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CIS 2015 NORTHERN CONFERENCE REPORT

God Loves Science: Towards a Theology of Scientific Enterprise. The CiS Northern Conference was arranged this year on April 18th by the Manchester group in conjunction with the Nazarene Theological College. Dr Deirdre Brower-Latz, NTC Principal, welcomed the speakers, and more than 50 delegates from as far afield as Newcastle and Cambridge.

After noting some historic links between the nearby Didsbury Park and the scientist-philosopher Michael Polanyi, Prof David Watts (Manchester) gave the opening presentation on 'Thinking God's thoughts after Him'. These words of Johannes Kepler express a Theology of Science and arose from his discovery of three empirical laws of planetary motion, subsequently understood as consequences of still deeper laws. Christian Theism - the most materialistic of religions - embodies a basic distinction between Absolute (*ex nihilo*) Creation and Mediate (secondary) Creation, related to the absence or presence, respectively, of pre-existing 'matter' [1]. However, reasons were suggested as to why many modern theologians have neglected creation in favour of other themes. Moreover, confusion on all sides often arises about the relationship between Big Bang cosmologies and *ex nihilo* Creation with time and space. These concepts should initially be clearly distinguished, along with their associated concepts of 'nothing'. The 'nothing' of creation *ex nihilo* [Hebr. 11:3] is completely distinct from the 'nothing' of the quantum field vacuum fluctuations. Also it is unnecessary for Christians to be dogmatic as to whether there was a first moment of physical time.

Prof Tom McLeish, FRS (Durham) tackled 'Mining Ancient Wisdom for a Theology of Science' [2]. In a wide-ranging address, he illustrated from chaotic

Brownian motion (statistical mechanics) the subtle cause-effect relationships underpinning biological life. He strongly advocated a different paradigm from the now conventional but disjunctive 'science/religion' debate, which regularly fails to engage with the wealth of Biblical material about creation, especially in the Wisdom literature. From this, he identified Proverbs 8: 22-31 as the foundational 'Creation 101' expressing curiosity about God's works. Through a careful study of the book of Job, he showed how Job accused his tormentors of acting like chaotic nature. And Job - afflicted by nature without and within - then received a creation narrative! Thus Science should be seen as the participative, relational, loving and co-creative work of healing the fallen relationship of humans with nature. This new understanding of nature can become inherently therapeutic, as a 'ministry of reconciliation', and *inter alia* the basis for healing in the academy between the fractured 'Two Cultures'.

Dr Althea Wilkinson (Manchester), a radio astronomer at the Jodrell Bank observatory and a relative newcomer to Christian faith, spoke on 'Astronomy and Christian Discipleship'. She first outlined the historical development

BREAKING NEWS

COMING SOON: Details of the 2016 Student Conference, which will happen in the Spring, in Birmingham.

"Science in society: science and faith in action"

Speakers include: Prof. John Bryant, Dr Mike Clifford, Dr Pete Moore and Dr Clare Foster.

Date and venue will be announced shortly - watch this space!



in understanding the cosmos from the Hebrew world-picture to the present day. This included her own involvement with the European Space Agency and the ESA Planck satellite to study the Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) radiation as a remnant of the Big Bang. Currently, Althea is involved with the development of the world's largest telescope – the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) - in South Africa and Australia. She then addressed wider issues of religious belief, amongst scientists and the general public, and specifically her own journey to personal Christian faith via the realization in mid life that no one had ever taught her properly about the basis and content of Biblical faith. This was eventually remedied when she did encounter a Christian community that taught and exemplified the faith in real life, [3]. She reflected upon some common misunderstandings of science by Christians as well as the importance of organizations such as CiS.

After a break for lunch, and patronage of an excellent bookstall, we divided into breakout discussion groups, ably led by Dr Tom Noble and Prof Peter Budd. Then we reconvened to summarize some conclusions and to hear the two final presentations.

David Watts tackled 'Mathematics and the Beauty of God' starting with the issue of whether mathematics entails discovery of structures that somehow pre-exist or whether they are merely the creation of the human mind imposing its categories on a formless world. The Biblical topic of beauty was considered and *inter alia* how crystals are illustrative of divine beauty, and thereby the connection with Group Theory and symmetry. The 'golden mean' (*phi*) provided a simple example of the unexpected recurrence of relationships in arithmetic, algebra, geometry and analysis. This was linked to the diverse ingredients of mathematical beauty and pleasure, which also occur in music appreciation. Contributions of mathematicians such as Euler, Cauchy, Riemann and Noether were noted along with reflections of physicists such as Heisenberg, Jeans, Dirac, Hawking and Dyson. "The kings of the earth will bring their glory into it... [the celestial city]", according to Revelation 21:24, so all that is good in human culture – including science and mathematics – will have eternal value.

