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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.

ISCAST Digest and Website Launch

We are pleased to announce the commencement of two ISCAST initiatives.

First we are launching our new website. Built with the support of a grant from the Templeton Foundation, it is designed to present a face to and a medium for the interaction between science and Christianity particularly relevant to the Australasian (read "Australia and New Zealand" for now) community. Many thanks go to James Garth, Mark Saward and the other ISCASTians who have been working on this project and who will continue to develop it as our needs change and opportunities emerge.

Please visit the site and let us know what you think. There is ample opportunity for you to add comments to the site. We are also inviting you to contribute, through the 'ISCAST Online Journal – Christian Perspectives in Science and Technology' (OLJ), through the News pages and elsewhere. Our experience is that quality content and fresh material rather than "bells and whistles" attracts visitors to the site. We welcome your contributions at whatever level.

The second initiative is related to the first and you are now reading it – the first edition of the ISCAST Digest. We have received numerous comments lamenting the passing of the ISCAST Bulletin. For many the Bulletin was a reminder of ISCAST's activities. Others miss the contribution the Bulletin articles and book reviews made to the interaction between science and Christianity in Australia. However the Bulletin and website were operating fairly independently with the OLJ competing for some articles. The Digest will be integrated with the website, continuing some functions of the Bulletin and highlighting functions of the website and OLJ.

The Digest will include a summary of the items loaded on the website (including from the OLJ), reference to articles of interest published elsewhere and news items relevant to ISCAST members. We hope it will encourage you to visit the full text versions of items of interest to you in a format that is easy to read (via the HTML link for those with internet access). For those of you without internet access, the Digest will give you a glimpse of the state of the debate in Australasia. We invite you to contact us for hard copy versions of articles of interest on the ISCAST website.

These are exciting times with advances in many areas of science (cosmology, medicine, bio-technology, environmental and social sciences, and so on). These advances continually challenge our view of ourselves and our understanding of God. There is the temptation to drift into reactionary fundamentalism (either scientific or religious), fervently grasping the fundamentals of one while rejecting those of the other. Instead, at ISCAST, we strongly advocate that there be a dynamic engagement of both science and our Faith.

It is our hope that the new website and the Digest will be tools that will help us all cultivate further this engagement to the glory of God and with sensitivity to humankind.

We look forward to hearing from you and to your sharing with us through these new media.

Em. Prof. John Pilbrow, ISCAST President

Dr Patsy Robertson, Convenor, ISCAST Communications Working Group

In this Issue:

- News Items
- Journal Abstracts
- New Strategic Direction
- Upcoming Events

www.iscast.org

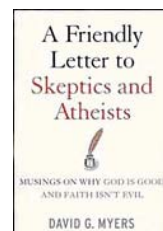
News Items

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

ISCAST and the Bushfires

We have received many expressions of concern regarding the bushfires in Victoria from our friends all over the world. As far as we know no one in the ISCAST family has been directly affected and for this we are profoundly grateful.

There have been a few close shaves with the fires burning close to several of our members' houses. The wind change that can so often double the size of the fire in very quick time also redirected the blazes, saving many houses and lives but catching many others. [More](#)



Book - A Friendly Letter to Skeptics and Atheists

The [John Templeton Foundation](#) has recently listed "A Friendly Letter to Skeptics and Atheists: Musings on Why God is Good and Faith Isn't Evil" as its Featured Book. The book, published by Jossey-Bass/Wiley in 2008, has already attracted highly positive reviews from Alister McGrath, Michael Shermer, Francis Collins, Owen Gingerich and others. [More](#)

News items continued next page...

