Both pursuits depend on community.
- Both encounters derive from encounters with reality.

There are also differences and they are as welcome and instructive as the similarities.

- Science accumulates knowledge steadily, but each generation must make its own expression of faith.
- Science abhors uniqueness. It is governed by universal laws. In religion, on the other hand, most positions have depended on the call or insights of individuals.

On Monday we were told that science and religion are going to interact anyway! People have derived their sense of place and a way to live from their cosmology. The hierarchical cosmology of Aristotle was expressed in the hierarchical structure of society which even colonised the theology of the church and caused all kinds of problems in the 17th century. Modern people are being evicted from their cosmology. This began with Newton for whom the Universe was "Particles, the void and action at a distance." This picture also represents us, for are we not also chemistry? Are the folk described in "Melrose Place" not behaving like particles, bouncing off each other, uninformed by a reason to show unselfishness, respect, humility, grace, forgiveness and acceptance?

I continue to find it hard to pin down what spirituality is but I am sure that it is more than just gooey feelings of niceness and connectedness to some "great spirit". I know that unless it takes into account that "Heart of Darkness" which admits our capacity to do horrendous things to each other we will be dreaming. For the wider world, all the evidence says that we are heading for disaster, given our rate of consumption. We need a cosmology that includes an unselfishness which will enable us to avert this disaster. But if people are only particles, why should we care?

On Tuesday we were told that not only was interaction inevitable, it was essential. People need to know more about their lives than science can tell them. "How should I live?" "Who is my neighbour?" "Why do some suffer and some do not?" The universe has given us abundantly more than we need for mere life. It abounds and vibrates with love, joy, pain, beauty, creativity and stories with meaning. Our spiritual nature must inform our science and say what ought to be done from among what can be done. Science must inform our morality and tell us how to clean up the arsenic and cure AIDS and cancer. A Jewish psychiatrist gave an example of a patient who had achieved an integration of his body and his spirit that escapes many of us.

On the last day of the conference, I saw a severely disabled man in one of those motorised wheelchairs. I was overwhelmed with the thought that this man had been blessed by science and technology which had restored his body to him in a way which made the alternative for this man unthinkable.

We must learn to walk on two legs. Science and spirituality must co-inhere or we will have inhuman science and irrational expressions of spirituality. Scientists are not the rulers of the world. People will not choose science if it does not respect personhood. In turning their back on science, many will embrace harmful or useless things in the name of health.

The rest of the conference searched the way ahead, wondering might be the shape of a new cosmology. Kevin Kelly referred to the Arts/Science divide and posited a new kid on the block called computer technology. As he spoke I feared for my son who is currently immersed in a game where he stalks through an environment shooting the enemy. Why is my spirit alarmed? I want help in placing a harmless diversion into perspective. Will my son's mastery of this creation diminish his awe and make him less able to live with humility in the face of Creation? As people working with this technology, we should in

some sense be "completing creation", but what does this look like, and when will it be blasphemy?

We are so pleased when our students show mastery of the subjects and demonstrate their extraordinary skills and qualities. They leave the school confident and competent. We must be sure that we do not take from them the capacity to be humble and full of awe and respect for their lives and for the lives of those around them.

I got the prize for being the only Australian and for having travelled the furthest. People were amazed and impressed when they heard that the school had sent me. I have personal messages from the female presenters specially for the girls here.

If asked to summarise the event I would like to say that, in the words of one of the presenters, I have learned that you can go to church and still count to ten with your hands in your pockets. When the aliens come, as well they might, who will you send to tell them about us, and what would they say?

Russell Downie

### **Article in International Journal**

Allan Day has survived a rigorous peer review to have his paper *Adam, Anthropology and the Genesis Record - Taking Genesis Seriously in the Light of Contemporary Science* published in the Journal Science and Christian Belief. Congratulations.

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### **Local News**

#### **Board Member off to Canberra**

Jonathan Clarke, Victoria's only representative on the ISCAST Board has just accepted a 3 year position at the Centre for Landscape Evolution and Mineral Exploration at the Geology Department, ANU. Jonathan still sees himself as being able to help with COSAC99.

#### **ISCAST Bulletin Editor National Chairman Elect of CMDFA.**

Alan Gijbbers has been elected to be the next National Chairman of the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Australia. The CMDFA in his opinion has gone through similar interstate tensions that sometimes exist within ISCAST and the CMDFA experience can help ISCAST. He is currently basing the format and features of the ISCAST Bulletin on their Luke's Journal but admits we have quite a way to go.

#### **New Fellows**

Bryan Elms, Jia-Yee and Denise Cooper-Clarke. Congratulations and best wishes.

#### **Australian Theological Forum**

At a recent dinner jointly hosted by the ATF and ISCAST (Vic) John Puddefoot, head of mathematics at Eton UK, gave a stimulating talk on artificial intelligence and the mind-

brain debate showing once again that there is more to the science-faith interface than a discussion of origins. The dinner also illustrated that there is scope for mutual benefit from forums with other bodies where we have common aims.

