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ASA/CIS/CSCA JOINT ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

Bristol Local Group leader, Tina Biggs, feeds back on her experiences of the joint conference with ASA and CSCA at McMaster University, Ontario, this summer.

With 250 attendees from the three organisations and 87 presenters over nine subject areas and four days, it clearly isn't going to be feasible to describe all the talks in this brief report. There is however a full set of abstracts, Powerpoints and audio files of all the talks given on the ASA website (<http://network.asa3.org/>), and in this report will be a description of some of the talks I personally managed to get to.

There were fourteen CiS people who made the journey across the Pond (see photo – from left to right, Alasdair Coles, David Wilkinson, Christina Biggs (my husband Brendan taking the photo), Colin Humphreys, Lesley and Hugh Reynolds, Tim

Middleton, KT van Santen, Bethany Sollereeder, Peter Bussey, Daniel Button, and Mike Clifford) plus Lizzie Coyle, picture below, who was also representing the Faraday Institute. Another Brit not formally a CiS member was Father Hugh McKenzie, a Catholic priest at UCL (photo below). Most of us gave talks, whether 15 minute, 30 minute or the one-hour plenary session talks, and many were grateful recipients of a Christians in Science bursary fund. There was also a British expatriate (of 24 years!) attending the conference, David Chettle, a member of the faculty at McMaster (the university hosting the conference), who is a medical physicist using the McMaster neutron reactor to track trace elements in the brain.

The title of the conference was "From Cosmos to Psyche" and the eight subject areas in the main conference were (in alphabetical order): Christian Women in Science and Engineering, Emergence, Environmental Sciences, Life Science, Mind Sciences,





Physical Sciences, Science and Technology in service to the poor, and Science and Theology. There were two parallel workshops before the meeting on the Friday, the first being Origins Today: Genesis Through Ancient Eyes, and the second being Progress and Challenges in Understanding Life's Origins. There were also field trips - one to Niagara Falls and one, a geology field trip, to the Niagara Escarpment - as well as a campus tour taking in the McMaster nuclear reactor, and a tour of the Royal Botanical Gardens. During the conference there was a hike organised by Christian Women in Science and Engineering, a banquet, a chance for students to meet the plenary speakers, and open meetings of the ASA, CSCA and CWIS. Finally there was a "post-conference conference" in another college, Redeemer College in Hamilton, for the final Monday afternoon. A real feast for the mind and senses!

There were many students present and the proportion of women present was far better than at a typical CiS conference - probably due to the activity of the CWIS organisation and the excellent quality of the talks at the conference on the vexed subject of the low representation of women in the sciences. E Janet Warren, for example, (pictured on the front page with our daughter Esther) gave a brilliant analysis of the effect of Augustine's focus on pride as the worst sin and the effect this had on women who already were lacking in confidence. Her thesis was that women as the networkers were especially susceptible to the consequence of this teaching in discouraging self-promotion and ambition, at the cost of not realising God's exciting plans for us. At the banquet I found David Wilkinson on a table with quite a bevy of beauties (below), one of whom (Marvellous Onuma-Kalu, far left) was doing a PhD in Quantum Information at McMaster University and had brought a student friend with her.

An important aspect of the conference was that as well as well-known speakers giving plenary sessions, there were a number of opportunities for those fairly new to

the field to give a short 15- or 30-minute talk in the four parallel sessions. I myself have never given a science-faith talk before, and have not given an academic talk in 20 years, but at this conference was generously allocated a 15-minute slot to try out my ideas, and enjoyed attending the talks of others similarly placed to me. For example, I enjoyed a talk from a pharmacist (Maria Fernandez) about the trials and lessons learned of managing the recovery of her husband in a health system that does not give the respect due to pharmacists that they enjoy in the UK; and also our own CiS Treasurer, Hugh Reynolds, gave a thought-provoking talk on the aim of Jesus' signs and wonders not being knock-down proof of God's existence but rather, reluctantly-provided evidence of Jesus' identity as the Messiah. Longer talks, such as Fr Hugh McKenzie's talk, was a revisitation of Plato and the argument towards God from the common experience of making decisions, especially those involving "the good" - surely a good first step for atheists! - and Colin Humphreys' talk was an astounding presentation of the exact dating of Jesus' death from biblical and secular sources and therefore evidence for God's effectiveness in carrying out his plans. My own talk was on the issue of God's character and action in the world; I looked at three philosophers and presented three "science parables" as models of how God's will, our choice and the shaping effect of the environment might all fit together.