Tom McLeish brought the day to an inspiring finale with the consequences that should flow from a theology of science. As scientists we have a mandate to play our part in shaping nature without restriction by pre-ordained boundaries, thus involving, for example,

theocentric environmentalism. This contrasts with the often pagan-inspired dismal and pessimistic outlook of many European policy makers in this field, where pseudo-wise warnings against 'meddling with nature' and opening Pandora's box prevail. Of course, the words science and scientist can be problematic and the older term 'natural philosophy' (love of wisdom of natural things) connects better with a theistic outlook and the perennial quest for wisdom apparent in many inspiring ancient texts.

All of the Powerpoint notes from the conference sessions are now available for download, both from the CiS website and the NTC website: www.nazarene.ac.uk.

David Watts

[1] R.J. Berry, (ed). *Christians and Evolution, Monarch, 2014. Chapter 15.*

[2] T. McLeish, *Faith and Wisdom in Science, OUP, 2014.*

[3] www.Saint-Johns.org.uk

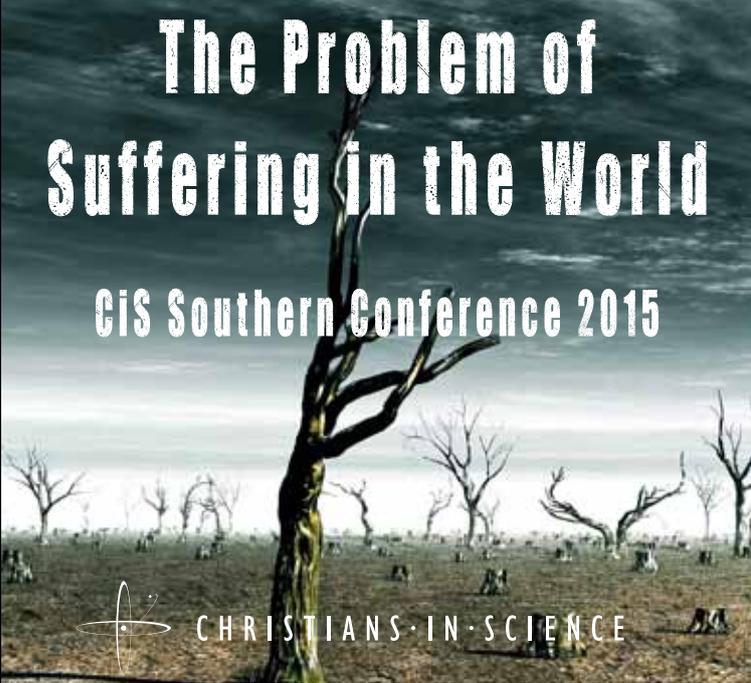
INTERVIEW WITH TIM MIDDLETON

Tim has been the student rep on the CiS committee for the past three years. As he finishes his PhD and hands his role on to Anna Pearson, he talks to us about his time on the committee, his science-faith thoughts, and what's coming up for him.

Tell us what you've been doing until now.

I'm just coming to the end of a PhD in Earth Sciences at Oxford. I've been looking at earthquakes in a part of northern China called the Ordos Plateau. The aim has been to try and understand the history of earthquakes in this part of the world—and how fast the various faults are moving—as this information is vital for assessing the future seismic hazard. It's been exciting work and I've been out to China twice for fieldwork—once in mid-November





The Problem of Suffering in the World

CiS Southern Conference 2015

CHRISTIANS · IN · SCIENCE

Saturday 24th October, 2015

The Kings Centre,
Oxford, OX2 0ES

£25 members, £30 non-members, £5 Students

TOPICS INCLUDE:

Philosophical Overview - Vince Vitale

Suffering in the Biological World -
Chris Southgate

Natural Disasters - Bob White

The Problem of Disease - John Wyatt

Online booking closes on 14th October, after which point please contact the secretary if you wish to attend but have not registered.

www.cis.org.uk/conferences

when the temperature was around -20°C .

What has been the most interesting thing you have discovered or worked on in your research career?

One of my thesis chapters is about an earthquake in 1739 that broke part of the Great Wall of China. The earthquake evidence is still very well preserved as a small escarpment running across the landscape. We've used satellite photos to build a three-dimensional model of this landscape, which then allows me to make a variety of measurements from the comfort and warmth of my office. It's quite a new technique in the Earth Sciences and some of my colleagues were amongst the first people to make these sorts of earthquake measurements at such high resolution.

What has your role on the CiS committee involved over the last 3 years?