The ATF is a new body looking at theological reflection on aspects of Australian culture. The theme of their first newsletter was "Reconciliation and Responsibility." Their Patron in Chief is Sir William Deane, the Governor General of Australia, and their Patrons are Archbishop Stylianos, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Australia and Archbishop Keith Rayner, Primate of the Anglican Church in Australia. Their outlook is ecumenical and their doctrinal basis is the Nicene Creed (though we do not know whether that is with or without the filioque clause!).

Some members of ISCAST (like the Bulletin Editor) have chosen to be members of such a body. ISCAST could clearly offer something in the science-faith area. Those who would like to know more can look them up on a web site: [www.atf.org.au](http://www.atf.org.au). Email: or snail mail: C/O Otira College 73 Walpole Street Kew 3101. Ph (03) 9853 2000 fax: (03) 9853 5263.

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## **State News**

### **Victoria**

#### **Science Teachers' workshop**

On October 17 we ran a day workshop for science teachers. A full report is available from the Vic. Exec. Secretary. There were a number of useful workshops with program developed for science teachers teaching in science-faith interface.

#### **John White's Visit to Victoria**

On Dec 8 John ran a seminar on Human Cloning, an issue which is much in the news at present. As a result a small working group will be developed looking at the science and ethics of the issue. Hopefully they will be prepared by COSAC 99.

#### **John Polkinghorne's visit**

As well as a number of well attended meetings under the sponsorship of the Monash University Chaplaincy department, John spoke at a public ISCAST meeting at St Jude's Carlton. About 300 attended and many were impressed at the godliness of his thinking and the clarity and charity of his replies.

#### **Annual General Meeting**

During the year we have had to farewell Tom Spurling who has gone to Java, Indonesia for two years. The chairman, Prof John Pilbrow and the executive secretary, Prof Allan Day will stay on and Prof Day will also act as treasurer. Alan Gijbers will be newsletter editor. The AGM congratulated the executive secretary for all the hard effort put into developing an office and ISCAST's reputation in Victoria and further afield. A full report is available from the executive secretary.

## NSW

At a recent Sydney meeting Perry Wiles gave a brief critique of the work of Pannenburg on "Science and Theology". Our correspondent wrote, "Very encouraging to see a broader view by a Moore lecturer, admittedly he has a science background." *Trust constructive dialogue with theologians will continue especially as we prepare for COSAC 99.*

On November 21, Alan Gijbers read a paper on *The Mind and Brain, Body and Soul: Should dualism be resurrected or buried?* He was encouraged by the turnout and by the subsequent thoughtful correspondence received privately. Thanks to Robert Stening for organising the session. The Zadok paper on this issue will hopefully be out shortly.

Alan has also been invited by the CMDF (NSW) to give the Howard Guinness memorial lecture "*Science and Spirituality - enemies or allies in the practice of health care?*" on April 17 1999. One friend commented, "Dialogue between NSW and Vic? The second coming must be near!!"

## TASMANIA

*(The Editor was privileged the "eavesdrop" on this correspondence between Lawrie Lyons our Treasurer in Queensland and Lloyd his brother in Tasmania).*

Dear Lawrence,

Mission accomplished - John Polkinghorne now back in Sydney for a few days - then to UK. All went well. Packed auditoriums twice at University in Launceston. Capacity 300 seats. Launceston General Hospital - some 90 persons in the smaller teaching lecture theatre. Department of Physics in Hobart at University also virtually packed, about 115.

Deputy Vice Chancellor R Lidl (Chairman on first night) said he had only ever seen the Sir Raymond Ferrall Lecture Theatre filled to that extent at University graduations! Never before at a presented Lecture.

The evening public lecture [at Hobart] .... was virtually a repeat of the first public lecture in the evening in Launceston. I am awaiting a report on the numbers .... but would expect similar attendances. Bearing in mind the size of the Tasmanian population, I think the results are gratifying.

Lloyd

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## Whither ISCAST?

*(There have been a number of behind the scenes discussions on this topic, but this is the first article the editor has received for publication. There is a place for further constructive discussion on this issue - correspondence is welcome).*

There has been much discussion amongst ISCAST members over the last year as to what ISCAST's priorities should be. Many of the debates have been on questions of width and narrowness.

### **How distinctly evangelical should we be?**

Our Memorandum of Association includes the words, "view of the need firstly to integrate the views of the world, as revealed in the Holy Scripture, with scientific discovery ..." I take this to imply that Scripture takes a high position in our work. This will further imply that ISCAST should only promote or sponsor persons who have a similar high view of Scripture. This does not mean that we should not study the writings of such persons as they may well have insights which are useful to us. It does mean that persons whom ISCAST invites to speak on an "ISCAST platform" should not be known to disbelieve basic Biblical doctrines and stories.

