Dear ISCAST members and friends,

It is December and Christmas is fast approaching. Please accept our best wishes for the season as we celebrate the miracle of the incarnation, Emmanuel, God with us! May 2017 be a blessed and prosperous time for you all.

I am writing to you with some news from last week’s ISCAST board meeting where we made three historic decisions:

1. We accepted the offer of an anonymous donor to develop what might be called the apologetics dimension of ISCAST’s vision; the donor will fund an extra day per week (plus associated expenses) for our Executive Officer, Rev. Dr Chris Mulherin. This initiative is in line with our mission to facilitate the public conversation about Christianity in an age of science and technology. The board sees Chris as developing a network of Christians around Australasia who will work together to engage in the media marketplace about the relevance of Christian faith to the issues of our day.

2. The board also agreed (with some sense of adventure) to fund two days of Chris’ time in addition to the day mentioned above. This is a step of faith as we seek to fund Chris for a total of three days a week, two of which will have to come from ISCAST supporters. We believe that as Chris raises the profile of ISCAST we will obtain an increase of funds from existing supporters as well as from recruiting new members and fellows. Please consider a further donation to ISCAST to meet this target.

3. We agreed to postpone the biennial Conference on Science and Christianity (COSAC) from 2017 to March 2018 when we expect to host Jennifer Wiseman (senior NASA scientist) coming to Brisbane for both the World Science Festival and as the main speaker for COSAC 2018. We plan to fill the gap in 2017 with a couple of touring visits around the country, similar to Graeme Finlay’s trip this year and Tom McLeish’s tour in 2015.

Please pray about the implementation of these three initiatives as they will have far-reaching implications for the direction of ISCAST.

In addition to these significant decisions, the board also approved new rates for subscriptions to the journal *Science and Christian Belief*. Fees are now as follows:

Electronic access: $40 per annum
Electronic access plus hard copy: $50 per annum

Also at the board meeting, our new board member, Dr Stephen Spence from Tabor College and the Graeme Clark Research Institute in SA, facilitated a discussion on how living in an age of science and technology affects our understanding of Christianity. It was an inspiring brainstorm, some of which is detailed below.

Meanwhile, work is progressing on the new ISCAST website. Emily from Stockdale ACS has been working to get this up and running before the new year. We aim to keep the resources found on the old site while making the new one more attractive to a wider and younger audience.

May God’s peace be with you and those around you this Christmas,

Alan Gijsbers
ISCAST President

How living in an age of science and technology affects our understanding of Christianity: A 15-minute ISCAST board brainstorm (December 2017)

a. Science and technology have given us a way of thinking that is different from that of other ages and we have become dependent on this. We are less likely to understand the thinking of the past and why people acted as they did then (see h. below).

b. There is an expectation that science will answer all questions (eventually) and a tendency to think that those that it can’t/won’t answer aren’t real questions anyway.

c. As Christians, we are acutely aware that science doesn’t answer the questions we consider most important.

d. This approach is utilitarian and creates a technical functionality to both our questions and the answers. This can lead us to losing our perspective of people as persons.

e. Science and technology have not made things easier. Many of the answers science has given have led us into further complexity and into realms that science cannot cope with. The interface between the different sciences is just as complex as the interface between science and religion (see g. below).

Continued on back cover
Big data, human rights and the ethics of scientific research

As we all know, digitization is radically transforming our lives. The internet, mobile devices, massive data collections and the analytics applied to them are propelling a digital revolution. The World Economic Forum spoke recently of a Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Read more...

Between science and theology: how science learns about unobservable entities

In 1800, someone took the temperature of a rainbow. This story isn’t as strange as it sounds because that ‘someone’ was not the sort of person to look for a pot of gold, but a scientist called William Herschel.

Read more...

Life & faith: going nuclear

Nuclear fusion energy has been heralded as the answer to the global energy crisis, a virtually endless – and cleaner – source of power that will last several generations.

Read more...

Freewill and the brain: choices, constraints, and community

Have you ever had that slightly disturbing experience of arriving at work and realising that you have very little recollection of how you got there?

Read more...

Science alone does not have all the answers

The assumption that science and religion are in conflict is a view that never diminishes.

Many assume that modern science has rendered religious explanations irrelevant, and some go further to say that science alone can answer all of the questions of life.

Read more...

What is a person?

How would you know that a person was a person, if they didn’t come in human form? This is one of the questions that David Lahti, Professor of Biology at Queens College in New York, asked in his lecture on Biology and Personhood at the Faraday Institute this summer.

Read more...

A single migration from Africa populated the world, studies find

Modern humans evolved in Africa roughly 200,000 years ago. But how did our species go on to populate the rest of the globe?

Read more...

Scientists use ‘virtual unwrapping’ to read ancient biblical scroll reduced to ‘lump of charcoal’

Scientists use ‘virtual unwrapping’ to read ancient biblical scroll reduced to ‘lump of charcoal’.

Read more...

Turned to charcoal in a blaze nearly 1,500 years ago, using groundbreaking digital reconstruction the scroll has finally been read and identified as biblical.