My role has been primarily to offer a young person's perspective on the various issues dealt with by the CiS committee. That said, as a very reluctant user of Twitter, I have sometimes felt that I'm not quite the youthful voice that people had hoped I was going to be! I've also been involved in helping Emily to plan and run the student conference and I've assisted with the organising and judging of the student essay competition. Last summer, CiS kindly provided assistance for me to attend the ASA

conference in Hamilton, Ontario, where I gave a talk on theodicy and was one of a small group of CiS representatives.

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

One of my biggest concerns has been to do with the purpose of science. For a period of time whilst I was an undergraduate I became quite disillusioned with it all. Some bits of science are used to make the world a better place or are fascinating in their own right, but many other bits of science are just used for making money or for personal career progression. The key problem, I think, is that science itself doesn't come with the tools telling you what it's for or how to use it.

For me, Christian theology helps to provide precisely this groundwork. But you needn't necessarily start from a Christian foundation. A wider acknowledgment of the potential contributions of theology, philosophy, ethics and the other humanities would really help us to see what the role of science in society ought to be.

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

To continue in the same vein, I think Tom McLeish's recent book, Faith and Wisdom in Science hits the nail on the head. He articulates exactly the sort of



unease that I had been feeling and not knowing quite how to express. I've also just finished Mary Midgley's book *Science as Salvation*, which picks up on similar concerns, particularly about the way in which science has been portrayed and popularised. She also presents a very sound case for why rational thought alone is not enough; the intellect and the passions need to work in tandem for a rounded appreciation of reality.

One of the best science-faith books I've ever read, though, is Iain McGilchrist's *The Master and his Emissary*. I'm not completely sure I agree with everything he says about the divided brain, but his intimate knowledge of both the medical sciences and the humanities is phenomenal. For example, there's a fascinating discussion about how the way in which artists have composed portraits through time might reflect changing intellectual cultures.

What has your research taught you about God, or vice versa?

I know many scientists find that through their research they come to be ever more astounded by the nature of the world around them such that it can function as a natural theology. As the Apostle Paul mentions in the letter to the Romans, the idea is that we can all come to know God because we can all look at the world around us. I find this sort of theology quite appealing because it suggests that everyone has access to God—it's very democratic. In the end, though, I have to admit that I struggle with this way of thinking. I don't think you can divorce natural theology from the question of theodicy: you have to take account of good and bad simultaneously. I also share some of the concerns of the theologian Karl Barth. It's a big leap from natural theology to talking about the life and death of Christ. For me I think it makes most sense to start from the incarnation (or crucifixion) and then work outwards from there.

What do you see as the current major challenges in the field of science and religion?

As I see it, there's an important distinction to be made here. Academically I think a lot of the questions have moved on, whilst in society at large many of the same old debates are still raging. For

example, I was recently talking about science and religion in a school and I was quite shocked by how many people thought that the Church of England taught that evolution was wrong.

The first task, then, is educational. Historians are almost unanimous in their agreement that the conflict model for the relationship between science and religion is pretty much obsolete. Whilst I would be the first to admit that it's not all plain sailing, I think the broad thrust of this conclusion needs to be communicated to the general public.

The second main area is to do with the environment. The Pope's recent encyclical is hugely inspiring in this regard, and a lot of worthwhile projects have been started. But I think Christian scientists have the duty of making sure their churches are at the absolute cutting edge on issues such as climate change and there's a lot more good work that could be done.

In the academic realm, as I say, I think the questions are rather different—they're much more to do with the purpose and place of science, as I mentioned earlier.

What do you do for fun? What are your major interests outside of work?

I'm a big fan of road cycling (it's by far the best way to get around), and I've recently been glued to highlights of both the Tour de France and La Vuelta. Also, since moving to a house with a large vegetable patch, I've become rather keen on growing runner beans!

I spend a concerningly large amount of my remaining "spare" time either reading theology books or making fresh coffee.

Where is life taking you now?

The first task is to finish and submit my PhD. After that, I am planning to apply to study theology in a more formal capacity. We'll see how it goes, but my hope is that ultimately I might be able to research and teach in science and religion.



