

## ***ISCAST BULLETIN 27***

**(incorporating VISCAST News)**

**May 1999.**

**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:**

#### **The critical approach**

"A bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;"  
- The modus operandi of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42:3

There are three phases in teaching critical appraisal of journal articles to medical students. They move from the first to the second when they no longer believe something simply because it is written. They learn to think critically, to discern biases and errors of interpretation. They move from the phase of gullibility to the phase of criticality. This is the dangerous phase. Since all scientific studies have limitations and are subject to all sorts of selection and measurement ?biases, it would be easy to dismiss all research because of minor errors. The third and most mature phase comes when they can identify a bias, assess its direction (in favour or against the main conclusion of the paper) and its extent so as to determine whether the bias is minor or major. In this, the resurrection phase, a student learns how to accept the flaws of a study and still benefit from its results. While the second phase is essentially negative (rejecting the study because it is biased) the third is more positive because it cautiously accepts the conclusions, in spite of the flaws.

In life and in our approach to our colleagues, fellow ISCASTians, and those with whom we might disagree, we too can go through these three phases. When we critically review an argument, do we look for points of agreement or disagreement? Are we destructive or constructive? Do we see blind alleys or ways forward? It is helpful to ask this question in relation to the origins discussion outlined below. It is also helpful to ask this question in the conduct of all business. The Suffering Servant exemplified by Christ is a paradigm for our servanthood. In life do we see problems or opportunities?

#### **ISCAST and Creation**

I have received correspondence, some of which preferred to remain anonymous, that ISCAST is committed to a theistic evolutionist position and that would not welcome

other points of view. This is unfair to ISCAST. We take no official position on the origins debate, though many would accept theistic evolution.

Allan Day and I set out a tentative document in the Victorian VISCAS News but that is only our ideas without an official imprimatur. In that document we were careful to try not to tie ourselves too closely to a particular scientific point of view, as we are only too well aware that theology tied to a particular scientific theory can be made to look very silly in the next generation. We tried to stick to broad principles of the science faith relationship.

I would hate to think that readers who disagree with us would not get a guernsey in our Bulletin. We only ask that the points of view expressed are Biblically sound and make a reasonable fist of the science we know. We are aware that blind belief about particular aspects of evolutionary theory can obstruct scientific progress as much as blind gullibility in particular hermeneutic theories of Scripture. We welcome all honest and sound ideas, carefully and charitably argued. I would like to think that honest robust debate is possible within the pages of this Bulletin.

Those who have been following our debate with the Answers in Genesis movement may like to see their latest reply to Allan's article published in the last Bulletin. This leads you directly to the [article in question](#).

There is another related site, the No Answers in Genesis website found through: <http://www.onthenet.com.au/~stear/> This website is sponsored by the Australian Skeptics. Under the general heading, "Are Science and Religion Compatible?" there are articles like Evolution, Theology and Creation Science. This article is a summary of Occam's Razor on the ABC Sunday 15 November 1998. It is an interview of Andrew Garrett by Robyn Williams. Andrew was a member of the Australian Skeptics who went to the UK, became a Christian and now gives considerable time to the Christian Students in Science website answering creation/evolution questions. You find the Gospel in funny places!

Another interesting article is, "Do Creationists vilify mainstream Christians?" We are grateful for those outside ISCAST who seek to defend our position, and the position of numerous Christian colleagues in scientific circles who seek to show that the Christian Gospel is highly relevant to our scientific age.

We have also received a couple of letters on the nature of ISCAST as an Evangelical organisation. Note again that opinions in the Bulletin are those of the authors of the articles and are not necessarily official positions of ISCAST. I would like to see us as a fellowship in open debate not as a team of intellectual thought police, desperately dousing contrary opinions! However even that is only an editorial opinion, not an official position!

Alan Gijbers.

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## **International News**

### **Ian Barbour wins Templeton Award**

March 10, 1999 -- Ian Barbour, has won the 1999 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Ian is a physicist and theologian who launched a new era in the inter-disciplinary dialogue between science and religion more than three decades ago. He is now one of the world's most forceful advocates for ethics in technology.

The Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion is valued at 750,000 pounds sterling, about 1.24 million dollars. Begun in 1972 by Sir John Templeton, the prize is given each year to a living person who has shown extraordinary originality in advancing humankind's understanding of God and/or spirituality. Barbour has decided to give \$1 million to the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences at Berkeley California, as an endowment for their continued work.

Others honoured by the prize include Rev. Dr. Billy Graham in 1982, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in 1983, The first Templeton Prize recipient was Mother Teresa in 1973.

Barbour's groundbreaking book, *Issues in Science and Religion*, in 1965, "literally created the current field of science and religion." Barbour has written or edited a dozen books on science and religion, including *Myths, Models and Paradigms* (Harper & Row, 1974), and authored more than 50 articles or book chapters on the relation of science to religion and on ethical issues arising from technology. His Gifford Lectures, published by HarperCollins in two volumes as *Religion in an Age of Science* (1990) and *Ethics in an Age of Technology* (1993), received the 1993 book award of the American Academy of Religion. Both books have been widely used as texts in college and university courses.

The full text of the citation and Barbour's response can be obtained from the internet: [www.ctns.org](http://www.ctns.org) This article was extracted from [Billy Grassie's press release](#).

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### **Visit of Ted Peters**

Ted Peters came to Brisbane partly to attend the International Conference on the Human Genome Project. Whilst in Brisbane Ted attended and spoke at a meeting attended by some Iscast Fellows and by members of the academic staff of five theological teaching centres in Brisbane. Ted Peters discussed the importance of the science:faith interface, and our underlying hope was that the theologians would carry this message back to their colleges. One theologian decided on the spot to attend a science and faith Templeton workshop in Boston from June 28th 1999 to 2nd July. In the course of the meeting a segment from Margaret Wertheim's video on "Faith and Reason" was shown. The video will be kept in the BCQ library and made available for borrowing.

Lawrie Lyons.

Ted's visit to Australia also included other states. His time in Melbourne was particularly appreciated by my colleagues at St Vincent's Hospital where he met with ethicists from Jewish, Catholic and Protestant persuasions. His lecture at Ridley College co-sponsored by ISCAST and the Centre for Applied Christian Ethics was well attended and valued.

He also attended other states but I have no reports of their visit. As a result of his visit ISCAST along with the ATF and the AUSREN organisations have put a proposal for Templeton Funding to sponsor a travelling facilitator of science faith courses in Australia. We are awaiting the outcome of that application.

Ed.

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## **AUSTRALIAN THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION**

Conference on Science and Theology  
Thursday afternoon 27 Jan - Saturday night 30 January 2000  
Luther Seminary, Adelaide

### **LIFE, INTELLIGENCE AND THE UNIVERSE: SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM'**

#### **Speakers:**

Professor John David Barrow, Astronomy Centre University of Sussex UK

Rev John Puddefoot, Eton College UK

Rev Dr Mark Worthing, Adelaide Oz

Submissions solicited for papers, connected with the overall title, to the ATF.

Fully catered, the registration fee will be in the vicinity of \$200, live in accommodation available at an additional fee.

Fax (08) 8340 3450

Phone (08) 8340 3060

Hilary D Regan (Mr) ATF Secretary  
PO Box 504 Hindmarsh SA 5008.

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### **John White's contribution to cloning debate**

John has been canvassing opinions from ISCASTians (among others) and prepared a statement on human cloning available from the Australian Academy of Science on their website: <http://www.science.org.au>.

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**An introductory Science-faith course for undergraduates** is available on the Internet. Assoc. Prof Robert Stening's course at UNSW can be perused on [www.phys.unsw.edu.au](http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au). Click on "Physics Courses" go down to General Studies subjects and click on GENS4010 Science and Religion. Robert is the ISCAST national secretary.

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## Book Reviews

**Jeeves MA, Berry RJ.** *Science, Life and Christian Belief: A Survey and Assessment.* Apollos Leicester 1998 pp 305

This book fills a gap in the recent flood of books about science and religion. Most have been written from the perspective of a particular discipline, or have concentrated on one aspect of science (biological, physical, or social). This book covers most of the natural sciences, as well as psychology and the interaction of mind and brain. It is not intended for people who have no knowledge of science, but it does not assume a wide familiarity with modern scientific, philosophical and theological thought, and so it can be profitably read by the educated layperson.

