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NORTHERN CONFERENCE 2008

This year's conference took place on March 8th and was held jointly with St. John's College Durham, a very successful symbiosis. The topic was Miracles. Nearly a hundred people from a wide spectrum of disciplines came from as far away as Aberdeen and Brighton. There were five presentations, two from scientists, two from theologians and one from the Durham students' CiS group (DUCiS).

John Polkinghorne started the day in his inimitable style. He argued that discoveries during the twentieth century made it clear that the model of the closed universe, the scientific orthodoxy of previous centuries, must now be seen as subject to much more uncertainty. Chaos theory and the theory of relativity have overturned the rigidity of earlier ideas. Despite the complexity of the underlying physics he made it easy to see how God might work ordering events through the minute 'butterfly wing' changes now known to be so important. He encouraged us to see prayer as the way by which our wills and God's became aligned, its impact being amplified as more people participated.

Old Testament specialist Professor Walter Moberly spoke on God's action in the Old Testament. He focussed on the strange story of Baalam's Ass described in Numbers chapter 22, and showed that by giving too much attention to the miraculous element of the talking donkey, we could miss the real message of the episode. He pointed out that our concept of the 'supernatural' has altered over recent centuries. What we now consider supernatural events should be seen as occasions for awe pointing us to God at work in his world.

The Durham students' CiS group then tackled the challenging topic 'How God Interacts with the Mind'. Clare Parkinson and Jona Foster gave a lively, clear and considered presentation, laced with touches of humour. Current research findings make the dualistic model of the mind or soul separate from the brain unsatisfactory. Brain and mind are intimately connected so that God can interact with His children through their senses. This leads to questions about free will. Scripture teaches that we are made free to make choices but Clare also tackled the difficult passages in Exodus chapters 8 and 9 which speak of Pharaoh hardening his heart, of Pharaoh having a hardened heart and of God hardening his heart, all within a cluster of 25 verses. Here lie clues to limits to our choices.

After lunch, Dr. Mark Bonnington, Handley Moule Fellow in New Testament at St John's College, Durham and

Senior Leader, King's Church Durham, spoke on God's action in the New Testament. Today's scholars have to take into account the modernist approach whereby biblical criticism and scientific rationalism are combined to produce 'gospels' in which the miracles are effectively removed. However, expositors such as Don Carson maintain that if the New Testament documents are properly considered, miracles have to be included; they are integral to all the gospels. Dr Bonnington stressed their importance as 'signs' in John's gospel and in Jesus' reply to the question from John the Baptist as to whether he was indeed 'the one that was to come' (Matthew 11:2-6). Finally he reminded us that the resurrection is the greatest miracle and without this there can be no true Christian faith.

CiS LONDON CONFERENCE 2008

CELEBRATING DARWIN? Creation, Evolution and Theological Challenges

Sat 1st November 2008:
St Paul's Robert Adam Street

Speakers include:

- Rev Dr David Wilkinson, 'The Christian Doctrine of Creation'
- Prof Darrell Falk, 'Human Evolution - Biological Facts and Theological Challenges'

Longstanding CiS member Mike Poole gave the final paper. He teased out the meaning of the word 'Miracle' and showed this to be less straightforward than perhaps expected. He examined the claims of the rationalist Hume that no reasonable person could accept that miracles happened and demolished these claims comprehensively. In a final scenario, he described the disdain and confusion of Noddy and friend when visited by their creator, Enid Blyton.

This picture summarised the over arching theme of all the speakers: that this is God's world, He is the creator,

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He made the regular arrangements by which it usually works but there is no need for incredulity if He sometimes works in unexpected ways.

After the afternoon tea break there was an opportunity for group discussion of the issues raised during the day. (Thank you Paul Wright and Paul Marston for agreeing to lead groups at three minutes notice). David Wilkinson chaired throughout the day with a calm and gracious hand, concluding proceedings with a brief epilogue. Many thanks go to the staff of St. John's who undertook the administration and provided lunch and refreshments, and to the local CiS members for their contributions which included running the bookstall and fair-trade stall.