News Items



Darwin a uniting force for science and religion

A meeting of minds: Geneticist Philip Batterham and Archbishop Philip Freier agreed St Paul's Cathedral was an ideal place to honour Charles Darwin. [More](#)



Closer To Truth

The Kuhn Foundation, in association with PBS, has produced a television series entitled 'Closer to Truth', which is billed as "the most complete, compelling and accessible series on Cosmos, Consciousness and God ever produced for television". [More](#)

A Theologian of Renewal: The Evolutionary Spirituality of John Haught

Noted pioneering Catholic theologian John Haught has recently given a fascinating interview for the December 2008 – February 2009 issue of [EnlightenNext](#) magazine. [More](#)

Review of Richard Swinburne's Lecture

ISCASTians may be interested to read Paul Johnson's [review](#) of Richard Swinburne's recent lecture, entitled 'God as the Simplest Explanation of the Universe', held as part of the [Royal Institute of Philosophy's annual 2008-2009 lecture series](#). [More](#)



Rescuing Darwin - Report

A very significant report has just been released by the UK public theology think-tank [Theos](#) in conjunction with the [Faraday Institute](#). It considers the public awareness and acceptance of evolution in the UK. The preamble describes the report thus:

Rescuing Darwin is the title essay of a wide-ranging project exploring the extent and nature of evolutionary and non-evolutionary beliefs in the UK today and their perceived relationship with theism and atheism.

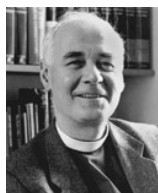
The project is managed and run by Theos, the public theology think tank, in partnership with the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion. [More](#)

After Darwin - Conference

The *Science Religion Society* program at [Trinity College Theological School](#) – which is part of the United Faculty of Theology – with the assistance of the [Melbourne College of Divinity](#), is sponsoring a conference to mark the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's, *The Origin of Species*. The theme of the conference, *After Darwin*, is set out below. The conference will be held at The Centre for Theology and Ministry from 21-23 July, 2009. Dr. Christopher Southgate from the Department of Theology at Exeter University will commence the conference by giving a public lecture at 7.00pm, 21 July. The lecture will be via an interactive satellite link in the Woodhouse Theatre at The University of Melbourne.

Call for Papers

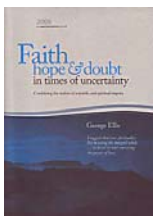
This is a call for papers. Sessions will be for forty minutes including ten minutes for questions. Intending presenters should send an abstract of 300 words to Revd Dr Stephen Ames, sames@trinity.unimelb.edu.au by Friday 6 March, 2009. [More](#)



Does God Interact with his Suffering World?

The Rev Dr John Polkinghorne presented this lecture at St. Andrews University on 9 October

2008 as one of the James Gregory lectures, a series of presentations from eminent international speakers promoting open dialogue and exchange of ideas on many intriguing points of contact between Science and Religion. [More](#)



2008 James Backhouse Lecture

ISCAST members may be pleased to learn that the 2008 James Backhouse lecture by Prof. George Ellis is now available for download as a PDF from the Quakers' Australia website:

http://www.quakers.org.au/associations/7464/files/FaithHopeDoubt_2008.pdf

In this fascinating paper, Ellis argues that a moral reality as well as a physical reality and a mathematical reality underlies the world and the universe, and that human moral life is a search to understand that true nature of

morality, which is centred in love, with the idea of kenosis ('letting go') playing a key role. [More](#)



Michael Poole on Origins

Noted author and researcher

Michael Poole has published an article in the September 2008 issue of the *School Science Review* entitled "Creationism, Intelligent Design and Science Education" in which he attempts to diffuse some current tensions over the teaching about origins, contending that a rejection of creationist or ID arguments does not by extension entail rejection of other traditional concepts of creation and design that have been historically held by Christians, Jews and Muslims alike. [More](#)



Keith Ward Interviewed by CPX

The [Centre for Public Christianity](#) has recently produced a fascinating interview with world-renowned philosopher and theologian Professor Keith Ward. Ward has held positions teaching philosophy and theology at Glasgow, London and Cambridge Universities before taking up the position of Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford. In this four-part interview, Ward discusses atheism, philosophy, science and belief. [More](#)



The Challenges of Clearing and Banning Land Mines

On 15 November, ISCAST Fellow Ross Macmillan and Mark Zimsak,

the National Coordinator of the Australian Network to Ban Landmines gave a challenging and thought-provoking presentation which discussed the technical and political challenges involved with developing technologies and strategies to eliminate anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions.

