

PréCis

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an occasional communication from
the secretary of *Christians in Science*

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CiS Northern conference
Leeds, Saturday 19th March 2005

“He also made the stars”



This year's northern conference focuses on the issues raised by astronomy and cosmology, and the speakers will include the well-known “northerner”, David Wilkinson, Lecturer in Theology and Science at Durham University. Revd. Dr David Wilkinson is an entertaining and engaging speaker, and author of the popular book, “God, Time and Stephen Hawking”.

Use the enclosed booking form now.

CiS-St Edmund's College Lecture Series

Alister McGrath: Has Science Eliminated God? Richard Dawkins and the Meaning of Life

Richard Dawkins has always used science to put forward an atheistic worldview, and this appears to have been accepted by the general public. Theologian and scientist Prof. Alister McGrath is well placed to criticize Dawkins' philosophy. His latest book, 'Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life' (reviewed below) sold out within two weeks of publication, reflecting the relevance and importance of these issues.

The Templeton-funded lecture organised by the CIS Cambridge group, in conjunction with St. Edmund's College, "Has Science Eliminated God?" attracted an audience of 500, including

many senior academics as well as a good number of students. McGrath addressed various aspects of Dawkins' arguments, and demolished them one by one, using examples from Christian theology and contemporary scientists. He questioned whether Dawkins really understands the concept of faith, because we know that it does not contradict the evidence we see around us.

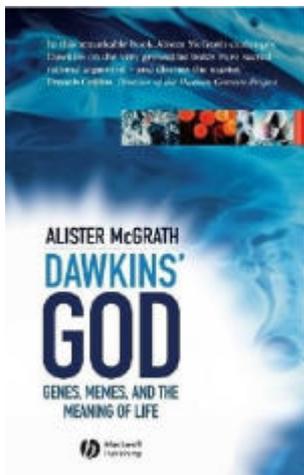
He concluded with a quote from his book: "I'm sure that we all have much to learn by debating with each other, graciously and accurately. The question of whether there is a God, and what that God might be like, has not -- despite the predictions of overconfident Darwinians -- gone away since Darwin, and remains of major intellectual and personal importance. Some minds on both sides of the argument may be closed; the evidence and the debate, however, are not. Scientists and theologians have so much to learn from each other. Listening to each other we might hear the galaxies sing [quote from Dawkins book]. Or even the heavens declare the glory of the Lord (Psalm 19:1)."

The discussion arising from the lecture continued at a dinner held for Prof. McGrath at St. Edmund's College after the lecture, attended by both the Master and the Vice-Master. Atheists, agnostics and Christians engaged in lively discussion on the topic.

An MP3 stream of the lecture, as well as text and pictures, together with the previous lectures in this series, can be accessed at: www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/cis.

A Book to buy or borrow

Alister McGrath, 'Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life', Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, hardback and paperback versions.



Denis Alexander writes:

This is the best book on the market specifically providing a critique of Richard Dawkins' view that science in general, and evolutionary biology in particular, can be used to support atheism. McGrath was himself a committed atheist when he came up to Oxford as a student, before then becoming a Christian. McGrath did a D.Phil in molecular biophysics before later turning to theology, and is therefore in a strong position to analyse Dawkins' views, which he does so carefully and objectively. The philosopher Michael Ruse writes that this is "A wonderful book...This is scholarship as it should be - informed, feisty, and terrific fun. I cannot wait to see Dawkins' review of Alister McGrath's critique". Francis Collins, Director of the Human Genome Project, writes: "*Wielding evolutionary arguments and carefully chosen metaphors like sharp swords, Richard Dawkins has emerged over three decades as this generation's most aggressive promoter of atheism. In his view, science, and science alone, provides the only rock worth standing on. In this remarkable book, Alister McGrath challenges Dawkins on the very ground he holds most sacred -- rational argument -- and McGrath disarms the master.*

It becomes readily apparent that Dawkins has aimed his attack at a naive version of faith that most serious believers would not recognize.

After reading this carefully constructed and eloquently written book, Dawkins' choice of atheism emerges as the most irrational of the available choices about God's existence."

Recommended books

The latest list of books and other publications available from CiS, along with an order form is now accessible on the CiS website: www.cis.org.uk. Paper copies will be included in the next mailing. The list includes Alister McGrath's "Dawkins' God" just described and another new book by him "The Science of God – An introduction to Scientific Theology", The list includes the items described below.

New booklets from New Zealand

Recently some evangelical Christian scientists in New Zealand became concerned about the shortage of cheap literature, suitable for university students and others, presenting the case for the compatibility of orthodox theology and orthodox science. In response they produced four short booklets, which we can now supply. "Evolving Creation" deals with the relationship between science and Christian theology, "God's Books: Genetics and Genesis" shows how molecular genetics gives overwhelming evidence for the fact of evolution, and relates it to theology, "God Created the Heavens and the Earth" relates science and the doctrine of creation, and "A Seamless Web: Science & Faith" includes twelve short essays by scientists relating their faith to their science. We are pricing these booklets quite modestly (£3 or 4) because we consider they will fill a significant gap, and will be useful to many members of CiS and their contacts.

To order contact Publication Sec. John Bausor.

5.Longcrofte Rd. Edgeware HA8 6RR tel. 020 8952 5349.

Book Reviews

If you have read something that you think other members might find useful please send the secretary a paragraph for inclusion in the next PreCiS. Personal recommendations are often a good spur to make time to read.

New Developments...



It's now been over a month since I started as the CiS Development Officer. My first day of work was at the conference at the beginning of October, where I had the chance to meet many of you. Since then I have been busy finding out how I can best use my time to raise the profile of CiS, and reach the next generation of scientists.

