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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.

Seed time and harvest... a reflection

By Ross Macmillan

From the ISCAST Online Journal 2008, Vol. 4

I was working on the tractor sowing grass seed. It was early winter but the days were still warm, the soil was moist and all the conditions were right for a good germination of the seeds.

The thing about that job was that, after a short period, it need occupy only about 20% of your mind; the job can be on 'auto-pilot' and your mind can be employed on other matters.

And so I got to thinking about soil and seed and seasons and the verse in Genesis where God speaks to Noah as he and the animals leave the ark:

While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease. (8:22)

Before the promise was given, the problem for Noah was that the dreadful flood had happened and presumably it could happen again. What guarantee was there that it would not?

God gave a visual promise (the rainbow) but also that verbal promise to Noah and to us that speaks of the certainty of His care for his people spoken in terms of the continuity of creation. For those with eyes to see, this promise is reiterated in the daily round of day and night, in the yearly return of the seasons and in seed time and harvest.

Now all of this and the little green shoots that have appeared in the weeks since I planted the seed have a scientific explanation as to their origins and growth. But what struck me and caused a sense of wonder was of their being part of a grand picture of the continuing existence – the consistence, the coherence of creation being 'held together' in Christ as Paul says in Colossians 1:17.

We spend a lot of time talking about how 'creation' originated, how it works and how we can make it work for us. But we spend little time thinking about this idea of coherence, of God's continuing, sustaining, providential care. We expect, on the basis of little scientific evidence, that creation will always be the same and hence we are startled when it seems to change and we think that, as a result, our life style might be threatened.

Generally, as a society or as a scientific community, we don't believe in or, at least, recognise God's providential care. It may not be obvious to the casual or to the scientific observer but it is there nonetheless – for those with eyes to see. There in the seed time and harvest, in the green growing things of my experience – and in your daily experience too?

Ross Macmillan is Senior Fellow in Agricultural Engineering in the International Development Technologies Centre at the University of Melbourne. He also encourages green growing things on the family farm on the outskirts of Melbourne.

In this Issue:

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www.iscast.org

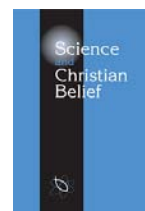
News Items

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



Test of Faith

On 3rd July a new series of materials from the Faraday Institute will be published by Paternoster Press. These resources are designed primarily for churches and other groups of people who are interested in discussing science and faith in an informal setting. The centrepiece of the project, a three-part documentary called 'Test of Faith', recently won Silver in the category Best Documentary in the [2009 IVCA \(International Visual Communication Association\) Awards](#). [More](#)



Highlights from Volume 21 of Science and Christian Belief (April 09)

* Denis Alexander - Editorial: Rescuing Darwin

* Edward J.Larson - The Reception of Darwinism in the Nineteenth Century: A Three Part Story

* Malcolm Jeeves - The Boyle Lecture 2008: Psychologising and Neurologising about Religion: Facts, Fallacies and the Future [More](#)

News items continued next page...

News Items



Simon Conway Morris on Evolution and Human Nature

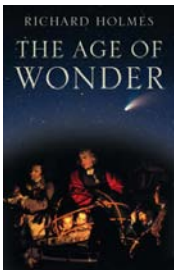
Our COSAC 2009 keynote speaker Simon Conway Morris features in the most recent ['Big Questions'](#)

discussion forum hosted by the John Templeton foundation. The topic, "Does evolution explain human nature" also features distinguished contributors including Jeffrey Schloss, Francis Collins, David Sloan Wilson, Francisco Ayala, and more, and can be accessed at <http://www.templeton.org/evolution/> [More](#)



Bernard d'Espagnat wins the 2009 Templeton Prize

On 5th May 2009, Bernard d'Espagnat, a French physicist and philosopher of science whose explorations of the philosophical implications of quantum physics have opened new vistas on the definition of reality and the potential limits of knowable science, was formally presented with the 2009 Templeton Prize. [More](#)



Marvels and misconceptions in the early childhood of modern science

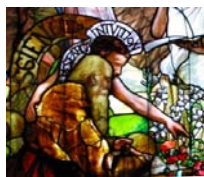
The [Centre for Public Christianity](#) has published a fascinating review of Richard Holmes' book "The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science." by Dr Steven Micklethwaite, a Research Fellow at the University of Tasmania. [More](#)



Faraday London Lectures

As part of the Pentecost Festival, the Faraday Institute is holding three lectures in London on 26th, 27th and 28th May 2009.