Each chapter opens with a short paragraph, outlining the problems to be treated. Most chapters finish with a section entitled "Conclusions", probably better called, "Tentative conclusions."

The first chapter provides the historical background. Then follows a chapter on what we understand by "the laws of nature", with an extended discussion on miracles. They argue that we should not try too hard to distinguish between God's normal way of upholding the universe (what we call the laws of nature), and any other mode of action he uses. William Temple said much the same thing in his 1932 Gifford Lectures: "Only if God is revealed in the rising of the sun in the sky can he be revealed in the rising of a son of man from the dead." In some places here the authors come close to deist ideas: perhaps including a theologian as a joint author would have improved this chapter.

The next chapter addresses the nature of "the scientific enterprise". The authors observe that many scientists have little knowledge of the philosophy of science, but also that many philosophers rely on the final published work of scientists, and have little appreciation of the false starts, blind alleys, and discussions over coffee which lead to the final work. This is followed by a chapter about what constitutes an explanation of phenomena in the fields of science and religion, and the use of models in these fields.

The next three chapters, "The God of the physical Universe", "Creation", and "Evolution", concentrate on some areas of natural science, and how these relate to our understanding of God's action in the world. Here the authors outline some modern scientific ideas and, by considering criticisms from both Christians and non-Christians,

demonstrate that much of the heat which arises in discussions on these topics is due to misunderstanding either the findings of science or what the Bible actually says (or both).

The next chapter, "Biblical portraits of human nature", is probably the most important one for those working in areas directly related to human beings. The authors quote a theologian as writing "... the Hebrew and Greek words to express physical, emotional and psychological being are an interpreter's minefield." They then proceed to sail directly into this minefield. Doubtless there will be disagreement with the authors at some points, but overall they make a very strong case for the "psychosomatic unity" of human beings. This is a much needed corrective to the recent view that we are nothing more than reproduction machines for genes.

Then follow three chapters dealing with biological and psychological aspects of humanity: "Human nature: biology and beginning", "Brain, mind and behaviour", and "Psychology". Here the importance of understanding the biological, mental and psychological aspects of what makes us human is emphasised, and the need to relate these to our theology. To quote the authors: "Good ethics are not likely to come from bad biology or naïve theology."

The next chapter, "Our common future", takes us into environmental issues. Here the authors provide biblically based guidelines. They steer a course between green religion, which places an undue emphasis on the preservation of nature, and the commonly held idea that nature is to be dominated by humans.

The final chapter, "The implications of science", criticises those who claim that scientists' presuppositions determine their conclusions, while agreeing that our presuppositions can influence both the way we look at the world around us and our relationships with our fellow humans. It concludes with a number of guidelines for a more constructive relationship between the scientific enterprise and Christian faith.

The text is followed by 26 pages of notes. There is a page of suggestions for further reading, in which the social sciences are rather short-changed, followed by a 17 page bibliography, which covers the whole field. One shortcoming here is that there is no indication of the background level of knowledge required to appreciate the different books and articles. The book concludes with a four page index.

Despite the minor quibbles expressed above, this is one of the outstanding books covering the field of science and religion. The authors have taken considerable care in the way they have presented current scientific knowledge. Thus, despite the rapid changes which may take place in our scientific understanding of the way the world is, there is much in this book which will be of permanent value.

KGSmith

**Gijsbers AJ.** *The Nature of Humans - Mind and Brain: Body, Soul and Spirit.* Zadok Institute for Christianity and Society, Hawthorn, Victoria. Spring/Summer, Zadok Papers 1998/1999; S96, pp 16, \$4.00.

There are a large number of books around which provide information on the mind-brain problem, and attempt to offer solutions. Few of them, however, are written from a Christian perspective. And even fewer manage to consider all aspects of that which goes up to make us human: biological, psychological and spiritual. We now have available an introduction to this complicated field, by the Chairman-Elect of the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship of Australia, who has been labelled a "leading ISCASTian".

