



PréCis

Breaking News



The third edition of "Connect" the Science and Faith Student magazine from Christians in Science is online at - connect.cis.org.uk/ We will be looking at the topic of "Space".

Student Conference

Science and Faith: the view Up, In and Out

Saturday 17th February 2018

The King's Centre,
Oxford OX2 0ES

See more details at
www.cis.org.uk/conferences/student-2018/



Prof Sir Colin Humphreys presenting certificate to 2017 Oliver Barclay Lecture winner Dr Jona Foster

CiS Oliver Barclay Lecture 2018

Nominations are now open

Christians in Science sponsors an annual "Oliver Barclay Lecture" in memory of Dr Oliver Barclay who was the driving force behind the establishment of The Research Scientists Christian Fellowship, the predecessor of CiS, and who was keen to encourage the next generation of effective communicators on Science and Faith.

Nominations for the award are sought each year from members of CiS with a closing date of **midnight 14th February**.

Please read the Nomination Criteria carefully - All details are available on our website www.cis.org.uk



Winning Student Essay 2017

By Jelmer Heeren

Master of Arts in Theology and Religious Studies, Leuven, Belgium

Truthful Imaginings: Scientific and Theological Enquiry

Only by imagination therefore can the world be known.

—Owen Barfield, Poetic Diction

In a world of “alternative facts” what does it mean to search for “truth,” scientifically and theologically? This is a pressing question. One-liners seem to have replaced civil discussion and the general mistrust of science has never been more rampant. ^[1] In evaluating information we now turn to “fact checkers.” Indeed, we should want the truth and nothing but the truth. Christians of all people should encourage and engage in the relentless search for it. After all, our faith is based on certain historical realities concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet in getting rid of distortions and falsehood in scientific and theological enquiry we are not to dispose ourselves of the imagination. Let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater.



Prof Andrew Halestrap and Jelmer Heeren

This may sound counterintuitive. The imagination is often associated with the faculty that brings to mind objects or events in the past or things that never existed in the first place. On this account, the imagination is seen as potentially unreliable at best and dangerous at worst, for it is only trustworthy insofar the images it generates represent the things we experience through our senses. These images are but reproductions of what is real. This is why Plato disregarded poets: their work was too far removed from reality. Likewise, Christians too have not had a high regard for the imagination. Our faith is not a figment of the imagination or a product of philosophy. Furthermore, theologian Kevin Vanhoozer notes that the King James Version of the Bible is partly to blame for the bad reputation of the imagination among Christians. Genesis 6:5 is translated as: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” ^[2]

Yet in recent decades, as Vanhoozer points out, “the imagination’s stock has risen considerably in the eyes of philosophers thanks to its association with creative language.” ^[3] What if the imagination does not merely reproduce reality but aids our understanding of the world? And what if this is not a function of its pictorial nature, but rather of its verbal nature? Philosopher Paul Ricoeur is an important proponent of this view, arguing that “images are spoken before they are seen.” ^[4] He links the imagination to language and interpretation, attributing to it an important feature called semantic innovation: the moment we redescribe reality through metaphorisation, the act of applying a verbal image. This is what we do when we say something in terms of something else, giving shape to new meaning in the process. ^[5]

For example, numerous Biblical passages say that the LORD is a rock. We immediately recognize that this is not to be taken literally, but rather that the authors are invoking a verbal image to say something about God. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are full of these literary devices that speak to the imagination. Consider also Jesus' use of parables which are essentially lengthy metaphors (e.g. the kingdom of God is like...). Likewise, in the realm of science verbal pictures help us understand reality and may end up becoming a dominant paradigm. Consider these examples: nature as book, world as mechanism, earth as spaceship, light as particle and so forth.

Obviously, redescription of reality through metaphorisation in different domains achieve different ends. Scientific knowledge (e.g. light is like a wave) and theological knowledge (e.g. Jesus is like a shepherd) pertain to different areas of reality. Yet it is evident that in both fields the imagination plays a formative role in gaining understanding.^[6] In our search for truth let us not go overboard by dispensing with the imagination. Still, there is a real possibility of the imagination hindering our grasp of reality instead of aiding it. "But," as Vanhoozer writes, "this no more disqualifies the imagination...than the existence of logical fallacies disqualifies reason."^[7] Let us thus walk the fine line between a dry, lifeless documentation of facts and an escapism that defies reality. May we imagine truthfully.

- [1] Daniel W. Drezner chronicles and comments on these phenomena in his recent *The Ideas Industry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).
- [2] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Imagination in Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie et al., 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 441. See also Genesis 8:21 and Romans 1:21.
- [3] *Ibid.*, 442.
- [4] Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*, Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 39.
- [5] Paul Ricoeur, "Creativity in Language: Word, Polysemy,

Metaphor," *Philosophy Today* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 110.