There were many new questions being tackled as being both challenging to current thinking and also relevant to today's issues. For instance, I felt that David Wilcox's talk was a direct response and "fleshing out" of Denis Alexander's idea of a real, small group of people being the "federal head" of humanity, both in the learning to know God and in the subsequent rebellion, by recasting the question of the Fall in terms of what actually might have taken place in the evolution of Homo Divinus, and an unabashed proposition of a God communicating directly with a small group of people. David Wilkinson very effectively set out

the conundrums that people were posing in the face of the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (such as whether Jesus would need to be crucified more than once) and gave some pointers to possible responses. Tim Middleton cautioned against any





attempt at a theodicy of natural disasters and pointed to Christ's suffering with us and Higton's "lament, protest and Christ-like love" as the only adequate Christian response to suffering. Bethany Sollereeder's talk, starting from nonhuman, pre-human, suffering in creation, explored ways in which God might redeem aspects of each creature's experience to contribute to the whole mosaic of redeemed creation.

Over in the "softer sciences", Alasdair Coles' talk on epilepsy was clearly an exploration of a different aspect to psychiatry and a direct treatment of the problem of mental illness and of evaluating the authenticity of its apparent direct experience of God, complementary to Andrew Sims' recent book on the benefits of corporate religion on mental health, which also had that wonderfully straightforward and biblical test, being simply "by their fruits shall ye know them". I appreciated the way that presenters had so evidently thought about their titles: for example, the question "Why do Christians find the Artificial Reproductive Technologies so Threatening?" (D Gareth Jones) was halfway to solving the problem!

Other talks were more pragmatic, dealing with the immediate problems encountered today. Bruce Beaver asked the urgent question "Would God Frack?" with some very arresting photographs of the process taking place, and David Larrabee was very helpful indeed for the modern conscientious-and-hip person, by modelling what changes in lifestyle might be necessary for humanity to avoid destroying the planet – his take-home message being that we might only have to halve our energy usage and should positively encourage the developing world to get past the fossil fuel stage, which to me was heartening given the messages of doom emanating from the press!

Overall, I would heartily recommend attending joint conferences such as these and would in particular encourage those who have not previously given a science-faith talk to put together something for a 15-minute slot at the next one – as there might similarly be several parallel sessions nicely dividing up the attendees the experience need not be traumatic and indeed could be a start of something new and exciting in your life! But also those who are well entrenched in their corner of science-and-theology and writing their next talks and books would do well, I would suggest, to look at the list of talks and powerpoint slides and listen to the relevant recordings for the challenges posed (some by quite young and inexperienced speakers) to existing thinking.

Christina Biggs, Bristol Local Group Leader

STUDENT CONFERENCE: SAVE THE DATE!

Arrangements are being made for the 2015 student conference, with many excellent speakers already lined up and a few more to be confirmed...

In the meantime, students, keep

SATURDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2015

free in your diary for a day's conference at St. Peter's church at London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC), focussing on some of the "Big Questions" of science and faith, across the scientific disciplines.

Full details of speakers, topics, timings and how to book will be released soon.

INTERVIEW WITH PROF SIR COLIN HUMPHREYS

On 1st November, at the annual CiS conference, Prof Sir Colin Humphreys will take over the role of CiS President from Prof Malcolm Jeeves, who has held the post for the last six years. Here, he tells us some of his story, and his vision for Christians in Science...

I am an academic nomad! My story so far is that I was born in Luton and educated at Luton Grammar School. From there I went to Imperial College London to study Physics and then moved to the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge where I obtained my PhD in Physics. I left Cambridge for the Metallurgy Department in Oxford, where I was a post-doc and then a Lecturer. I left Oxford to be Professor and Head of the Department of Materials Engineering at Liverpool, and after 5 years I moved to Cambridge to be Professor of Materials Science, the next year becoming Head of the Department. I am now Director of Research in the Department. In Cambridge I founded and still direct a major Research Centre with Rolls-Royce: materials we developed are now flying in Rolls-Royce engines. I also founded and still direct the Cambridge Centre for Gallium Nitride, which is a semiconductor material. So I have interests in both structural and electronic materials.



Recently, my group discovered how to make GaN LEDs much more cheaply, by growing on large-area silicon substrates, and I set up 2 companies to exploit this technology. These were acquired by Plessey, who are now manufacturing LEDs in the UK based on the technology of my research group. So my research ranges from

basic science through to real technological applications.

My parents were Creationists and I was brought up as a Young Earth Creationist. I started to have doubts about this in the Sixth Form at Luton Grammar School, because radioactive dating techniques seemed to show clearly that our earth was very old. At Imperial College I temporarily stopped being a Christian while I thought through my beliefs and the scientific evidence for evolution, and I then became a Christian again, but believing that evolution was the mechanism God chose to create life on earth.