Selected audio files can be downloaded from the conferences page on www.cis.org.uk.

CIS BOOKS

Various books, booklets and reprints from *Science & Christian Belief* are still available from the CiS Publications Secretary - the full list is on the CiS website. A recent addition is the new edition of Mike Poole's popular ***User's Guide to Science and Belief*** with full colour illustrations (Lion, still only £7, highly recommended). Also ***When Enough is Enough*** - a Christian framework for environmental sustainability, edited by Sam Berry from a CiS Conference, and still highly topical, is now reduced to £8 from £12.

For up to date information, resources and articles remember to visit our website www.cis.org.uk

HOPE FOR PLANET EARTH

The Hope for Planet Earth tour took in 20 venues (weekdays for 4 weeks) from Penrith in the north to St. Austell in the southwest. It was the vision of the late Rob Frost, and his organization, Share Jesus International (SJI), did the bulk of the tour administration. The other lead partners were JRI, A Rocha and Tearfund.

Three speakers and four helpers travelled the country, and Tearfund provided their local staff. They spoke to schools during the day (usually to years 10 and 11) and mostly church people in the evenings. It is difficult to be precise on the numbers at the presentations, but attendance probably totalled at least 5000 school students and 3000 adults. The largest evenings were Chester with 400 and Guildford with 350, other venues rarely dropped below 100.

The evenings began with a reception for church and civic leaders (including bishops, MPs, mayors, councillors etc.), at which all of the lead partners gave short talks on their organisations. Martin Hodson from John Ray Initiative gave the science talks as it was too difficult to provide CiS members to do this but we had a representative at half a dozen venues so thanks to those who volunteered for that. It is possible that there will be a further future tour. If so, we need to decide how much we should be involved.

Caroline Berry



Science and Religion Forum: 2008 Annual Conference

Registered Charity 1034657

President: Professor John Hedley Brooke, Chairman: Professor Neil Spurway

"Matter and Meaning: Is Matter Sacred or Profane?"

Liverpool Hope University, Thursday 4th to Saturday 6th September 2008

The 2008 Annual Conference will consider the nature of matter, and whether our increasing scientific knowledge has significance for religious belief. The main speakers will be:

Professor Colin Russell
Professor Emeritus, Department of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine, Open University

Professor Ruth Gregory
Professor in the Departments of Mathematical Sciences and Physics, Durham

Professor Peter Harrison
Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion, Oxford

Professor John Harding
Professor of Materials Simulation, Sheffield

Professor Niels Gregersen
Professor of Systematic Theology, Copenhagen

Rev Dr Michael Fuller
Ministry Development Officer, Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Edinburgh

Rt Rev Dr James Jones
Anglican Bishop of Liverpool (conference dinner speaker)

The Conference is open to members and non-members of the Science and Religion Forum. The Forum is an open group of people exploring the relationship between scientific knowledge and religious faith, and welcomes participants of any religion or none.

For further information about the Science and Religion Forum, see

www.srforum.org

or contact the Secretary,
peter.colyer@regents.ox.ac.uk

LOCAL GROUPS

CENTRAL SOUTH

The Central South CiS group held a series of successful meetings earlier this term with Dr John Lennox, Reader in Mathematics at Oxford University and Fellow at Green College, Oxford. A lunchtime session organized jointly with the Southampton University atheists society attracted about forty students. In the evening Dr Lennox spoke to about 400 people on the title of his book "God's Undertaker: Has science buried God"?