For those wishing to learn more about the effects of these devices, or how they can assist with this campaign, please visit:

[The International Campaign to Ban Landmines](#)

[Australian Network Inc](#)

[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)



What is Real? Seeking realities in understanding faith: Astronomy, astrology and the Kingdom of Heaven

Merrill Kitchen, August 2008.

Author

Principal, Churches of Christ Theological College, Mulgrave, Victoria, Australia

Abstract

Theological reflection and scientific understanding have been partners in the journey that searches for transcendental meaning in the context of human life experience. In the midst of earthly uncertainties, the observed continuity of cosmic realities has provided religious and philosophical frameworks of understanding from ancient times to the present day. Light and darkness, day and night, sun and moon, the transport of stars, the seasons, the weeks, the months and the years have been seen as emanating from the Divine. Zodiacs on the floors of recently excavated ancient synagogues were clearly important in some expressions of early Formative Judaism. Some Jewish scholars attribute it to Christian contamination. What is real in all of this? Where does careful scientific observation inform healthy faith understanding about concepts such as the 'kingdom of heaven'?



Reality and Addiction: Neuroscientific and psychological perspectives

Alan Gijsbers, June 2008.

Author

Dr Alan Gijsbers is Head, Department of Addiction Medicine Royal Melbourne Hospital.

Abstract

Mind-altering drugs are purported to enhance reality. However, drug-affected patients describe addiction as unreality, and recovery as a return to reality. Neuroscience helps to clarify the difference between perception and reality. Our perceptions are selective and colour particularly the way we view, recall and rework our own narrative. This is partly due to the defence mechanisms we all employ. Their use need not be a sign of ill-health, but a sign of healthy coping. However some of our damaged patients have such a poor sense of themselves that they see their whole narrative very negatively.

Insight relates to understanding our perceptive filters and making them truer to reality. It is now recognised that the emotions shape our reasoning and our perceptions. These defensive processes are well-narrated in John's Gospel, which deals with human responses to the Light of the World. Part of addiction recovery is for patients to develop a truer understanding of the reality of their own history. This involves overcoming their own fear and denial and coming to terms with the painful emotions invariably attached to these memories. More deeply they need to reframe their distorted view of themselves and see themselves in a truer light. Recovery involves knowing the truth about themselves, for in the light of that truth there is freedom.



The Genesis of Everything: An historical account of the Bible's

opening chapter

John P Dickson, March 2008.

Author

Honorary Associate of the Department of Ancient History, Macquarie University, Sydney.

Abstract

The paper seeks to plot a path through the controversy surrounding the Bible's opening chapter by examining Genesis 1 in historical context. The author assumes and endorses no particular view of human origins but argues for a literal interpretation of the text, as opposed to what may be called 'literalistic'. The former reading gives due weight to both the literary genre of Genesis 1 and the cultural milieu of the original writer, whereas the latter gives sufficient attention to neither. Various pre-scientific interpretations of Genesis 1 are described, including those of the first century Jewish intellectual Philo and the great Christian theologian Augustine. In particular, comparisons are drawn with the Babylonian creation epic, Enuma Elish, and it is suggested that Genesis 1 is a piece of 'subversive theology', making significant theological points in the light of contemporaneous creation ideas. The questions raised (and answered) by the Bible's opening chapter concern the nature of the Creator, the value of creation and the place of humanity within the creational scheme. Modern questions concerning the mechanics and chronology of creation may not be appropriately put to the ancient text.



The Bible as Communication

W Grainge Clarke,
December 2007.

