



AN INTERVIEW WITH GRAEME FINLAY

Dr Graeme Finlay's interest in cancer genetics, and the rise in young earth creationist ideas in New Zealand, stimulated him to write on genetics in terms accessible to non-biologists. The resulting booklets were published in 2004 by Telos Books, and are available from CiS publications secretary (details on www.cis.org.uk).

What have you been doing until now?

I've been a cell biologist for 20 years with the Auckland Cancer Society Research Centre, a lab dedicated to the discovery of new anticancer drugs, and the largest of its kind in the southern hemisphere. My interest has been in DNA-binding drugs, especially those that poison the DNA-unknotting enzyme topoisomerase II. Six years ago my emphasis changed to lecturing in scientific pathology.

What do you do for fun?

Not enough! I walk to unwind. I live a few minutes from the coast, and regularly head off along the beach, rocks at low tide, and cliff walks with wonderful views of the beautiful Hauraki Gulf and its dozens of islands. Such natural beauty is conducive to prayer.

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

My parents – who served as missionaries in Asia, and who lived unreservedly for the Kingdom of God. They taught me that no matter how disillusioned I might be with the trappings of the Christian church, the enduring and liberating reality is Christ. As an insecure student, I was hugely encouraged by the Christian faith of the then Professor of Zoology at Auckland, John Morton. Subsequently, from the other side of the world, many of the CiS people have encouraged and inspired me more than I can ever express.

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

I am always saddened by the way that conflict between science and Christian faith is propagated by the media and by people who are uninformed and uncompromisingly dogmatic. Here in New Zealand, young earth Creationism is inalienable orthodoxy for many of the most vigorous churches. I feel enduring frustration when Christians exclaim that they do not know how an intelligent person can ever believe in evolution and Dawkins exclaims that he does not know how an intelligent person can ever believe in God. If only they would ask!

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

I would like to think that my faith has helped me through the many discouraging periods in the lab. Science has helped me appreciate more the wonder of the ever-working God. Surely a faith that encompasses science is the most consistent and satisfying world-view. But both may synergise to cause discomfort. I have not come to terms with the fact that my lifestyle has an ecological footprint of >8 hectares, whereas the carrying capacity of the earth is 2 hectares per person, and many people subsist on 0.5 hectares per person. I know that the Gospel alone can address this tension, but the prophetic voices in the Church seem to be muted. If I was not a scientist I might not know; if I was not a Christian I might not care.

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

There have been many. I was very fortunate to come across Donald MacKay's 'The Clockwork Image' when I was still a student in my formative years. MacKay's unassailable logic protected me from the range of category errors that have been propounded by the Creationist-ID alliance on the one hand, and the Dawkins propaganda juggernaut on the other. These category errors seem to carry all before them. These days my favourite book would be one of Tom Wright's.