Central South CiS covers a region from Chichester to Poole and up to Reading and Woking. We are keen to hear from CiS members who live in this region, especially if they have ideas for future events. For more information and contact details please see our web page: www.cis-centralsouth.org.uk

GLASGOW

For information about upcoming events please contact: Ari Sadanandom, Institute of Biomedical and LifeSciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, UK. tel no. 0141 330 8639 a.sadanandom@bio.gla.ac.uk

IRELAND

On 16th February approximately 80 delegates from across Ireland attended "Ireland and Global Warming", a one-day conference which looked at the evidence and impact of global warming worldwide and at the issues global warming raises for Christians. The three speakers were: Prof. Sir John Houghton, Prof. John Sweeney and Prof. Bob White. The event was featured in the "Presbyterian Herald" as part of a post-conference article on climate change. Audio files and powerpoint presentations can be downloaded from the CiS Ireland website at: www.cis.org.uk/ireland.



Prof. Sir John Houghton addresses the delegates at the Irish branch conference in Belfast.

The next lecture in the "God and Science" series will be held at City Church Belfast at 7.00pm on Monday 20th October. Prof. Stephen Williams of Union Theological College will speak on: "Religion and Scientific Reason: Dawkins, Locke and Pascal". Please check the CiS Ireland website or e-mail Scott Peddie at: s.peddie@pattersonpeddie.com.

OXFORD

Our next meeting will be at St Andrew's Church, Linton Road, Oxford at 7.30 pm on Monday, 14 July, 2008, when Professor Cees Dekker will speak on "Science and Religion – looking beyond Flatland". Professor Dekker (<http://www.ceesdekker.net>) is from the Department of Molecular Biophysics at the University

of Delft. For more information, contact Diana Briggs (diana.briggs@gmail.com).

SOUTHWEST

University of Plymouth Chaplaincy and CIS Southwest ran a series of open lectures earlier in the year under the umbrella title of "Faith Thinking in a world of Science". The three talks given by Professor Sam Berry, Professor John Bryant and Professor Bob White were attended by an average of 85 people. Dr Matthew Frost (Chair of CIS SW) was also invited to give a talk at Emanuel Baptist Church, Plymouth that was attended by c. 130 people. Given the controversial title ("Genesis, myth, miracle or what?") the evening proved to be very enjoyable with a very constructive discussion time. Dr Frost also gave an interview to the main local newspaper (Plymouth Evening Herald) relating to the talk and CIS SW activities which ended up as a full 2-page spread with the title "Explorer in God's World".

After a fairly busy period CIS SW is now planning future events and continuing to meet approximately every 6 weeks at the University of Plymouth. We are also looking for someone to take on an organising role. If anyone in the SW area would be interested taking on this role, or for more information generally, then please contact Matthew Frost matfr@mba.ac.uk.

**The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion**
St Edmund's College, Cambridge
www.faraday-institute.org

The Faraday Institute offers informed and intellectually rigorous courses on the relationship between Science and Religion delivered by experts in the field.

Short Course No. 12: Science and Religion for Church Leaders

4-6 November, 2008, St Edmund's College, Cambridge

This course aims to equip church leaders and those training for ministry to answer some of the questions about science and religion which they might well face during the course of their ministry. Are science and religion in conflict? How does one interpret the early chapters of Genesis? How do we understand the foundational Christian doctrines in the light of science, and how are ethical issues raised by science to be handled?

Speakers include: Prof. John Bryant, Dr Allan Chapman, Prof. Darrel Falk, Prof. Richard Hess, Revd Dr Rodney Holder FIMA FRAS, Prof. Colin Humphreys FIM FInstP, Revd Dr John Polkinghorne KBE FRS.

For more details, including eligibility, application forms and details about discounts and bursaries, visit www.faraday-institute.org

Or contact: The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, St Edmund's College, Cambridge, CB3 0BN. Tel. 01223 741281.

Email faraday.administrator@st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk



INTERVIEW WITH SIMON KOLSTOE

Dr Simon Kolstoe is a research fellow in the Laboratory for Protein Crystallography, UCL Medical School, London. He is co-founder of the Southampton CiS group and sits on the national CiS committee.

Tell us what you've been doing until now.