- [6] This is not to say that these domains are not related. Taking the imagination seriously, Alister E. McGrath for example maintains the credibility of a Christian take on the natural world, arguing for "an imaginative discernment of deeper levels of truth beauty, and goodness within the natural world, enabled by the informing *imaginarium* of the Christian tradition" (*Re-Imagining Nature: The Promise of a Christian Natural Theology* [Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2017], 182).
- [7] Vanhoozer, "Imagination in Theology," 443.

Bibliography

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- Kearney, Richard. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.
- McGrath, Alister. *Re-Imagining Nature: The Promise of a Christian Natural Theology*. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell: 2017.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Creativity in Language: Word, Polysemy, Metaphor." *Philosophy Today* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1973): 97–111.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "Imagination in Theology." In *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, edited by Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, and T. A. Noble, 441–443. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016.

2017 Student Essay Winners

All the winning essays, including Jelmer's, can be found online at :- www.cis.org.uk/students/essay-competition/

2nd Prize: Abigail Motley, Oxford, "In a world of 'alternative facts' what does it mean to search for 'truth', scientifically and theologically?"

= 3rd Prize: Daniel Nie, Queen Mary, London, "Can a scientist believe in miracles?"

= 3rd Prize: Tamsin Nicholson, Glasgow, "Can a Scientist Believe in Miracles, a Bayesian approach"

Disasters, Faith, and Resilience



13 - 15 April 2018, Westminster College, Cambridge

This weekend course explores the causes and effects of both natural and man-made disasters on those caught up in them, and the role that religious faith has on those affected.

Speakers: Dr Roger Abbott (Faraday Institute, Disasters and Survivor Testimonies)
Dr Amy Donovan (Cambridge, Volcanic Eruptions)
Pastor Luc Honorat (Haiti, Earthquake)
Dr Linda Mobula (USAID, Epidemics)
Dr Jonathan Moo (Whitworth University, Theology)
John Mosey (Lockerbie, Terrorism)
Rev Ken Taylor (New Orleans, Flood)
Prof Bob White, FRS (Cambridge, Natural and Unnatural Disasters)

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2017 Southern Conference Report

The CiS 2017 Southern Conference took place on Saturday 21st October at The King's Centre, Oxford. I attended as somewhat of a newcomer to CiS, though I have attended some previous conferences.

The theme this year was "The Penultimate Curiosity - how science swims in the slipstream of ultimate questions." This is both the title of a lovely book by Roger Wagner and Andrew Briggs (published last year by OUP), and also a phrase inviting general reflection on the interaction of science and spiritual questions. In the 'slipstream' metaphor, the idea is that human efforts to better understand the processes of the natural world - science - have tended to be helped forward by our curiosity about ultimate questions that we can never fully answer. This is similar to the help provided to one bird or cyclist by flying or riding in the slipstream of another. Wagner and Briggs make a case, from many strands of human history, that the type of seeking that may be called spiritual or religious creates, when it is pursued appropriately, the conditions in which science can flourish.

After an opening hymn and prayer, this connection was presented by Andrew Briggs. We were taken on a fascinating tour that started out from James Clerk Maxwell, then whizzed back to prehistory, then ancient Greece and on through late antiquity and High Medieval scholars, then on to the seventeenth century and finishing back in the present day. It was very helpful to bring in John Philoponus (6th century), a high-calibre scholar who makes the bridge from antiquity to the medieval period, and who was highly influential on Galileo. Indeed he should be more widely known since he proposed the

universal acceleration of heavier and lighter objects under gravity, an idea commonly attributed to Galileo, and an important improvement on Aristotle.

Another highlight for me was the story of what is now the Natural History Museum in Oxford. Henry Acland was the driving force behind the idea that the sciences were a central part of education and of university life, and that the university should invest in a building to house science research and teaching facilities. His vision, and the architecture of the building, are a fine example of religion, science and art in mutual respect and shared endeavour.

Andrew finished with some comments from contemporary scientists such as Rolf Heuer and Martin Rees. Both share the view that science and religion can respect each other,



but Rees has argued that the potential for development and change in the human race is so great that we should be

very cautious of saying anything at all about spiritual or theological matters---we may prove to be utterly wrong. Andrew Briggs offered his response: that there is nothing wrong with the fact that a relationship can develop and deepen over time; this is not a reason not to embark on the relationship in the first place.

The subsequent talks picked up on the word "curiosity" in various ways.