The author manages, in a brief space, to cover all the major points of interest in discussions which have taken place about the relationship between mind and

brain. I was very encouraged, part way through the paper, to come across the phrase "... it's not that simple". As scientists, ISCASTians are well-aware of the limitations of science, the tentative nature of much of the work at the frontiers of research, and the complexity of many problems: and human beings are certainly complex entities! It is refreshing to read something which is intelligible to a lay person who reads it carefully, but which doesn't over-simplify matters.

Some of the topics treated include: The methods of knowing and the limits of science; Biblical approaches to anatomy, physiology and psychology; The soul and the spirit; The mind and consciousness; The problem of determinism.

It is always possible to nit-pick, but there are very few nits in this paper on which to pick. As a (retired) mathematician, I would have liked more discussion of Roger Penrose's criticisms of computer models of the mind, with a direct citation, rather than a reference to Polkinghorne's treatment of this. But I suspect that another reviewer might then complain about too much attention being paid to computer models.

The references in the page of Notes at the end are quite up-to-date (of the 31 books listed, 15 have been published since 1990). Some old classics are included, such as Augustine's *Confessions* and Bernard Ramm's, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, but there are plenty of modern resources listed here for anyone wishing to follow up some topic in more detail.

Anyone interested in knowing more about the nature of humans could read this with profit. All ISCASTians should read this before COSAC99. The final section, "Appropriate models of mind function", is particularly good. And we should all bear in mind the author's words near the end of this section: "However, my mind is not made up and I, as always, seek further enlightenment."

KGS

**Wertheim M.** *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: a history of space from Dante to the Internet.* Doubleday Sydney. 1999. 308pp. \$A 29.95.

In what way is cyberspace a new space for the soul? Have we not had other bolt-holes like for our imagination novels, TV or cinema? What makes cyberspace different? Proponents suggest that cyberspace offers us immortality, transcendence and omniscience. It is an opportunity to explore a new world of our minds without the bloody mess of organic matter. If humans are just computers made of meat, why not transmorph into cleaner bits and bytes?

These questions are evaluated later in the book. Wertheim in the meantime takes us on a fascinating intellectual journey on the west's changing view of space. Starting from Dante's *The Divine Comedy* as a model of mediaeval soul-space she moves us through a unitary view of space as three dimensional, infinite and empty except for occasional lumps of spinning matter. There was no space left for heaven or the soul. Physicalism had taken over.

From a deeply dualistic position Wertheim argues that humans are not content with such a materialistic view of reality. Hence the fascination of cyberspace. Wertheim takes us on a journey through relativistic space making the usual sci-fi assumptions that the black holes may be the gateway of travel faster than light through space either into other universes or other times. Other worlds (?spiritual worlds) thus become possible.

Other dimensions are also possible she argues, and follows Edwin Abbott's tale of Flatland to introduce the concept of multi-dimensionality fundamental to speculations about a "theory of everything" so beloved of some physicists. Suddenly comes the cyberspace revolution - a whole new space into which the human mind can enter and live. Wertheim claims that materialist America was intellectually and psychically ripe for the explosion of cyberspace.

Like any new fad, its enthusiasts make astonishing claims which are well criticised by Wertheim. However much cybersouls would like to lose (or find?) themselves in cyberspace, they have to eat, sleep, type keyboards, look at computer screens. I would add they need a steady power supply and a whole telephonic infrastructure to survive. Who pushes the keyboard to continue cyber-immortality? Who will reboot the back-up copies should the system have crashed? More fundamentally if our minds are downloaded into cyberspace will our self-consciousness disappear or will we still be able to reflect, perceive and understand ourselves? Will we be able to observe ourselves thinking and feeling or is that precious qualia central to the mind of meat rather than the mind of bytes? How will we demonstrate our self-consciousness to ourselves?