After school I spent two years traveling in Africa and Europe as a volunteer with the charity "Mercy Ships" before settling in Southampton where I studied Biochemistry as both an undergraduate and postgraduate. After completing one post-doc in Southampton I moved to the medical school at UCL in November 2007. My research uses structural biology (specifically X-ray crystallography and in silico docking simulations) to study protein-drug interactions. Our aim is to rationally design the next generation of small molecule drugs that can be used to treat a variety of diseases including Alzheimers, cardiovascular disease, rheumatoid arthritis and type II diabetes. As I still live in Southampton (whilst my wife completes her doctorate in clinical psychology), I use my long commute to continue studying for a correspondence degree in Philosophy with the Open University.



What do you do for fun?

I really enjoy playing electric guitar in both rock and jazz bands however unfortunately since finishing university both family and work have gradually turned me into a bedroom musician. I play field hockey every week, ski once a year, and enjoy weekends away with my wife especially in European cities. The rest of my time is spent helping with both the national and Southampton CiS committees. I also collect books that I would "one day like to read".

Who have been the most important role models in your life?

Dr. Gary Parker and Simone Dyer, both CEO's at different times of the hospital ship M/V Anastasis, demonstrated models of Christian grace despite the most difficult situations both politically and pastorally. They showed me how a Christian approach can really achieve practical and humanitarian goals where other methods fail. Lynn Swart, a South African worship leader whose band I played in for a couple years, has also been a role model. Her spirituality is something that has puzzled and intrigued me, showing that a relationship with God extends further than just theology. More recently, thanks to courses at the Faraday Institute, I have had the opportunity to speak to

scientists such as Francis Collins, Simon Conway Morris, Jeff Schloss, David Cooke and many others. I have gained a great deal of encouragement from such influential thinking people who are able to integrate their Christian faith with the highest levels of academic excellence.

What challenges have you come across as a Christian and a scientist?

Two areas have challenged me, one as a Christian in a scientific environment and the other as a scientist in a Christian environment. The former has involved trying to understand why I believe what I do, and thus present a thoughtful apologetic to intelligent people who are often hostile to religious beliefs. Engaging with colleagues has helped reveal many weaker aspects of my faith, and also been part of my motivation for studying philosophy in order to get a better understanding of the issues that Christianity tries to address. Within the Christian environment I find it difficult to engage with some people who despite relying upon scientific ways of thinking to shape their own world-view, apply the method selectively or inconsistently. I believe, regarding both the secular and Christian environments, that if Christianity is to play a role shaping our society it has to be able to stand up intellectually as well as in other areas.

How has your faith helped you as a scientist, or vice versa?

I try to make it impossible to separate my faith from any aspect of my activities. The main benefit I have found at work is trying to act more positively and constructively when coming across ethical issues, especially regarding internal lab relationships such as first author squabbles or clashes in personalities. I also find my training as a scientist helpful when examining and thinking through complex issues, and increasingly find myself asked to give a Christian response to various contemporary issues.



What science-faith books have you most enjoyed/found most helpful?

As a short but readable introduction I have been most impressed with *Beyond Belief: Science, Faith and Ethical Challenges* by Denis Alexander and Bob White. Recently I have also enjoyed Ken Miller's *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*, as a robust resource for countering inconsistent ideas within the church. Middleton and Walsh's, *Truth is stranger than it used to be*, must also get a mention as one of the books that has most influenced my Christian faith.

Change of address? Graduated?

If any of your details have changed, please contact the CiS membership secretary, Tom Moffat at:

Flat 8/1, 8 Cranston street, Cranstonhill, Glasgow, G3 8GG. Tel. 01383 880 231. E-mail: subscriptions@cis.org.uk

Submissions for next PréCiS

We would love to receive your contributions - news of local group activities, events, new books and other activities.

Items for the next PréCiS should be submitted to:

Diana Briggs, 5 Northmoor Road, OXFORD OX2 6UW, diana@cis.org.uk