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ISCAST is a think tank of Christian academics, scientists, professionals and theologians who explore the interface and interactions between science & technology with the Christian faith.

Perceptions of Faith - Summary

In contemporary discussions between religious and non-religious people, the nature of "faith" is a frequent topic of debate. Christian thinkers and apologists have argued that faith can be reasonable: a step in the direction of the evidence, not opposed to it [e.g., Collins, 2010 and Craig, 2008]. More fideistic Christians have argued that faith is inherently non-rational. Non-religious critics such as the "New Atheists" have argued passionately that faith can only be belief in spite of evidence, or against the evidence [e.g., Boghossian, 2013 and Dawkins, 2006]

To date, empirical data on how actively engaged religious and non-religious groups actually use the word "faith" has been hard to come by. Large scale surveys [e.g., Pew Forum Religious Landscape Study, 2014] typically do not go down to a level where fundamental definitions of "faith" are explored. Some studies have explored qualitatively how participants feel faith relates to evidence [e.g., Ecklund, 2010] but these have been geared towards specific sub-sections of the community [e.g., scientists from elite universities].

The idea of developing a focussed study to shed light on how these communities perceive faith was conceived as part of the lead-up to an event in Melbourne featuring Professor Peter Boghossian, a prominent philosopher and epistemologist.

The lead author, James Garth, an aerospace engineer and Fellow of ISCAST, devised the survey with input from Dr Meredith Doig, President of the Rationalist Society of Australia, and Robert Martin, Director of the City Bible Forum Melbourne. Our collaboration aimed to ensure the survey was clear, unbiased, balanced, and understandable by our respective communities.

The response was overwhelming, with over 1350 contributions received. This is a statistically significant number, justifying a professional write-up and distribution.

The research is based around a survey of six short questions regarding the respondent's gender, age, strength of belief about the existence of God (the "Dawkins Scale"), affiliation with actively engaged religious or non-religious groups. The core of the survey contains eight definitions of "faith", which were developed after extensively reviewing an in-depth conversation between Professor Peter Boghossian and Professor Tim McGrew on the "Unbelievable" radio programme. By doing this, the two professors were effectively used as key informants. Five definitions were derived from these key informants, two were taken from the Oxford English Dictionary and one was taken from Hebrews 11 (NRSV translation).

In addition, we included a qualitative component, allowing respondents to provide their own definition of faith. This has yielded about 300 responses, and a treasure-trove of data and perspectives.

The survey was specifically distributed to targeted, actively engaged, non-religious and Christian religious groups based in Australia. In addition, a number of church congregations from a variety of denominations were surveyed via hard copy and electronic means.

The data-collection phase of the survey is now complete. ISCAST has taken up the challenge to find the funds to complete this research. If you want to help, please visit our [website](http://www.iscast.org/node/1029) (http://www.iscast.org/node/1029) for details on how to do this.

– James Garth

[You can download a copy of James' Faith survey overview from our website.](#) This also lists the references cited above.

In this Issue:

- News Items
- Journal Abstracts
- Event News

Introducing our newest ISCAST Fellow Stephen Spence

Dr Stephen Spence is currently Deputy Principal (Academic) at Tabor Adelaide. He is also currently Interim Director of Tabor's Graeme Clark Research Institute. His area of speciality is New Testament Studies, in particular Luke-Acts and Paul, and he works within the general area of socio-historical studies. He is author of *Parting of the Ways: The Roman Church as a Case Study* (Peeters, 2004). Stephen has lectured in biblical studies and in theology since 1997; prior to that he was an ordained Baptist pastor. Stephen was born in Scotland but grew up in Melbourne. He has a BSc (Computer Science) from Melbourne University, as well as a MDiv (Asbury, USA), MA (Theol) (ACTh), and a PhD (Fuller, USA). He is married to Colleen and they have two grown children. Currently he is reading Tartan Noir novels.

News Items

Items of interest to the interaction between science and Christianity and of significance to the ISCAST family. Your submissions of these are welcome.



Chance or necessity in the origin of life?