It may sound very dull (it isn't!), but my major interests outside of work are thinking and writing about science and faith. While I was in Oxford, I was keen to present a balanced account of creation and evolution to sixth formers in schools, so I wrote a booklet "Creation and Evolution" in 1985, which was published by Oxford University Press, as part of a series called "Studies in Christianity and Science". I know that this booklet was widely used in schools from the many responses I got from school teachers. I wrote a chapter "Can Science and Christianity Both Be True?" in the book "Real Science, Real Faith", edited by Professor R J (Sam) Berry, published in 1991 and reprinted in 1995, and recently updated this in a new book entitled "Real Scientists, Real Faith", again edited by Professor Sam Berry. I became fascinated by using science to help determine the date of the Crucifixion and, rather remarkably, a paper I wrote with Graham Waddington entitled "Dating the Crucifixion" was published in *Nature* in 1983. I write "rather remarkably" because the editor of *Nature* at that time, Sir John Maddox, was a card-carrying atheist and somehow this paper got past him. When I worked on this paper I became aware of a number of apparent contradictions in the Gospel accounts of the last week of Jesus. It took me a long time to resolve these to my

satisfaction! But I then wrote about this in "The Mystery of the Last Supper: Reconstructing the Final Days of Jesus" which was published by CUP in 2011. I became fascinated by the very large numbers of Israelites the books of Exodus and Numbers record being involved in the Exodus from Egypt, and apparent contradictions in these books which elsewhere suggest far smaller numbers. I tried to solve this problem using mathematics and published a paper in the leading Old Testament journal *Vetus Testamentum*. The paper contained 3 simple mathematical equations and I was told that it was the first time mathematical equations had ever appeared in this journal! I expanded on this article and wrote a book called "The Miracles of Exodus", which was published by Harper in 2003. Recently an atheist has asked me to write a chapter in a book he is editing in which he has asked about 6 atheists and 6 Christians to debate in writing topics of his choosing. He has asked me to write about the Origin of the Universe, in debate with Professor Lawrence Krauss, a distinguished cosmologist who is my atheist opponent. I look forward to our debate!

I have had a number of important role models in my life. When I was a post-doc I found the writings of Oliver Barclay and Donald MacKay to be particularly useful. I also found CiS conferences to be very helpful. At that time, local groups would prepare a paper for the annual CiS conference, together with having some invited speakers. This worked really well and I would like to suggest that CiS tries this again. More recently, I have found the writings on science and religion by John Polkinghorne to be helpful, as have been the theological writings of Tom Wright. But I have found many writers to be inspirational, including the Bible reading notes of Selwyn Hughes.

I think that scientists who are Christians have a particularly important role to play in our modern world. Scientists like Richard Dawkins have been hugely successful in proclaiming that there is no God and a large number of people are persuaded by the writings of Dawkins and other New Atheists. I believe that scientists who are Christians have a key role to play in countering these arguments. Jesus said that we should love God with all our mind, so Christians who are scientists need to have their brains fully switched on and we need to rise to the intellectual challenge of responding to the arguments proposed by the New Atheists and the Secular Humanists. So members of CiS have work to do!

Prof Sir Colin Humphreys

LOCAL GROUP NEWS

If you live somewhere that does not have a CiS local group but you wish it did, please get in touch with the Development Officer, (emily@cis.org.uk) about starting up a new group in your area. If you are interested in being involved with new groups that may be starting in Reading, Dundee, Camberley or the London Universities, please let us know.

LOCAL GROUPS

ABERDEEN

A discussion group runs in Aberdeen. If you would like details of meetings please contact David Ely at aberdeenlocalgroup@yahoo.co.uk.

ABERGAVENNY

If you would like to get involved with the discussion group in Abergavenny, please contact Dr Huw Morgan at jhcmorgan@gmail.com.

BIRMINGHAM

If you would like details of future happenings in Birmingham please e-mail bhamcis@gmail.com or join the Birmingham CiS Facebook group www.facebook.com/groups/ciscbirmingham

BRISTOL

On Friday 7th November the Bristol group will be welcoming Dr. Peter Bussey, Emeritus reader of Physics, University of Glasgow, to speak on the topic 'God and the Big Bang'. Contact Tina Biggs for more information (cmbbiggs@googlegmail.com)

CAMBRIDGE

For details of upcoming events in Cambridge please go to www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday/Lectures.php.

CENTRAL SOUTH

On 29th October, the Central South group were joined by Ernest Lucas, speaking on 'Can we believe Genesis today?' If you would like more information about the group please go to our webpage or e-mail Peter May on petergeorgemay@gmail.com

DURHAM

Contact Alan Roberts (a.w.roberts@durham.ac.uk) for information about future events.

