



An interview with Keith Fox

Keith Fox is Professor of Biochemistry at Southampton University, where he leads research on sequence specific recognition of DNA by small molecules, oligonucleotides and proteins, and is Executive Editor of the journal *Nucleic Acids Research*. He is a lay reader at Highfield Church, Southampton, and has been recently appointed to the CiS committee with a view to becoming chair in September 2007 (see note on page 2).

What have you been doing until now?

As an undergrad at Cambridge I moved from physics to chemistry to biochemistry – a decision that seems to have done no harm! I did my PhD in the pharmacology department in Cambridge, and spent six years there as a postdoc. From there I moved to a lectureship in pharmacology at Southampton University. After several rounds of restructuring in the University, and with five years as a Lister Institute research fellow, I gradually moved up the ranks to become Professor of Biochemistry.

What do you do for fun?

I'm into distance running, which helps to relax the mind, and like to walk when I can – although there are no real hills near Southampton... and I read a huge amount. I am also heavily involved in my local church, where I am a lay reader.

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

Scientifically the person with the biggest influence in my life was my school chemistry teacher. I gained a scholarship to the local grammar school, but my academic career was fairly chequered until a chemistry teacher won my respect and enthusiasm in class. Within a term I moved from the bottom to the top of the class, and academically things began to improve - which shows just how much one person can influence your life. The scientist that I respect most is Fred Sanger – to me as a student he came across as having a huge intellect and a gentle approach to life. Many different Christians have been an influence over the years: youth leaders, colleagues and others have helped me, and I have had the privilege of working with some excellent vicars during my time as a lay reader.

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

I have not come across any great moral challenges in my studies on the physical chemistry of DNA, but I still find the way that people tackle the issue of origins a challenge - I don't see any

contradiction between the Bible and science. I do enjoy the debate, but I find the Christian and non-Christian views at the extreme ends of the spectrum frustrating - and often Christians are the most set in their ways.

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

I think the two run in parallel – truth and integrity are important to both, and looking at and verifying evidence, and trusting it. Truthfulness in science is paramount, and the vast majority of scientists tell the truth, regardless of their religion – but for Christians this is very important.

What science-faith books have you found most helpful?

I read a lot of science-faith books, so I can't think of any one in particular that was the most helpful – the latest book that I read and liked was Francis Collins' "The Language of God", which was very good. Early on, I remember reading Denis Alexander's first book in the 1970s, "Beyond Science". There are many books by Christians at the science-faith interface, and it's good to be aware of what is out there.

Why is CiS so important?

It's important as a resource for Christians who are scientists, to be able to meet people in the same discipline, and to be thinking together. It should have an important role in developing a national voice, and be a place for different organisations to turn to when they have questions. I'm also very keen on showing that science and Christianity can coexist without conflict, and getting that strong apologetic message out there.

If you weren't a biochemist what would you be?

I am a lay reader in the Anglican church, and I have thought several times during times of departmental restructuring at the University about entering full-time ministry - but I always come back to knowing that I'm called to practice and teach as a scientist.