Prof. Colin Humpreys will speak on 'Can a scientist believe in miracles today?', Revd Dr David Wilkinson will speak on 'God and the Big Bang' and Dr Denis Alexander will speak on 'Creation or Evolution - do we have to choose'. [More](#)



Dr Francis Collins Launches The BioLogos Foundation

Prominent physician-geneticist Dr. Francis Collins has established a new organisation called the BioLogos Foundation, which endeavours to promote the search for truth in both the natural and spiritual realms, seeking harmony between these different perspectives. [More](#)



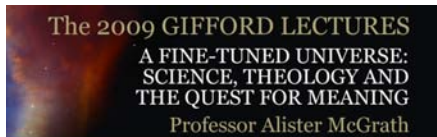
Blog: Soli Deo Gloria

Ross McKenzie has started a blog: Soli Deo Gloria

Thoughts on Theology, Science, and Culture

<http://revelation4-11.blogspot.com>

Please draw it to the attention of those you know with an interest in such issues. Feedback welcome. [More](#)



The 2009 Gifford Lectures - A Fine-Tuned Universe: Science, Theology and the Quest for Meaning

In the recent annual Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen, Professor Alister McGrath explored the human quest for meaning in the universe, especially in the light of its apparent "fine-tuning" to permit the origination of life. [More](#)



ISCAST Victoria Congratulates Prof Alan Gijbers

ISCAST Victoria is proud to congratulate Dr Alan Gijbers on his recent appointment to Honorary Clinical Associate Professor at the University of Melbourne, held in the Department of Medicine at the Royal Melbourne and Western Hospitals. The title acknowledges his important contribution to scholarship, recognising his professional achievements as one of the leading clinicians in the Faculty of Medicine. [More](#)

NZ Conference - The Theological Meaning of Evolution

Date & Time: 7pm Thursday 25 June - 5pm Saturday 27 June 2009. Venue: Laidlaw College, Auckland Campus, Waitakere NZ. Keynote Presenter: Christopher Southgate, Research Fellow University of Exeter, theologian, poet and editor, and author of The Groaning of Creation.

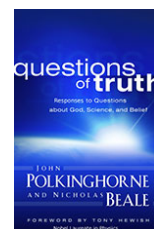
A conference to celebrate and interact with Darwinism, on the 200th anniversary of Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of On the Origin of Species. [More](#)



Evolution and Wonder: Understanding Charles Darwin

American Public Media's "Speaking Of Faith" programme has produced a fascinating podcast entitled "Evolution and Wonder: Understanding Charles Darwin".

The programme takes a fresh and thought-provoking look at Darwin's life and ideas, and suggests that he did not argue against God but against a simple understanding of the world — its beauty, its brutality, and its unfolding creation. [More](#)



Questions of Truth

Acclaimed physicist John Polkinghorne has just released his latest book, "Questions of Truth", together with a special promotional mini-site; www.questionsoftruth.org. The website contains extensive background material for the book, including contents, reviews and a collection of videos from the Launch Event and panel discussion held at the Royal Society. [More](#)



Global Warming: Is it real and what should we do?

Sir John Houghton presented the James Gregory Public lecture on 19th February 2009, entitled "Global Warming, Climate Change and Sustainability: Challenge to Scientists, Policy Makers and Christians".

A movie, powerpoint presentation of the lecture, and 16-page pamphlet which covers the lecture material in more detail can be downloaded from the [James Gregory website](#). [More](#)

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

Christian Perspectives on Science and Christianity: Journal Abstracts

The ISCAST Online Journal – *Christian Perspectives on Science and Technology* is a forum for those exploring the interaction between science, technology and the Christian faith. Submissions are invited and they may be academic articles, less formal discussions aimed at non-academic readers, opinion pieces, or book reviews. Articles and discussions will be refereed. The intended readers are Christians interested in science and technology, and scientists and technologists interested in the Christian faith. Specialist knowledge is not assumed. Below are selected abstracts from the journal. (see www.iscast.org/journalpage)



Review of Colin A Russell's *Saving Planet Earth – a Christian response*

Authentic Media 2008.
133 pp. \$17.50 at Ridley
bookshop
ISBN: 9781850787716

Reviewed by
Ian Hore-Lacy

Review extract

This is a recent addition to the many works by Christian academics and clerics urging care for the environment on the basis of biblical values and teaching. Colin Russell is a particularly distinguished scientist to become an author in the field, though he writes essentially as a layman, with little research evident outside of climate change.

Compared with other books in the genre this is helpful and positive, setting out yet again the problems and challenges viewed from a Christian perspective and anchored into biblical teaching.

However, the book is far from a comprehensive view of planet Earth as God's creation, it focuses on the issues which comprise that well-worn abstraction: the Environment. He makes the point that 'our environment is under threat' and the writing continues in that vein. There is little to disagree with in what he says about pollution, wastes, climate change and so on, and still less in his exposition of the Earth being the Lord's and us being accountable for care of it. The garden metaphor is paramount, with no mention of where food, fibre, energy and infrastructure come from or how they should be produced from planet Earth. A few simplistic comments, for example on oil tankers and GM foods, don't help.



God's Statistical Universe

Robert J Stening,
September 2006

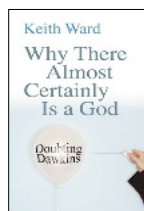
Author

Dr Stening is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Physics, University of New South Wales.

