

## Christians in Science Northern Conference 2005 Report:

### He Also Made The Stars

**He also made the Stars'** attracted around 80 people from all over the United Kingdom to St. George's Church in Leeds. **Colin Russell**, Emeritus Professor of the History of Science at the Open University, set the scene by suggesting Copernicus is a model we can follow to-day. Copernicus was unafraid to challenge the accepted dogma of his day even though he had only primitive instruments with which to make his astronomical observations. His theory was probably based initially on 'hunch', an origin for new ideas we should not downplay. He stressed the need to



distinguish world-picture from world-view. Copernicus changed the world-picture from earth centred to sun centred but his world-view, his moral values and belief in the supremacy of God and the teaching of the Bible remained constant. Similarly, our world-picture changes with new scientific discoveries but our world-view, our values and ethics should not. He discussed the support of the Church for Copernicus and showed us a book, written by Copernicus' pupil Rheticus and lost till re-discovered and translated by the late Professor Hookeyaas, a great supporter of CiS in its early days. This focused on Copernicus' faith and how he related his science to the teaching of Scripture.

**David Wilkinson**, Research Lecturer in Theology and Science at Durham University spoke next on 'Christian Eschatology in an Expanding Universe.'

He outlined the pessimistic outlook for the future presented by the current generation of cosmologists. Environmental degradation leading to an uninhabitable planet, an asteroid hit leading to disaster, or, looking further ahead the death of the sun and the inevitable end of Planet Earth and finally the end of the universe, with still so much of its energy systems shrouded in mystery. He mentioned theories of multiple universes, the views of Dyson and Tipler and 'life in all directions', the pointlessness of life that these views could engender. He stressed the opportunity for Christians to bring a message of hope, with the biblical emphasis on the positive side of the end times. He outlined biblical themes: the Creator God; the mutual dependence of the current creation and the New Creation; Transformation, Judgment and Resurrection with the physical being transformed rather than discarded. Here we were at the limits of our understanding, our minds needing to be expanded as well as the universe. It was time for lunch.

After lunch **Trevor Griffiths**, one of the local organizers, gave a fascinating presentation on the recent discoveries about the Saturn moon Titan by Cassini Huygens and speculation from this as a model for planet earth in its formative and pre-cellular life period.

He was followed by **Chris Done**, Reader in Astrophysics in Durham and a consultant for the European Space Agency who researches on radiation mechanisms and extreme gravitational objects such as Black Holes. She reminded us how ignorant we are, even of the nature of matter. Rather than the diminishing 'God of the gaps' she delighted in Dorothy Sayer's dictum: 'If God is eternal reason then any valid reasoning must be a manifestation of him'. There is infinite scope for our understanding of him to expand.



The search for other life in the universe must start with a search for stars with planets. She explained how progress on this was beginning. Time spans are enormous: three billion years separate the appearance on earth of fossil bacteria and that of the first multicellular organisms. She acknowledged that we were not really interested in finding mere micro-organisms, but 'proper'

life, preferably self conscious and communicating life. She assured those of us able to wait another 20-30 years there was a real chance of knowing whether this would move from 'Star Trek' into fact. Inevitably this raised questions about the impact of 'the Fall' and the efficacy of Christ's death but we agreed that our God is big enough to make these things clear when the need arose.



Group discussion of all these mind-stretching ideas followed. Finally **Richard Dimery**, one of the local team, wrapped up the day with a short epilogue. He reminded us of the wonder and majesty of our Creator God whilst bringing us back to earth by telling us that the next day, (Palm Sunday) he would be walking the streets of Leeds with a donkey.

Many thanks to St George's Church for an excellent venue and support, to the five organizers, the speakers for a mind expanding day, and to those, including Sarah Dimery who laid on an excellent lunch for an ever increasing number of participants.