Read more...

Cut-throat academia leads to ‘natural selection of bad science’, claims study

Scientists incentivised to publish surprising results frequently in major journals, despite risk that such findings are likely to be wrong, suggests research.

Read more...

The Bible and human origins

Science may have changed the way we read the opening chapters of Genesis, but we still need to respect the historical integrity of the text. This was Mark Harris’s reflection as he opened his lecture on The Bible and Human Origins at the Faraday summer course last month.

Read more...

Beauty in the brain: sleep, disease, and family life

A podcast by Anna Goodman, neuroscientist, and Ruth Bancewicz asking what we can find out from studying neurological disease. How has Anna found a way to fit family life and career together, and how do both of those aspects of life complement her faith and role in the church?

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 relevant to the interface between science and Christianity.

The Nature of Things

A new book entitled
The Nature of Things: Rediscovering the Spiritual in God's Creation, edited by
Graham Buxton and Norman Habel, with foreword by David Rhoads.

Abstract
This book arises out of 2015's international conference in South Australia on ecology and creation care, ‘Rediscovering the Spiritual in God’s Creation’.
Read more...

Christian voices in the environment debate

Author
Richard W. Gijsbers

Abstract
This paper arose out of ISCAST’s “State of Play” workshop held at Ridley College in Melbourne in August 2015. The workshop explored the possible hot topics in the science-Christianity debate that would be of concern in ten years' time in a number of identified domains. This paper focuses on the “Stewardship of Creation” domain.
Read more...

Christian positions on environmental theology

As a forester, I have had a passing interest in what has become eco-theology since the mid-1970s. In that time a number of “theologies of the environment” have been produced, each claiming to be THE Christian position on the subject.
Read more...

Interview with Alister McGrath

Rev. Dr Chris Mulherin interviews Rev. Dr Alister McGrath for The Melbourne Anglican.
The full interview and audio will be published in early 2017.
Read more...

Genetics, evolution, cancer, suffering and God

ICAST (Sydney) Lecture 2, at Robert Menzies College, Macquarie Univ. – Thurs. 7th July 2016

Abstract
In this second lecture Graeme will consider how the same genetics underlies both phylogeny (evolution of species) and oncogeny (evolution of tumours in cancer). If God is the creator of one, he must be creator of the other. He believes the only resolution takes us to the heart of the Gospel: the cross and the resurrection.
Read more...

The laws of nature: the ancient origins of a modern scientific puzzle, and its relationship to Christianity

ICAST-CASE* (Sydney) Lecture, at New College, UNSW - Tues. 27th September 2016

Abstract
Where did the idea develop that nature has “Laws”? Classical mythology assumed that things happened in the world due to the will of particular gods.
Read more...

A fortunate universe: life in a finely tuned cosmos—book launch

Hosted by Dr Karl Kruszelnicki, join authors Geraint Lewis and Luke Barnes on a scientific journey to the amazing conclusion that our universe is fine-tuned for intelligent life.

Abstract
Over the last forty years, scientists have uncovered evidence that if the Universe had been forged with even slightly different properties, life as we know it - and life as we can imagine it - would be impossible. Join us on a journey through how we understand the Universe, from its most basic particles and forces, to planets, stars and galaxies, and back through cosmic history to the birth of the cosmos.
Read more...

Free will: a modest proposal

Author
Alfred Mele

Extract
In my latest book, Free: Why Science Hasn’t Disproved Free Will, I sketch three different ways of understanding free will. Here, I will briefly describe the two I find most attractive. Some people argue that as long as you are able to make rational, informed decisions without being subjected to undue force (e.g., a loaded gun), you have free will.
Read more...
Continued from front cover

f. Science and technology have opened the door to secularism in which God is seen as an optional extra. For many, science has replaced God and science has become the essential component to our thinking.

g. Science and technology have led us to specialisation in which the amateur clergy-scientists of the 1800s have given way to the exclusive study of distinct sciences by individuals, individual groups and industries. This has also split our lives into areas of specialisation (of which Christianity can be understood as one area).

h. There is a loss of respect for history and a tendency to think that what is happening now is the only way of things. Thus today, the wisdom of the past is ignored.

i. We are a “storied” people, each with our own individual and collective narratives but we forget this and so describe ourselves quantitatively (see d. above).

j. Having said all of that, we are currently moving away from this ‘scientistic’ mindset and re-enchanting our narratives (particularly in our movies, novels, games, but also in response to complex issues such as understanding our relationship to the environment).

k. Science and technology suggest that there is an objectivity to our relationship to nature that may not exist. There is a hermeneutical dimension to this that we need to understand. This interpretation is coloured by our (often hidden) values and presuppositions.

Event News

The ISCAST office will close for Christmas and New Year

Please note that the office will be closed from 12 noon on Thursday 22 December and will reopen on Monday 16 January 2017.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Other News

Look us up on:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ISCAST
Twitter: @ISCAST_Oz
Tune in to our Podcast

Digital Subscription and Renewals

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☐ I would like to know more about being associated with ISCAST

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

Contact the ISCAST office for payment details.