

CIS Student Conference March 2013 Report

This year's Christians in Science Student Conference met on a cold but bright March morning. Students from all over the country made the journey to St Wulfstan's Church in Birmingham to enjoy Science and Christianity: the View Inwards, Upwards and Outwards.

The morning session was chaired by CiS student rep Tim Middleton and Dr. Stuart Judge gave the first talk, entitled '*Developing a Christian Mind*'. Dr. Judge set the tone of the conference by reminding us that we each have vocations from God by which to bring Him glory - a great encouragement for those of us (seemingly the majority) who have little clue where our lives are headed. So it was in this context that we began the day with an examination of what a Christian mind might look like in terms of a framework for understanding our faith, in particular with regard to science. We saw that the Biblical view of the Universe recognises both that God created and is continuously active in sustaining everything, such that what we call the 'Laws of Nature' are better understood as God's ongoing, consistent action in the Universe. Moreover, this is the basis of the modern scientific method. We then spent some time considering the way we live and work day to day under the scrutiny of the Christian worldview, in particular our obedience to Jesus' command to 'obey the whole law' with regard to the values we uphold in our studies and careers. For me, the most challenging comment was that we should reflect on whether we would be able to defend our career choices under the scrutiny of God's judgement, or whether we are really just pursuing a Nobel prize out of sinful pride.

In the second half of the morning session, Dr. Ross Williams directed our gaze upwards, from our worldviews towards the awe of God reflected in His creation. Dr. Williams helped us to think about how God reveals Himself through the Creation: His majesty, glory and immensity. A healthy dose of enthusiasm was entirely appropriate as we embarked on a sightseeing tour of the Universe from the cosmic microwave background, via particle physics and the human genome to the astonishing complexity of the human mind. Undoubtedly my favourite quotation of the day was Dr. William's description of how the bizarre realities of quantum physics reveal God's nature: "*if the world is that weird (in the most reverent way) how weird must God be!*"

Both afternoon sessions were chaired by CIS Development Officer, Dr. Becky Lowton, and focused on the outward expressions of our faith in the scientific context. Dr. Sharon Dirckx from the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics expertly guided us as we considered the relationship between science, apologetics and evangelism. We saw the Biblical mandate for being 'prepared to give an answer (*apologia*) to everyone who asks [us] to give the reason for the hope that [we] have', and reflected on the need for our words and behaviour to be consistent and distinctive as we seek to share the gospel. With these ideas in place, Dr. Dirckx applied them to a handful of familiar objections to Christianity, which are particularly relevant in the current scientific climate. No doubt we all ended the session feeling well equipped to engage with this type of issue but also recognising the absolute necessity of prayer for our non-Christian friends and colleagues.

The final talk of the day was given by Dr. Mike Clifford, on the subject '*Science and Engineering as Service*'. Dr. Clifford's direct and engaging presentation was an effective antidote to afternoon sleepiness as he challenged us to interrogate our motivations (and those of our funding organisations) for the research we undertake. In particular we tried to see our science in the context of the world's needs. A fast-paced survey of case studies where engineering has been used to find practical and applicable solutions to real-life problems (many revolving around cooking stoves) gave us plenty to chew over as we

thought about the value of our own work. Dr. Clifford emphasised the importance of living fully integrated lives as Christians where work is part of our worship and service, and so encouraged us to use our science to serve others.

To help us digest all that we had heard, we split up into small discussion groups, which provided an honest and open forum for discussing and addressing the specific challenges and situations we face in our daily work or study. We rounded off the day by inviting all four speakers to form a panel and to take any questions from the floor, which had been raised by the day as a whole or which had so far gone unaddressed. As we launched into the full flow of debate and discussion the allocated time rapidly vanished and so we ended with plenty still to discuss and to think about on the train journey home and with gratitude to our speakers and conference organiser, Becky, for helping us to look inwards, upwards and outwards to the glory of God.