COSAC 2011 Feedback

This year’s COSAC (Conference On Science And Christianity) was held at the Aspect Tamar Valley Resort in Tasmania from 26-28 August. We asked participants ‘What has been most valuable for you at this COSAC?’ and some of the feedback we received (in no particular order) is as follows:

- Connecting with Christian thinkers across Australia and forming the start of friendships.
- Hearing speakers of very high quality. Fellowship with like-minded folk. Relaxed atmospheres.
- The format of the breakout sessions led to good discussion and coverage of topics.
- The lectures by Denis Alexander and Nancey Murphy and the parallel sessions that I was able to attend. The devotional sessions with Bp John Harrower were also good.
- The fellowship - meeting and talking with speakers and other ISCAST members, etc.
- The opportunity to investigate (and purchase) new science/faith books.
- Personal discussions with people over coffee and meals.
- Opportunities for questions and discussion very much appreciated.
- The time spent meeting with fellow delegates and talking through ideas.
- Connection with thinkers/writers on evolutionary/faith issues.
- The timing structure of the talks was excellent - significant time allocated to discussion (rather than lecture) improved the value immensely.
- Getting to know other Christians who are active in science and research.
- Listening to fascinating lectures, purchasing several books about subjects of interest and in some cases meeting the author.
- To sit at the feet of exceptional Christians.
- The range of expertise.
- General conversation with other people and the interesting talks.
- Bp John Harrower’s devotions were memorable.
- Renewing friendships from previous COSACs and the meal-time discussions.

News Items

A Sense of Awe: science, faith and wonder

ABC Radio National’s Encounter program is hosting a conversation called A Sense of Awe: science, faith and wonder, produced by Chris Mulherin. To find out more about the project go to www.asenseofawe.net, where there are also links to Facebook and Twitter. There is also an article by Chris on the ABC Religion and Ethics portal. More

The Nature of Nature

ISI has released an expansive compendium called “The Nature of Nature: Examining the Role of Naturalism in Science”, which is now widely available at a very affordable price. At over 900 pages and 500,000 words, the book features over forty essays from an extremely diverse field of philosophers and thinkers including Alvin Plantinga, Robert Koons, Stephen Meyer, Michael Shermer, Alan Guth, Nancey Murphy, Roger Penrose, John Searle and Dallas Willard. More
News Items

Science v Faith: What's The Problem?
Melissa Mack writes for Australian online paper InDaily about the science and faith conference currently being held at Tabor College in Adelaide, jointly organised by The Faraday Institute and Tabor College. More

A Leap of Truth: Expanding the Paradigm
The BioLogos’ website features a number of clips from the forthcoming documentary ‘A Leap of Truth’, featuring Faraday advisory board members Prof. Alister McGrath and Revd Dr John Polkinghorne. More

Book Review: The Great Partnership
Jonathan Sacks' book The Great Partnership was reviewed in the Church Newspaper on Friday August 19, 2011. More

More Educated, More Religious
CNN reports on a recent study in the US into the correlation between levels of education and levels of religious belief. It turns out that the secularist truism "more educated = less religious" is not accurate. More

The New Universe and the Human Future
A review of Nancy Ellen Abrams and Joel R. Primack’s Yale University Press-published book on developing a “shared cosmology”. The book has received positive reviews from Desmond Tutu, Martin Rees and Paul Davies. More

Emergence: The whole is greater than the sum of the parts
What is emergence? Ross McKenzie explains this key concept in science and religion using examples from different areas of science. The concept of emergence is examined from both philosophical and theological standpoints. More

Artificial Life
Denis Overbye reports for the New York Times on the latest attempts by scientists to create life artificially in the lab. By some accounts, they are getting very close indeed. More

Artificial life research triggers concerns
Anna Salleh from ABC News discusses a debate held at the University of Sydney regarding synthetic biology. More

Malaria vaccine to be released in Queensland’s Griffith University
A malaria vaccine expected to protect against all known strains of the deadly disease will be launched at a Queensland university this week. More

Mars 500 crew breaks endurance record
Enclosed in a metal spacecraft, the Mars500 crew have endured 438 days of isolation, living on a spartan diet of cereal bars and pasta with precious little contact with friends and family back home. More

Majority of U.S. students believe science and religion are not in conflict: survey
Dr. Scot McKnight writes on the Jesus Creed blog about a recent study conducted by Christopher Scheitie from Penn State which was reported in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 50, p. 175 (2011) U.S. College Students’ Perception of Religion and Science: Conflict, Collaboration, or Independence? More