Wertheim has a number of other questions for protagonists of cyber-souls. She asks what would cyber-immortals do if they lived for ever? Can the human mind with all its complexity and levels of subconsciousness really be downloaded? Since so much of consciousness is a sense of the passage of time can that dynamic sense be programmed into me on the internet? Can we capture the essence of a person so that that person can be reconstituted in a new cyber-form? Maybe not, but Wertheim argues the question has

opened up the possibility anew that there is such a thing as the essence of a person and that the cyberspace has allowed us to more clearly see that there is a space for the soul.

Wertheim's final and telling criticism of cyber-souls is the thought that immortality is offered to the technologically privileged without thought to morality. Cyber-selfishness ignored social responsibility in the real world. Cyberspace is also a tool for social interaction. However does this lead to utopia? Today newbies are hounded and some cyber-contributors have even been sexually harassed. Hardly utopia, but what else can be expected of humans? The internet is a tool which can be used for good or ill.

What then the value of cyberspace? Wertheim cites two. First it is a network of relationships which can be a powerful metaphor for building better communities. It is a shared space which can bring people closer, while maintaining distance. More fundamentally it is a reminder in this age of scientific reductionism that the physical world of bits and bytes encodes messages of meaning. Physical space is not the only space. The mind and the imagination live in other spaces. The soul marches on!

AG

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## Letters

Dear Editor,

Your editorial in ISCAST Bulletin 25 reminded me of the series "When Christians Disagree", published by Inter-Varsity Press, and "Coping with Conflict", by Gareth Jones. What have I learned about "Coping with conflict when Christians disagree"?

Some of the conflicts in Christian circles relate to widely circulated factual misinformation. In a number of cases there is no direct connection between the matter under dispute and Christian doctrine. Sometimes the misinformation approaches the slanderous, particularly when non-Christians are criticised over scientific matters. Here I Corinthians 6:9-11, where Paul puts slander on a level with adultery and sodomy, should be our guide. Despite this, any attempt at challenging this misinformation can very well lead, as Gareth Jones writes, to protests that the person concerned is condoning sinful behaviour. Let me give just one example.

About 30 years ago, there was much fuss in the local Queensland media about the immorality of teenagers, as shown by the number of illegitimate babies born to teenage women. Many of the churches jumped on the bandwagon. A Christian student, concerned about the fuss, asked me "Aren't unmarried teenagers having a large number of babies simply because there are far more unmarried teenagers than unmarried women in other age groups?" Together we consulted the records of the Bureau of Statistics.

Her suggestion proved correct. Comparing the number of illegitimate births with the number of unmarried women in different age groups, it turned out that an unmarried

teenager was, in fact, less likely to have a baby than an unmarried woman in any other age group up to 45!

I have been trying, ever since, to get people to stop criticising teenagers for sexual immorality, and concentrate on their elders who are setting the example. The almost invariable response is disbelief: many Christians have the idea of teenage immorality so firmly fixed in their minds that they simply refuse to accept that the data on babies born out of wedlock shows otherwise. And my stance has, in a number of cases, led to people charging that I am trying to justify the immoral behaviour of youth.

ISCASTians are a group of people who are accustomed to analysing data, and trying to make sure that any conclusions drawn from the data are justified, trying as far as possible, to avoid any prejudices and presuppositions. we may have. Most people, however, are not accustomed to looking closely at evidence before drawing conclusions. If the evidence conflicts with any presuppositions they may have, far too many Christians want to ignore the evidence, or assume that the data has been collected by people who want to discredit Christianity.

Intellectual integrity demands that errors should be corrected, preferably privately, but if necessary, publicly. But we should, as far as possible, do this in a way which does not imply that those with whom we disagree are doing so from unworthy motives. In nearly all the cases in which I have been involved, the disagreement has involved lack of knowledge about some topic, or quoting another Christian source where information has not been checked for accuracy.

This leads us into another area in which ISCASTians can be helpful: providing accurate information about various issues to the Australian Christian community. Between us I am sure that we have a lot of knowledge which could be useful to other Christians. As well as witnessing to our non-Christian colleagues, perhaps we could, individually, be more actively involved in some of the Christian groups which are trying to cope with the multitude of problems facing Australian society at the end of the 20th century.