Pablo de Felipe introduced us to debates from the past and present. I found it helpful to be reminded that to do history correctly one has to invest time and effort to get a picture of what was going on at any given

time, and what sorts of issues people were thinking about. When Augustine writes against the “disease of curiosity”, for example, it does not follow that he is not interested in natural philosophy, since in fact he shows an impressive knowledge of it. Rather, he cautioned against lack of humility. It was also fascinating to see that the kinds of debates about astronomy that Augustine faced in the fourth century, and Philoponus in the sixth, were almost identical, as far as concerns the right use of Scripture, to modern-day concerns about evolutionary biology. Pablo de Felipe explained that



Dr Pablo de Felipe

already in the 6th century Philoponus urged that Scripture should not be interpreted as if it conformed to knowledge about astronomy that was

acquired later on; rather, it should be allowed to speak in its own terms.

Peter Jordan’s talk continued the theme of attitudes to curiosity. He began with a memorable image: Chinese tourists on a boat excursion, taking photographs of life in North Korea. It was an example of the fact that curiosity is not always an unqualified good. The tourist excursion had no interest in making any human connection; it was like a Victorian freak show, or its modern equivalent on television. This helps us to understand the mixed feelings about ‘curiositas’ that were expressed in pre-modern Christian history. Augustine’s caution was about an intemperate desire. Intemperance is involved when we desire something creaturely with an intensity only appropriate to God. But this implies that there can also be a temperate desire.

Peter Jordan explained that Francis Bacon is a crucial figure in the history of science,

because he showed how the pursuit of knowledge could be morally upright. Prideful knowledge was questionable, but the study of nature needn’t be like that. Bacon also drew on the ‘natural magic’ tradition, which was a precursor to what we now call empirical methods; he showed how to reform and rehabilitate this as an innocent interest in natural phenomena such as chemistry and magnetism, not an attempt to make pacts with demons.

All round, I found these talks were filling out my sense of the honourable history of the interaction of Christian discipleship and scientific knowledge. It strikes me that it was important that, before the human community received the blessing of scientific understanding, there was first this insistence on humility and the desire to use knowledge wisely and well. That caution has served us well.

The morning session finished with a wonderful lecture by Jennifer Wiseman, “A curious cosmos”. Drawing on a beautiful set of images from the Hubble space telescope and other sources, we sat back and were thrilled and awed at the grandness and splendour of the physical cosmos. We were also invited to think about some interesting questions. The universe has developed in such a way that life becomes possible. Does this imply purpose? This is not a science question, but it is a question which we may ask. Like other people, Christians have also been thinking about life on other planets. Thousands of planets have been detected. What does this have to teach us?

After lunch we had a brief meeting, followed by the Oliver Barclay Lecture winner 2017 Jonathan Foster – *Reigniting the chemistry between Science and Faith*. Dr Foster’s lecture displayed, in my opinion, exactly the right combination of serious discussion and

engaging images and turns of phrase. Chemistry is “the science of stuff” or “how to turn stuff into other stuff”.

He made the point very well that chemistry is not just applied physics, but rather develops its own toolbox for understanding molecules. Trying to tackle this by solving the Schrodinger equation is almost useless! The lecture also touched on issues around the nature of life and the origin of life. We need a theology that can react usefully to, not be threatened by, discoveries concerning origin of life processes.

The conference included, as usual, break-out sessions in which we discussed the themes of the conference. These were helpful to me, and, I judged, to others.

We finished with a gentle and thoughtful reflection from Roger Wagner. I encourage readers to view the images of his art work on the book of Job, available on the CiS website (<http://www.cis.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-Roger-Wagner-CiS-widescreen.pdf>). Roger said that a verse very much on his mind as he worked on the book with Andrew Briggs was Ecclesiastes 3.11: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” The verse hints at the idea that it is quite deliberate that we cannot find out everything. We are like Newton, on the shore before an ocean of truth. And like Francis Bacon, we must make love, compassion and charity the guiding principle of our curiosity. The ultimate end of our penultimate curiosity is a Person.

These notes are brief reactions; they do not do justice to the talks. These were uniformly high quality presentations.

Report by Prof Andrew Steane

LOCAL GROUP NEWS

*Details of all events
are also available
on the CiS App and
at [www.cis.org.uk/
events](http://www.cis.org.uk/events).*



BRISTOL

Bristol is having a series of lectures on “*Our Fragile Planet*”, during 2018/19. Venue for all lectures is Redland Church Hall, Redland Green Rd, Bristol BS6 7HE

Friday 19th Jan, at 7:30pm: “*Creation Care and the Kingdom of God*” speaker: Dr Hilary Marlow.