This is not an easy road to tread, but it is a road followed by the American Scientific Affiliation and by Christians in Science in the UK. As we walk down this road, we have the Scylla of literalism and "Creation Science" on one side and the Charybdis of liberalism and attempts to demythologise the Scriptures on the other. Even after having taken the Scriptures as normative, there will be debates on their interpretation. Here again there is a more evangelical emphasis which might be preferred.

### **What is our main purpose?**

The name of our organisation states our purpose is "study." Is that all? If so, we are probably going to be a rather small and select group who meet from time to time to hear expert talks on the Science-Christianity interface and to discuss these. Maybe publications will ensue. But the "person in the street" or "person in the pew" would probably not benefit greatly from our discussions because they would be conducted at too high a level.

It has been suggested that ISCAST should be involved in promoting courses on Science and Christianity in our Universities, Theological Colleges and Bible Institutes. Indeed there has been some activity in this area but the interest has not been great. Overseas there appears to be a burgeoning study of our subject but this does not seem to be happening the same way in Australia. We do not have the same tradition of a General Education post High School as exists in the USA. Students only want those courses which are immediately relevant to their career (which is selected to earn them lots of money).

Recently both the Victorian and NSW chapters have sought to organise events involving school teachers. We all felt that this was an important thing for us to do, but it doesn't fit into the narrow definition above.

Another member questioned whether we should be an "IPCAST" - an Institute to Promote the understanding of Science and Christianity. This might be a group who seeks

(i) to retain a high view of both Science and Scripture, and to show that Science does not need to be re-written to conform with Scripture as some do, and

(ii) to show that Science does not require a disbelief in the supernatural and miraculous and that faith in the crucified, risen Saviour is not at loggerheads with modern science.

Some Christians will respond positively to the "IPCAST" idea because it reaches a wider audience of people and is more obviously gospel-oriented.

This is not to say that studying has no gospel benefit, but the benefits are less obvious and the audience is smaller.

Robert Stening

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## Letters

Dear editor

I'm just responding to your plea for some feedback on the ISCAST bulletin. I liked your editorial "ISCAST and the gospel".

The facts you gave on the warming and cooling of the environment are very interesting and I like your challenge about managing rather than preventing the environmental changes, though we need to minimize global warming by a more thrifty use of our energy resources.

There were some frightening statistics given in an *Age* editorial recently, such as that Bangladesh could lose a large percentage of its land through global warming though it contributes only a tiny percentage to global warming. It seems to me that the government's attitude in claiming special status for Australia to be able to increase its use of greenhouse gases is very short sighted and selfish.

Best wishes, Frank O'Dea

Jonathan Clarke replies:

The popular media deal with environmental issues in a simple linear cause and effect way, eg human activity > environmental impact (always portrayed as negative). The reality is almost always more complex but rarely dealt with adequately. The greenhouse effect and possible sea level rise is a good example. It is one thing to race about crying "The sea is rising!", quite another to determine how much. There are many unanswered questions; the degree of global warming, the effect of that on sea level, the significance of that rise compared with the influence of subsidence though compaction resulting from urbanisation and subsidence though extraction of groundwater, the ability of the normal sedimentary processes to keep up with natural or anthropogenic subsidence in places like the Ganges delta, and whether the global community has the ability to offset such rises through flood control measures.

Another issue is whether the economic, social, and environmental impact of reduced fossil fuel usage outweighs the impact of continued use. Fossil fuels are difficult to beat for convenience, economy, and compactness as energy sources, especially in transport. The only alternative to fossil fuels for large scale base load electricity generation is nuclear power. Is increased use of nuclear energy in the industrialised countries acceptable to avert global warming?

Discussion of environmental issues is often hampered by the way the agenda is set by environmental fundamentalists such as Greenpeace. Such groups tend to be interested in scientific and technical issues only so far as they advance their own political and scientific agendas. Environmental issues which do not advance such agenda do not get the attention they deserve, no matter how worthy.

Consider the lacklustre interest of such groups in issues such as soil erosion, salinisation or even population compared with the hysteria over nuclear testing.

These are difficult and complex issues and I do not think there are any simple answers in Christian environmental stewardship, especially when applied to specific issues. I do believe that better understanding of the doctrine of creation will provide better guidelines to stewardship of the environment than either economic rationalism or a "nature first" pantheism.

Jonathan Clarke.

### **Lawrie Lyons On the Pursuit of Science**

In listing the reasons why people do science, you omit to say that science is done by most of its practitioners because it provides new and better ways of serving men. It is a way of helping not only ourselves but also our neighbours, and very often science provides the only way to help others. For example, science in providing more food for the hungry than all charities added together, often is the only way to remove starvation. Science provides better health and very often it is the only way to overcome some types of disease. It therefore is impossible fully to love God by loving our neighbour unless we embrace science. Is it any wonder that Christians were in the forefront in developing the modern scientific and technological movement?

Yours faithfully, Lawrie Lyons