Was the living world desitined to look the way we find it? Or to ask a question that's closer to

home, were our bodies meant to be the way they are?

A podcast interview between Ruth Bancewicz and Stephen Freeland.

[Read more...](#)



There is no conflict between our faiths and the science of climate change

On Thursday, Pope Francis issued a powerful and timely encyclical on the environment, urging humanity to come to its senses and cease its reckless onslaught against God's creation.

[Read More...](#)



Curiosity: the search for life on other planets

Being chosen to pick the name for a major piece of space exploration must be one of the coolest

things that could ever happen to a kid.

[Read More...](#)



Tesla batteries: just the beginning of how technology will transform the electric grid.

Tesla Motors already makes batteries for its electric cars. On Thursday it's expected to introduce battery systems for homes, businesses and electric utilities.

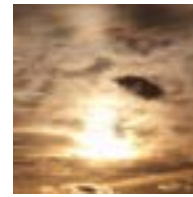
[Read More...](#)



The Pope's encyclical on climate change – will evangelicals care?

Pope Francis released an unprecedented encyclical last Thursday. For those in the know, it's a big deal.

[Read More...](#)



Does science increasingly make the case for God?

On Christmas Day 2014, the Wall Street Journal published a provocative piece by Christian thinker Eric Metaxas. Aerospace engineer and Fellow of ISCAST James Garth weighs into the debate.

[Read More...](#)



Sexism in science: one step back, two steps forward.

Two postdoctoral researchers took to the internet last month after having their research paper rejected for publication on laughably sexist grounds.

[Read More...](#)



A crisis at the edge of physics

Do physicists need empirical evidence to confirm their theories?

[Read More...](#)



NASA spies Earth-sized exoplanet orbiting Sun-like star

Astronomers have spotted the closest thing yet to the first true 'Earth twin' - a small planet orbiting the bright star Kepler 452, at a distance where liquid water could exist.

[Read More...](#)



Pope on the Pope: An evangelical climate scientist reflects on Laudato Si'

As a climate scientist cum budding eco-theologian, it is hard to contain my excitement that the head of the largest Christian denomination has made such a pronouncement on climate change, ecological issues and their underlying socio-political drivers.

[Read More...](#)



The power of awe

Philosopher Immanuel Kant famously remarked that two things filled him with awe and wonder: "the starry heaven above me and the moral law within me."

[Read More...](#)



Bionic ear inventor Graeme Clark 'excited' about new project

The inventor of the bionic ear has revealed new Australian university trials that could help with treatment of paraplegics, epileptics and also dramatically improve the bionic eye implant unveiled in the UK last week.

[Read More...](#)

No access to the internet and want more information? Contact the ISCAST office (see back page) and we will forward the full item to you. Postage and handling fees apply.

Books and Resources

Books and articles on the subjects of science and Christianity.



Who is to blame? Disasters, nature and acts of God

A review of Bob White's
talk Richard Gijsbers,
March 2015

Author

Richard Gijsbers is the secretary of ISCAST.

Excerpt

Who is to Blame? Disasters, Nature and Acts of God was the topic of this year's [ISCAST \(Vic\) annual lecture](#) given by Prof. Bob White (FRS). We are all acutely conscious of natural disasters – tsunamis, bushfires, and the earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand and so on.

[Read More...](#)



Prof. Bob White responds to the Nepal Earthquake and discusses 'natural disasters'

Author: Prof. Bob White is the Director of the Faraday Institute

Excerpt

Prof. Bob White (Director of the Faraday Institute) talks to Eleanor Puttock about the recent earthquakes in Nepal as well as the implications of 'natural disasters' over time.

[Listen Here...](#)



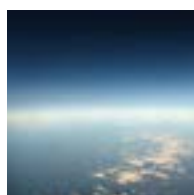
Science- and-religion strategies among interpreters of Genesis 1 through the centuries

Dr Andrew Brown gave an ISCAST-CASE lecture in June 2015

Abstract excerpt

A survey of high-profile Christian interpretations of the creation week in Genesis 1:1-2:3 reveals a range of implicit stances on the relationship of the biblical portrayal of creation to data derived from the natural world and incorporated into explanatory schemes of the origin and ordinary functioning of the cosmos.