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. Full event details are available at www.cis.org.uk/events

ABERDEEN

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

ABERGAVENNY

This Autumn the group are looking at different views of the Genesis Creation Narratives, led by local theologians interested in this topic. The Abergavenny CiS group meet monthly in the chairman's home. If you would like to get involved with the discussion group in Abergavenny, please contact Dr Huw Morgan at jhcmorgan@gmail.com

BIRMINGHAM

Details of events in Birmingham will be released once term has commenced. If you would like details of future happenings in Birmingham please e-mail cis@guild.bham.ac.uk or join the Birmingham CiS Facebook group www.facebook.com/groups/ciscbirmingham

BRISTOL

The next event in Bristol will be on Weds 4th November at the Wills Great Hall, Clifton, when Prof Alister McGrath will conclude their Origins series, speaking on 'Science, Faith, and God: Richard Dawkins vs C S Lewis on the Meaning of Life'. Their new series, on Mind, will begin in the New Year. Contact Tina Biggs for more information (cmdbiggs@googlemail.com)

CAMBRIDGE

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

CENTRAL SOUTH

If you would like more information about the group please go to our page on the CiS website, or e-mail Peter May on petergeorgemay@gmail.com

DUNDEE

For information about the Dundee group, please email christiansinsciencedundee@gmail.com.

DURHAM

Contact Alan Roberts (a.w.roberts@durham.ac.uk) for

information about future events in Durham.

EDINBURGH

If you 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 Prof Paul Younger on paul.younger@glasgow.ac.uk

HARROW

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

IPSWICH

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

IRELAND

CiS Ireland have three events this term. On Tue 6th October, Dr Mark McCartney will speak on "Mathematics and God: Beauty, Truth, and the Square Root of 666". On Tue 3rd November, Dr Ruth Hogg will lead "An Introduction to Test of Faith, a Teaching Resource on Faith and Science". Finally, on Tue 1st December, Dr T. Desmond Alexander will speak on "New perspectives on Genesis 1". Each event will happen at The Hub, 22 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast, at 7:30pm. Details about the upcoming events in Ireland can be found at www.cis.org.uk/ireland

LEEDS

Prof Sam Berry will join the Leeds group on Wednesday 11th November, speaking on "Creation Care: Gospel Mandate or Irritating Irrelevance?". South Parade Baptist Church, 7:30 for 8pm. Further details of meetings from John Lockwood at jglockwood1@me.com

LIVERPOOL

The Liverpool group meet regularly at Saint Philip Neri, Catherine Street. Contact Neville Cobbe for more information (Neville.cobbe@liverpool.ac.uk).

LONDON

The CiS London Autumn Lecture will be 'Science: For the Glory of God', with Prof. David Dye. Thu 22nd Oct, 19:30, St John's Wood Road Baptist Church. For more details about the group contact Benjamin Chang on cins.london@gmail.com, and visit the website <http://cislondon.org/>



MANCHESTER

The Manchester Science and Philosophy group will be joined by Prof Andrew Sims on Thu 12th Nov, to speak on the subject 'Is Faith Delusional?'. 18:00-19:30, The Common Room, St Peter's House, M13 9GH. Details of meetings in the Spring can be found on the CiS website. Please contact the 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

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. For further information please contact Geoff Bagley (geoffbagley@me.com)

OXFORD

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

READING

The Reading group meets bimonthly in central Reading. Contact Dave Law for details on dave@readingatwork.org.

ROYAL HOLLOWAY

For more information from the group at Royal Holloway, or to be added to their mailing list, please contact Oliver Edy on Oliver.Edy.2012@live.rhul.ac.uk

SHEFFIELD

The Sheffield CiS group meets regularly for prayer and discussion during the university term. For details about happenings in the Sheffield area or to be added to our mailing list please e-mail shefuni.cisc@gmail.com, 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 info about the undergraduate group at St Andrews, please contact Dr Andrew Torrance (abt3@st-andrews.ac.uk), Joshua Sharp (jas29@st-andrews.ac.uk) or Laura McCullagh (lsm4@st-andrews.ac.uk). For more information about the postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

The Surrey group will be joined by Dr Peter Bussey, on Nov 24th, speaking on 'God & the Universe.' 7pm, Christ Church, Purley, CR8 2BN. Entrance is free. For more details about future events in the Surrey area please contact Joy Perkins at joyeperkins@googlemail.com.

THREE COUNTIES BORDERS

The newly established Three Counties Borders group is based in Camberley on the border between Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. Their inaugural meeting will be held on Wed 4th Nov at St Peters Church, Frimley, where they will welcome Dr Rodney Holder who will speak on 'Big Bang, Big God: a Universe Designed for Life?' Please contact John Russell for more info on chynoweth.jw@gmail.com.

TYNESIDE & NORTHUMBERLAND

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

WORCESTER

On 3rd Nov, Prof John Wyatt will join the Worcester group, speaking on 'Assisted Suicide: Do hard cases really make poor law?' 8-9:30pm, Lindisfarne House, WR1 3JS. More details can be found at the website <http://bibleandscienceworcester.org.uk/> or contact Jim Smith on jgsmith29@aol.com.