Abstract

The universe is not completely predictable, but contains many uncertain events, which follow statistical laws. The whole evolutionary

process is driven by statistics. Haught's 'process theology', is discussed, in which the future is uncertain, even to God, but offers promise. Two common attitudes, of blind trust in God, and the earth as a 'soul school', are examined and found to be common in popular Christian literature. The existence of uncertainty is seen as a prerequisite for the exercise of faith as God requires. Some ideas are advanced of how evangelicals and process theologians might learn from each other.



Review of Keith Ward's *Why there almost certainly is a God*

Lion Hudson, 2008, 160 pp.
ISBN: 9780745953304
(UK), 9780825478437 (US)

Reviewed by
James Garth

Review extract

Keith Ward's latest foray into popular philosophy and theology *Why there almost certainly is a God* is enlightening, entertaining, elegant, and quite simply a delight to read from cover to cover.

In just 160 pages, Ward has managed to give us perhaps the most sophisticated refutation of the 'New Atheism' produced to date. And yet, to simply categorize it as a reflexive reaction to pop culture atheism would be a grave injustice, since Ward has simultaneously crafted a crisp, positive, standalone apologetic that even those inclined towards atheism have found 'stimulating and elegant' (Phelan 2008).



Then a miracle occurs: the blessing and limitations of science. A

bishop looks at science from the viewpoint of the Christian faith

Robert Forsyth, November 2006.

Author

The Right Rev. Robert Forsyth BA, BD, ThL, MTh, DipA. Bishop of South Sydney

Abstract

The remarkable human activity of science has been wonderfully successful in advancing

human understanding of creation in which we live and human wellbeing. From a Christian point of view, science makes sense in the context of creation which is good, real and dependent. It is a blessing from the Creator. There is no essential warfare between science and Christianity.

However, the use of science as a form of Christian apologetics has dangers for Christian faith. Science has the limits in what it can describe from the actual miracles of the gospel to even the existence of science itself. The Intelligent Design issue is really an argument about what are the limits of science. Science and the Bible are engaged in a two-way conversation because God does not teach what is false, and because science helps us interpret Scripture in a number of ways: discerning literary types, distinguishing between the human and divine author's intentions and clarifying assumptions of the models which we import to Scripture.



Will the Real 'Soul' Show Itself?

Barry C Newman, July 2006.

Author

Barry Newman was formerly a senior lecturer in science education, Head of the School of Teacher Education and Director of the Board of Studies in Professional Studies at the University of New South Wales. He is a lay preacher attached to the Anglican Church, Christ Church St Ives, Sydney, Australia.

Abstract

The Old Testament Hebrew word *nephesh* and the New Testament Greek word *psuche* are often translated 'soul'. An examination of their usage in the Testaments reveals that neither is very commonly associated with life after death. There is a high association of each with death but death in terms of the cessation of life. Usage of each word often seems to stress the significance of the person. There is no evidence in either of the Testaments that unequivocally suggests that the soul is an entity resident within the body that departs at death. Rather the little evidence there is suggests that after death there is a person identifiable with the person before death. Translations would probably be more helpful if the word 'soul' were avoided altogether.

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

Upcoming Events

ISCAST Excursion

Forests, Bushfires and Christian Theology: A Wicked Problem

Date: Saturday 25 July 2009

We will meet at 9:30am at Fernshaw at the foot of Black Spur, (11km past Healesville along the Maroondah Highway) for billy tea and a yarn. Lunch and dinner will be provided by local providers. We will aim to finish at the Black Spur Inn at about 9:00pm. The cost will be \$50.00. Bring good walking shoes, wet weather gear and an open mind.

RSVP to the ISCAST (Vic) Office or register online at www.iscast.org/register_2009_07_Excursion.

Public Lectures

Annual Lecture in Victoria

Darwin's Compass: How evolution discovers the song of creation

Presented by: Professor Simon Conway Morris FRS of Cambridge University

Date: Thursday 17 September 2009 at 8.00pm

Venue: Glen Waverley Anglican Church, Glen Waverley, Vic

Order tickets from the ISCAST (Vic) Office or online at www.iscast.org/Annual_Lecture_Vic_Tickets.

We are also planning for Professor Simon Conway Morris to present lectures in Hobart (16 Sep) and Sydney (21 Sep). More details on website soon.

ISCAST
Christians in Science and Technology

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 will be 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 \$10 pa and subscriptions can be arranged by contacting the ISCAST Victoria office.

COSAC 2009

Conference on Science and Christianity

18 - 20 September 2009

Christianity and the Origin of Species

Darwin 150 Years On

Venue: Geelong Conference Centre, Geelong, VIC

Keynote Speaker:

Prof. Simon Conway Morris

Professor of Evolutionary Palaeobiology, Cambridge University.

Fellow of the Royal Society

Call for Presenters:

Submissions to present papers at this year's conference are welcome. Responses can be submitted online.

For more information visit:

www.iscast.org/cosac_2009



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