EDINBURGH

If you are interested in taking over running the Edinburgh local group, or would like more details about the group, please email Gavin Merrifield (g.d.merrifield@gmail.com)

GLASGOW

For details of future events in Glasgow please contact Dr Lawrence Osborn on lawrence@lhosborn.co.uk

HARROW

For details of future events in Harrow please contact Revd Lyndon North (revlnorth@aol.com)

IPSWICH

For information about events in Ipswich please contact Dr John Ling (jjling@btopenworld.com).

IRELAND

Details about the upcoming events in Ireland can be found at www.cis.org.uk/ireland

LEEDS

Our first meeting of the new session was in early September when Rev Dr Rodney Holder joined us to talk about the subject of his new book "Big Bang, Big God: A Universe Designed for Life". He gave us an informative and challenging evening. Further meetings are planned and will be announced as soon as details are settled with speakers. Further details of meetings from John Lockwood at jglockwood1@me.com

LIVERPOOL

The Liverpool group resumed their monthly meetings on Wednesday 29th October, at their new venue, Saint Philip Neri, St Catherine's Street. Meetings run from 6-7pm and this term will be exploring 'The God Question' resource. Contact Neville Cobbe for more information (Neville.cobbe@liverpool.ac.uk).

MANCHESTER

Please contact the Manchester group secretary, Alma Budd on sec.cismanchester@yahoo.co.uk if you would like more details about the Manchester group, or to be added onto the mailing list.

NORWICH

On 31st October, Science and Faith Norfolk hosted a debate between Rev Dr Patrick Richmond and John Mackay on the topic of the Christian Understand



of Evolution. Their next event will be on 22nd November, when Rev Dr Alasdair Coles will speak on the topic 'Broken Brains and Christ.' Please contact info@cis.norwich.org.uk for details about upcoming events in the Norwich area.

NOTTINGHAM

The Nottingham group meets regularly for discussion about science - faith topics. They met on 28th October to discuss the topic 'The Origin of Life.' Please contact Geoff Bagley (geoffbagley@me.com) if you would like further information.

OXFORD

For information about the Oxford local group, contact Diana Briggs at diana.briggs@wolfson.oxon.org

ROYAL HOLLOWAY

For more information from the recently formed group at Royal Holloway, or to be added to their mailing list, please contact Aline Porteous on aline.porteous@gmail.com.

SHEFFIELD

The Sheffield CiS group meets regularly for prayer and discussion during the university term. They also hosted Peter S Williams for an event on 29th October, where he spoke on the subject 'Science, Scientism and the Knowledge of God.' For details about happenings in the Sheffield area or to be added on to our mailing list please e-mail shefuni.cisc@gmail.com or join our Facebook group www.facebook.com/groups/shefuni.cisc/ or see their website <http://sheffieldchristiansinscience.wordpress.com>

SOUTH WEST

If you would like details about future events in the South West, please contact Prof. David Huntley (dhuntley@plymouth.ac.uk).

ST ANDREWS

For more information about the undergraduate group at St Andrews, please contact Dr Andrew Torrance (abt3@st-andrews.ac.uk) or Joshua Sharp (jas29@st-andrews.ac.uk). For more information about the postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

Surrey have two events coming up: on November

18th, Prof Sir Colin Humphreys will be speaking on 'The Star of Bethlehem'. Then, on 22nd January they will be joined by Prof Bob White, speaking on 'Who's to blame? Disasters, Nature and Acts of God.' For more details about future events in the Surrey area please contact Joy Perkins at joyeperkins@googlemail.com.

TYNESIDE & NORTHUMBERLAND

On 28th October the group met and discussed the topic 'Science and Christianity, who's got it wrong?', which was chaired by Bill Clegg. For information from the group in the Newcastle area, please contact Bill Clegg at bill.clegg@ncl.ac.uk.

WEST MIDLANDS

The West Midlands Group meets infrequently and people should contact Godfrey Armitage if they are local and interested at g.n.armitage@warwick.ac.uk. There is no meeting currently planned.

WORCESTER

Bible and Science Worcester were joined by Prof Sir Roy Peacock on 21st October, who spoke on 'Life After Data? My Paradigm Shift'. They will be joined by Prof Glynn Harrison on 18th November, who will speak on 'The Myth of Self-Esteem'. For information about upcoming events, please contact Kim Stansfield at kimestansfield@gmail.com.

CIS BOOK SALE

You can still buy books from our book sale online, although our stocks are fast depleting!

If you would like to purchase any of the books we have still in stock, please visit the spreadsheet 'Christians in Science book sale' at <http://tinyurl.com/q2gfzt8> which will be regularly updated with stock levels, and send your order and postal address to DO@cis.org.uk.