Friday 16th Mar, at 7:30pm: “*Caring for the Atmosphere*” speaker: Prof Euan Nisbet.

For more information please contact Tina Biggs (cmbiggs@googlemail.com)

CAMBRIDGE

For details of events in Cambridge please go to <http://www.faraday.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/>

CENTRAL SOUTH

Details are now listed under **Southampton**

DUNDEE

Monday 5th March at 5:15pm, “*Truth and Myth about Darwinism and Christianity*” Speaker: Prof John Hedley Brooke. Main Physics Lecture Theatre, University of St Andrews. Please contact christiansinsciencedundee@gmail.com for more information.

HARROW

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

IPSWICH

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

IRELAND

February 2018, (date TBC) at 7:30pm “*Artificial Intelligence*” Speaker: Prof. David Bell at the Hub, 22 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast.

March 2018, (date TBC) at 7:30pm “*Creation Care in the Old Testament: Genesis in Context*” Speaker: Rev. Dr. Ron Elsdon at the Hub, 22 Elmwood

Avenue, Belfast.

Details about the upcoming events in Ireland can be found at www.cis.org.uk/ireland or contact Dr Peter van der Burgt (peter.vandербургт@nuim.ie)

LEEDS

For further details of meetings, please contact John Lockwood at jglockwood1@me.com

LONDON

For more details about the group contact Benjamin Chang on cins.london@gmail.com

MANCHESTER

For more information, please contact the Secretary on sec.cismanchester@yahoo.co.uk

NORWICH

Monday 5th Mar, at 7:30pm: “*God in the Science Lab: curiosity, awe and the meaning of life.*”

Dr Ruth Bancewicz will base her talk on her new book exploring the relationship between science and faith - *God in the Lab: How science enhances faith*. Trinity Meeting Place, Essex St. NR2 2BJ

For details please contact sfnorfolk1@gmail.com

OXFORD

For more information, please contact Diana Briggs at diana.briggs@wolfson.oxon.org

READING

For information on Reading events please email Simon Peatman at simon.peatman@sky.com for more information.

SHEFFIELD

There is a monthly meeting for staff at Sheffield University, on the 1st Wednesday of every month at 11am, in “Coffee Revolution” in the Students’ Union. Please contact Dr Rhoda Hawkins on rhoda.hawkins@sheffield.ac.uk for more detail

SOUTHAMPTON

Saturday 3 Feb, 9:15-17:15: *Frontiers in Science and Society: Christian Perspectives*. A conference organised by CiS and Faraday Institute at the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton SO14 3ZH. Details and to register - goo.gl/u2Rxix For information on meetings, please email Peter May (petergeorgemay@gmail.com)

SOUTH WEST

Saturday 24th Feb, 9:30am to 4pm: ‘*Science: Exploring God’s Creation*’ A conference on the relationship between science and the Christian faith, with prestigious speakers discussing the issues from a variety of scientific disciplines. Venue: St Andrew’s Church, Plymouth, PL1 2AD.

To register please go to <https://www.cissouthwest.co.uk/dayconference>

For information on the Plymouth student group please contact KT at KT.van.santen@gmail.com For more information on events in the South West, please contact Prof David Huntley at dhuntley@plymouth.ac.uk

ST ANDREWS

Monday 5th March at 5:15pm, “*Truth and Myth about Darwinism and Christianity*” Speaker: Prof John Hedley Brooke. Main Physics Lecture Theatre, University of St Andrews. Undergraduate group 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). Postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

For more details please contact Joy Perkins at joyeperkins@googlemail.com

SURREY HEATH (formerly ‘Three Counties Borders’)

Friday 16th Feb, 10am to 4pm: “*Get Thinking - Explore the interaction of Science and Faith*” In conjunction with Lizzie Henderson and Stephanie Bryant, Faraday Institute, we are holding a one-day workshop for young adults and youth leaders. Venue: St Paul’s Church, Camberley, GU15 2AD. For details contact John Russell at chynoweth.jw@gmail.com

TYNESIDE & NORTHUMBERLAND

For information on Newcastle events, please contact Bill Clegg at bill.clegg@ncl.ac.uk

WEST MIDLANDS

For more information about events in the West Midlands, please contact Godfrey Armitage at g.n.armitage@warwick.ac.uk

WORCESTER

For more information about events in Worcester please contact Jim Smith on jgsmith29@aol.com

YORK

Inaugural Meeting - Saturday 20th Jan, at 12:30pm: “*Let there be Science: faith and science working together*” Speaker: Prof Tom McLeish at Holy Trinity Micklegate. After the lecture, there will be a light lunch and an opportunity to ask questions. For more information please email christiansinsciencenyork788@gmail.com