High on the priority list are the brochure and website, which are due a re-vamp. We're also working on expanding and changing PreCiS, to include more news and articles, so watch this space! (Any contributions will be welcomed).

I'm based in Edinburgh, and as I've been settling in to my new role I've been helped by a few generous people/organisations. I'll soon be using an office in St Columba's by the Castle church. I felt the need to get out of the house, and St Columba's have kindly given me some space for a very minimal rent. My home church, St Paul's and St George's have donated £1000 from their Charities Fund to cover the cost of new computing equipment. I've also been invited to the monthly UCCF Scottish Team days, which should be a good source of training and support.

I've been traveling around the country getting to know people and finding out what's going on in CiS. As well as the conference and recent committee meeting, I've just returned from a visit to Cambridge, and I've a visit to Leeds planned at the end of November. If you'd like me to visit your area, please get in touch.

Very soon I'll be sending out a **questionnaire** so that you can air your views. I've kept it short, so please take the time to fill it in. I'll be sending it by e-mail, so **please let me know if your address has changed** (ruthb@cis.org.uk). If you don't use e-mail contact the Secretary for a paper version.

*Ruth
Bancewicz*

Future meetings of interest

Those who were stirred by Tim Maughan's contribution to the London conference in October may be interested in day conference **Last Rights: Will Euthanasia happen here?** arranged by the Centre for Bioethics and Public Policy. Tim and four others are speaking. It is to be held at St. Paul's Robert Adam Street, on Saturday January 22nd 2005.

More information on www.bioethics.ac.uk

The Grosseteste dialogues, organised by the British Association for the Advancement of Science look at bioethics but from a broad perspective, with speakers from a wide range of beliefs. There are 5 or 6 speakers on each occasion, all well informed on their topic so these should be interesting and challenging evenings. For full lists of speakers see www.gtd.org.uk

Start of Life Feb 15 2005, Lincoln Cathedral.

Environment Feb 22 2005, Leicester.

Genetic Testing March 1 2005, University of Derby.

Health of South Asian Community

March 8 2005, Nottingham.

End of Life March 15 2005, Lincoln Cathedral.

Tickets are free but must be ordered in advance from Philip Brown, BA East Midlands Regional Officer. Tel: 024-7671-7275. Email: philip.brown@the-ba.net.

CiS member Geoff Bagley writes:

In Nottingham, there are many from a variety of faith and non-faith positions that are willing to meet to discuss science and philosophy topics or to hear people speak on such topics. I have found it a great opportunity to share from a Christian perspective and to hear others from a different point of view.

I would like to meet with Christians in the Nottingham area who would like to form a group that could offer discussion or speakers from a Christian perspective but open to non-Christians. If any one is interested could they contact Geoff Bagley, 58 Meadow Road, Beeston, Nottingham, NG9 1JT. Tel: 0115 9258801

email: gbagley@ntlworld.com

Darwin Reconsidered

Some members may be aware that Philip Johnson and Andrew Snelling are touring churches in the UK with a presentation on Darwin Reconsidered. Philip Johnson wrote the book "Darwin on Trial" that kick-started the Intelligent Design movement in the USA. Johnson, like Alister McGrath, has reacted to Dawkins' use of science to defend atheism, but in an entirely different manner.

A statement from the website www.Darwinreconsidered.org gives a flavour of the views put forward "It is futile for Christians to try to reconcile their faith with Darwinist claims by imagining that natural selection is God's means of creating, because the claim that natural selection has creative power is derived not from impartial testing of evidence, but from a materialist philosophy that excludes God by definition." This is clearly a contentious statement.

Bob Carling attended a meeting in Bournemouth and found this point re-iterated together with the claimed corollaries that science and faith are therefore necessarily in conflict and that an evolutionary biologist must be an atheist. We have evolutionary biologists in CiS who are committed Christians. It would be interesting to hear the views of others who have attended one of the Johnson and Snelling meetings.

DEMOCS

Here is a tool that might be useful for youth groups, church small groups etc. They're designed for non-scientists, as way to help people to discuss issues thoroughly.

"Democs (DEliberative Meeting Of CitizenS) is part card game, part policy-making tool that enables small groups of people to engage with complex public policy issues. It assists them find out about a topic, express their views, seek common ground with the other participants, and state their preferred policy position from a given choice of four. They can also add in their own policy positions."

At the moment kits are available for GM food, and biomedical issues such as over the counter genetic testing, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, xenotransplantation, and stem cell research and cloning. Donald Bruce of the Church of Scotland Society Religion and Technology project has been involved in developing the GM food kit, and the Wellcome Trust has supported development of the bioethical issues kits.

You can order the kits for your own use, or you attend facilitator training and receive £10 per game you organise. Kits are available from <http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/democs.aspx>

If you find these kits useful, please let Ruth know. (e-mail ruthb@cis.org.uk).

Change to subscription renewal system

This is related to the new mailing system. At present renewals are staggered throughout the year but with our new mailing agents it will be more efficient if the renewal forms are sent out in a batch once a year. We propose to make subscriptions go onto an annual basis starting from April 2005. Those whose membership renewal becomes due in or after September 2004 will have FREE membership until April 2005 when they will be expected to pay their subscription. Renewal notices will be sent with the general mailing. As usual, donations are always welcome.

This mailing has been sent by a commercial company for the first time.

This should enable Pauline to devote more time to membership matters. If you become concerned that the journal and newsletters are not reaching you or others please let me know at:

cberry@centrenet.co.uk or

4, Sackville Close, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3QD.

Or contact *Pauline Williams* at:

PaulineAWilliams@aol.com or

The Coach House, Eagle Hall, Swinderby, Lincoln LN6 9HZ.