Author

W Grainge Clarke BSc(Hons) BEd MA DipRE MACE is a retired senior lecturer in science.

Abstract

During the protracted arguments over evolution and scripture, little attention has been paid to the limitations that human concepts and language have placed on what information could have been revealed to human beings at different stages of their history and what actions were necessary on God's part to enable the basic message of sin and salvation to be communicated. Likewise, those who claim that the Bible gives a complete account of creation need to consider how this technical data could have been transmitted to the writer of Genesis. This paper argues that such technical information was irrelevant to God's purposes and if transmitted at that time, would have obscured the purpose of the Scriptural revelation.



Phenomenal Cosmic Power, Itty-bitty Living Space? Reflections on the

Incarnation in an Einsteinian Universe

Andrew Sloane, October 2005

Author

Andrew Sloane is Lecturer in Old Testament and Christian Thought, Morling Theological College, Sydney, Australia.

Abstract

How can the infinite Creator inhabit a finite body? What does this mean for God's action in the universe? Theoretical viewpoints in both physics and theology impact on the answer to these questions. This paper explores these issues from a theological point of view, with particular reference to the work of Thomas Torrance and his understanding of the interaction of science and theology and the theology of divine agency and the Incarnation. It notes the way that theories of space and time have influenced the theology of the Incarnation and divine agency. On the basis of a particular understanding of space and time and theological method, it concludes with theological reflections on the Incarnation and divine agency.

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

A New Strategic Direction for ISCAST

Em. Prof. John Pilbrow, ISCAST President

ISCAST exists to see “a **healthy interactive relationship between science and Christian faith within the Australasian community**” according to the new Vision statement adopted by the ISCAST Board in February this year.

John Pilbrow, the President of ISCAST reported that “New chapters are emerging, we are continually recruiting new Fellows and many people are asking what we stand for. This strategic direction will let people know where we stand and allow new chapters to develop knowing that they are in step with the rest of us. It will also encourage Fellows and friends of ISCAST to actively contribute of their scholarship and research to ISCAST.”

Complementing our vision, our mission is:

“To develop and advocate a Christian perspective in the science-religion dialogue within the science community, the Christian community and society generally in the Australasian and international communities.”

Our core values are:

• Christian commitment

We affirm the Gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Bible and outlined in the Nicene Creed as central to our faith.

• Scientific commitment

We are committed to rigorous scientific and technological research; particularly the insight this gives to our understanding of our creator and the benefits it brings to our planet and humanity.

• Moral accountability

We are committed to understanding and working within the limits of our knowledge

and seek to minimise the adverse impacts of the application of our science and technology.

• Biblical interpretation

We seek to interpret the Bible within the mainstream evangelical tradition while respecting the stance of others.

• Theological and Academic Safe Space

We will encourage people to be free to explore new areas of discovery without fear of unfair or inappropriate criticism or ostracism.

• Mode of debate

We seek to speak the truth in love and firm humility while being open to new ways of thinking and without rejecting the insights of the past.

“We are adopting this stance because, with science and technology developing on so many fronts, people are tempted to crawl into fundamentalist mindsets (either religious or scientific) or become just plain confused. It is only with an active engagement of both science and religion (in our case Christianity) that we will address this confusion and help society grasp the benefits and address the downsides of this advancement

“As scientists, theologians, professionals and others, ISCAST has a responsibility to be involved and cultivate a much more positive approach than so many of the other popular responses that we see in the media these days.”

Unpacking these strategic statements and converting them into action is the next challenge that the ISCAST Board is addressing. One of the first of these will be the Conference on Science and Christianity to be held in September this year.

Upcoming Events

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



Public Lectures

Currently we are planning for Prof. Simon Conway Morris to present lectures in Hobart (16 Sep), Melbourne (17 Sep), Sydney (21-22 Sep) & Canberra. See website for confirmation and details.

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.

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