Medically Supervised Injecting Centres - A Good Idea or Not?
The issue of medically supervised (“safe”) injecting rooms polarises the community, and many Christians are strongly opposed to the idea. But drug and alcohol physician Alan Gjigas examines the arguments on both sides of the debate for Engage.mail. More

Climate debate 'appalling' says Chief Scientist
Australia's Chief Scientist, Ian Chubb, has lamented the quality of public debate on climate change, saying it "borders on appalling". More

2011 New College Lectures - The Future of Theology
The 2011 New College Lectures will be held from the 27-29 September and will feature three 'younger' theologians who will explore the theme, 'The future of theology’. More

Borderlands Seminar
The first annual Borderlands Seminar was a great success, with Professor Tom McLeish, Durham University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Research. Tom explored 'the Borderlands of Science and Faith.' More

Scientists trap antimatter
At the Cern particle collider in Geneva, physicists have created and trapped 309 antihydrogen atoms for a record amount of time, up to 1,000 seconds (just over 16 minutes). More

Life, science and...everything
Prominent Australian research biologist Sir Gustav Nossal discusses science, vaccinations, climate change, uncertainty and belief in a wide-ranging interview with Jo Chandler in The Age. More
Towards a post-modern apologetic

Alan Gijsbers, August 2011

Author
Assoc Prof Alan Gijsbers, University of Melbourne, Head Addiction Medicine, Royal Melbourne Hospital, Medical Director, Substance Withdrawal Unit, The Melbourne Clinic, Richmond, National President ISCAST.

Abstract
I find the current approach to Christian apologetics quite unsatisfactory. ‘Ten reasons why atheists are wrong and I’m right’, smacks both of intellectual arrogance and misunderstanding how humans come to conclusions.

A good example of the poverty of the believer’s argument is the frequent statement, that atheism is an inadequate foundation for a coherent ethic. Granted that there may be some difficulty finding a ‘rational basis’ for ethics in atheism, we nevertheless find that there are many very ethical atheists in the debate, and to argue that they are not ethical is quite demeaning and simply wrong. Conversely of course atheists argue that to invoke a deity as a basis for ethics is quite demeaning and simply wrong.

As someone who has often found the field of theology frighteningly arcane and frequently under-determined by the data, I was personally challenged and encouraged by the unique vision of theology painted by McGrath in The Passionate Intellect.

Using the evocative image of ‘theology mapping the landscape of faith’, McGrath begins by suggesting that the proper purpose of theology is to help us articulate, deepen and communicate the Christian vision of God in all its fullness and wonder (p. 22). He suggests that theology is a pursuit that is decidedly corporate; the landscape of faith being so vast that no individual can fully comprehend its panorama. Theology helps the individual Christian by identifying aspects of the landscape that may have been overlooked or filtered out, whilst simultaneously offering helpful corrective to individual, subjective descriptions of the landscape.

First a scientist believes facts. That in itself is an act of faith. Under certain conditions water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. Gravity always acts. Staphylococci cause boils. Sometimes the facts of a case have to be verified. Is it really true that water goes down the plughole clockwise in the northern hemisphere and anti-clockwise in the southern? Scientific facts, like historical facts can be verified according to set norms. The reliability of witnesses to the facts comes into the picture.

1 Indeed, this book was previously published in the UK by SPCK under the title Mere Theology.
Event News

A trip to the Grampians (Vic)

Date: 22-23 October 2011
Details: Meet at 11am at the parking lot near Heatherlie Quarry near Hall’s Gap with a packed lunch for a picnic at the quarry. From there we’ll head to Pomonal Church for the afternoon/evening events. On Saturday night we’ll head out for dinner somewhere nearby. Sunday service starts at a reasonable 10am and you will offer an optional walk around Lake Fyans on Sunday after lunch.

Creation Science, Intelligent Design and Theistic Evolution (Bathurst)

A one-day seminar is to be held in Bathurst to provide a frank assessment of the various creation stories and beliefs that are held by a range of Christians from various traditions. We are seeking to provide a safe space to allow Christians to assess these often conflicting and controversial beliefs and how they square with Scripture.

Date: 5 November 2011
Location: All Saints Cathedral Hall, Bathurst
Time: 10.30am to 6.00pm
A full program is available on the website.

ICAST Vic Annual General Meeting

ICAST Vic will be holding their AGM in November and have invited Prof. David Clarke to speak. More details available soon.

For more details on events visit www.iscast.org

Other News

ICAST Shop

The online shop has been revamped and now includes a list of books with links to online book stores. When purchasing your next product through Amazon or the Book Depository, follow the links provided in the ICAST Shop and earn ICAST a percentage of sales!

Congratulations

Congratulations to John and Susan Pilbrow who celebrated 50 years of marriage on the 5th August.

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