Ken Smith

Dear Ken,

As an epidemiologist I warm to the thrust of your example, which asked that fundamental question, what is your denominator? In teaching critical thinking to epidemiology students that is one of the first flaws they are taught to spot. The medical literature is filled with such blunders. I also appreciate the more general point that in conflicts, truth is still fundamental. I am aware of the post-modern critique of the "theory-ladenness of data" and the view that different theorists may reinterpret data differently, but I am still enough of a modern to make a distinction between fact and theory and to recognise that some conflicts over facts are actually deeply disguised debates based on prejudice. The problem is I can see other's prejudice but I have so little insight into my own. The parable of the plank and the splinter comes to mind.

In drug and alcohol work that distinction between data and prejudice is very prominent. The clinical data shows that methadone is currently the most effective agent in helping people suffering from heroin dependence. The data on naltrexone is much weaker. Those from the abstinence school however would prefer to use the inferior drug, naltrexone, for ideological reasons than to use the most proven drug, methadone. The decision in favour of naltrexone, currently before the federal government, threatens to lose more lives in our struggle against heroin dependence. Ideology rules over data. The Prime Minister has listened to scientists, "but there are other considerations." Standing for truth is not always easy.  
- Ed.

Dear Sir,

In recent days I have read the following book and pamphlets:  
Peter Cameron's account of his heresy trial, "Heretic", the Lent *Anglican Digest* from the USA, and the ISCAST letter.  
What all three comment on, in their different ways, is "Who is a Christian?"

The *Anglican Digest* comments on the change in the Roman Catholic view of Anglicanism, which has moved its opinion of the validity of Anglican Ordination from "Invalid" to "Infallibly Invalid". The discussion of the Heresy Trial centres around the question of whether it is essential for a Christian to believe that Paul necessarily wrote all the letters bearing his name, and your ISCAST bulletin says that it is important that no one who does not believe (whatever that may mean) the main stories (whatever that may mean) of the Bible should be invited to speak at an ISCAST meeting.

What all three have in common is that they are concerned with one group of people presuming to tell another group of people who think of themselves as Christians that, whatever they may themselves think, whatever their prayer life may be, they are not in fact Christian.

The issue of *Anglican Digest* has an article by JI Packer about CS Lewis...Packer points out that Lewis would fail many of the tests of Evangelical Orthodoxy, yet has become the "Aquinas, the Augustine, and the Aesop of contemporary evangelicalism". It makes very interesting reading, coming as it does from the pen of so noted an Evangelical and being published in so "high" a church journal.

By and large, do you not think that if someone says that they are Christian, says that they know the Lord, we should probably believe them and not presume to judge them?

Dr Kit Bunker.

Dear Dr Bunker,

Thank you for your comments. I wonder whether you are confusing orthodoxy orthopraxy? It is obviously important not to be judgemental in our dealing with people and to be open. On the other hand Christianity also has intellectual content and truth is an

important issue. There are different standards of orthodoxy required from speakers as from those we relate to privately. Some of Paul's vehemence in Galatians is related to misleading views of Christian truth. Some of your vehemence is also related to your view of appropriate Christian charity. What do others think?

- Ed

Dear Alan,

It was great to hear from you. I read the ISCAST Bulletin hungrily, and much enjoyed the stimulus of the thinking and ideas and the chance to get a wider perspective. I also like the approach that was taken in the bulletin, it seems to agree as I understand it, with the ideas that seem logical and appropriate to my kind of situation. I am also impressed with the functioning of ISCAST as an organisation. Praise God for the dialogue around His kingdom and the chance to use our brains to praise Him. Thank God He did not leave us as puppets to just follow, but honoured with the ability to think and use our discretion and respected our maturity to make decisions based on logic and common sense and our dependence on Him and His word. Thank God we do not have to be slaves to just follow.

Dr Andrew Truscott, Johannesburg South Africa.

Thank you, Alan, for your illuminating editorials in recent ISCAST Bulletins. I was particularly pleased to read the editorials of Bulletins 25 and 26 (25 even made it into my conflict management file!), and your explanation of Ken Smith's notoriety relating to the Sceptics. Keep up the good work!

Rev Rod Benson, Pastor, Blakehurst Baptist Church