[Read More...](#)



ISCAST Board Devotional: 26 May 2015

Author

Peter Eyland is an
ISCAST Fellow

Excerpt

At the ISCAST Board meeting on Tuesday 26 May 2015, Peter Eyland opened the meeting with a Devotion. He touched on some of the disasters recorded in Scripture and their seemingly random nature.

[Read More...](#)



The territories of science and religion

Author

Prof. Peter Harrison

Excerpt

The Territories of Science and Religion, a new book by Prof Peter Harrison The conflict between science and religion seems indelible, even eternal. Surely two such divergent views of the universe have always been in fierce opposition? Actually, that's not the case, says Peter Harrison.

[Read More...](#)



Responsible dominion – a Christian approach to sustainable development

Author

Ian Hore-Lacy is an ISCAST Fellow
A new edition of ISCAST Fellow, Ian Hore-lacy's 2016 Responsible Dominion – a Christian approach to Sustainable Development has just been published in Kindle format.

[Read More...](#)



Science and faith in dialogue – Guest podcast

Speaker

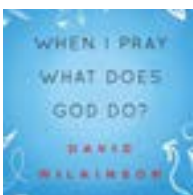
Alister McGrath

About

As well as being the

Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at Oxford University, the theologian and biophysicist Alister McGrath is now also the Gresham Professor of Divinity, a role that will involve him giving a series of lunch time lectures on science and religion in 2015-16.

[Listen Here...](#)



When I pray, what does God do?

Author

David Wilkinson of
Durham University

About

The question of how, and whether, God answers prayer has been intellectually shaped by the rise of science, the problem of evil and the nature of the biblical records. Scientist and theologian David Wilkinson shares his own struggles with the question of how God answers prayer.

[Read More...](#)



15 questions about science and religion, answered

An interesting link for
ISCAST readers.

Questions include: How can evolutionary psychology inform the science and religion dialogue? Can science ever replace religion? Why should scientists care about religion?

[Read More...](#)

Do you have an article to submit to Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology?
Contact the editorial team via www.iscast.org/journalpage

Event News



“Faith in Science?” – Professor Tom McLeish Visit

Prof. Tom McLeish FRS will be visiting Australia in September 2015. He will be speaking at

events across the country.

Prof. Tom McLeish takes a fresh approach to the ‘science and religion’ debate, taking a scientist’s reading of the enigmatic and beautiful Book of Job as a centrepiece, and asking what science might ultimately be for. Rather than conflicting with faith, science can be seen as a deeply religious activity, and the current form of a deep and continuous thread in human culture.

[Read More...](#)

Victoria events

Friday 11 September

[Soft Matter Physics Discussion](#) – 11.30 am

[Ordered Universe Project Talk](#) – 2.30 pm

[Allan Day Memorial Lecture](#) – 5.30 pm

Saturday 12 September

[Faith in Science? A contradiction in terms?](#)

Adelaide events

Monday 14 September

[Graeme Clark Research Institute Public Lecture](#) – 7.30 pm

Brisbane events

Tuesday 15 September

[Faith and Wisdom in Science seminar](#) – 12.00 pm

[Working with Medieval Scholars seminar](#) – 4.00 pm

Wednesday 16 September

[Molecular Engineering seminar](#) – 2.00 pm

Sydney events

Thursday 17 September

[ISCAST-CASE \(Sydney\) Lecture 3](#) – 7.30 pm

Other News

Look us up on:



Facebook: www.facebook.com/ISCAST



Twitter: [@ISCAST_Oz](https://twitter.com/ISCAST_Oz)



Tune in to our [Podcast](#)

Keep an eye on the
website for events

www.iscast.org

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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 family and to the engagement of science and Christianity in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

It also includes abstracts of articles submitted to “Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology”, 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 or all 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 Victoria office.

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