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# CHRISTIANS·IN·SCIENCE

## PréCiS

### Sept 2006

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### Science communications conference

Ask anyone whether 'society' believes in their values and wants to know the wonderful things they have to offer and you will get the same lament: "No one takes us seriously – no one listens". A gathering of science communicators in London in July started from the premise few people in the UK understand science and the technology it creates, nor do they have an interest in understanding it.

This gathering of full-time science communicators felt that this causes two problems. A scientifically illiterate community will not be able to forge ahead in a technological world, neither will its members be capable of conducting informed debates about the applications it creates.

There is nothing new in this dearth of interest – it has been well documented for decades. In 1982 the *Bodmer report* was the first to point to the lack of interest in science. This was extended in the 1993 White paper *Realising our potential* and further elaborated in the 1995 *Woldendale report*. The 2000 *Science and Society* report to the House of Lords went around the circle again.

The London 2006 meeting looked at the latest offering, a report this time from the Royal Society. This report asked scientists about their experience of science communication, and reading between the lines shows a number of reasons why it is not going well.

To start with, 74% of scientists claimed to have been involved in science communication in the previous year. If this veritable army of scientists is busy spreading the word about the wonder of science, why is the public so uninformed?

A few answers were clear. First, most of the instances recorded as science communication were presentations at conferences, where learned friends spout jargon to each other, and congratulate themselves for their superior insights. Secondly, 73% of them said they had no training in communication skills, so even when they are out there it is doubtful that anyone would understand or respond. Thirdly, a majority of scientists felt that their task was to tell people about science, rather

than engage in discussion. The underlying feeling is that if people know and understand science then they are bound to be excited about it and the technology it creates.

This however is not shown to be the case - a 1998 public engagement exercise looking at cloning discovered that the more people knew and understood the science of cloning the less they liked about it.

The 2006 Royal Society report talks of the need for dialogue, which it defines as "deliberative [i.e. over time] participatory engagement where the outcomes are used to inform decision-making".

The lessons are clear, even if hardly revolutionary. Anyone with a message needs to get out among the people they want to inspire, train their key communicators and genuinely listen as well as talk. I left the meeting, however, feeling that most were happy about getting out, were happy about training, but still had little idea how to listen.

*Pete Moore PhD - Science communicator, Bristol.*

### CiS London Conference 2006

#### ***Mind Machines and Majesty – The Boundaries of Humanity***

Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> Nov 2006, 9.30am – 5pm  
The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity,  
Vere Street, W.1

#### Speakers:

**Prof David Booth**; Psychology Dept., University of Birmingham; *"Minds, Mechanisms and Made Free: The scientific study of human life, in gratitude to the Creator"*

**Dr Graeme Finlay**; Dept. of Medical and Health Sciences, Auckland University, New Zealand; *"Genetics and humanity"*

**Dr Calum MacKellar**; Scottish Council on Human Bioethics; *"Embryonic, Fetal and Post-natal Animal Human Mixtures: An Ethical Discussion"*

**Prof Bill Newsome**; Neurobiology, Stanford University, California; *"Mechanism, Mind and Choice: On Neuroscience and Human Freedom"*

**Revd Dr John Searle, OBE**; co-author of "Life in our hands"; *"What does it mean to be made in the Image of God"*

**Booking form and flyer enclosed**

**ASA Annual Meeting  
Embedding Christian Values in  
Science & Technology**

Fri 28<sup>th</sup> – Mon 31<sup>st</sup> July, Calvin College, Michigan

As the joint CiS-ASA meeting will be held in Edinburgh next year, CiS was asked to send one representative to this year's ASA meeting, to entice people to come and join us next year. The ASA was established at around the same time as CiS, and there have always been good relations between the two organisations - many people subscribe to both journals! The last joint meeting was held in Cambridge in 1998, and was a success that will hopefully continue.

The ASA meeting was held on the leafy campus of Calvin College, Michigan. The days began and ended with plenary talks: Ethicist Karen Lebacqz spoke on Embryonic stem (ES) cells and human dignity, Rudolf Jaenisch introduced us to the use of 'altered nuclear transfer' to produce mouse ES cells, and Celia Deane Drummond helped us to think about Christian values and nature, the environment and scientific research. Congressman Vernon Ehlers, one of the few scientists in the US congress, spoke on Christian values and the use of science in public policy.

Francis Collins spoke to a packed room on Saturday night, expanding on the material in his book, *'The Language of God'*. He spoke about his own life in science, the privilege of working on the Human Genome Project, and the need for Christians to encourage young people to study science and not to make them fearful of different views on origins. After the talk he gate-crashed the 'students and early career scientists' social (he was very welcome!), and spent a long time with them, answering their questions.

All this was supplemented by a very full programme of parallel sessions, covering: Human stem cells; Ethics and public policy; Stewardship, conservation and land management on US campuses; Science and technology in service to the poor; Models for teaching of origins; Science in context – putting science in its place; Christian values in Biotechnology; and Christian values in Engineering, Technology and the Physical sciences.

I personally valued the opportunity to hear lots of good biology talks, get some new ideas on how to support science students, and meet many of the ASA members. See you next year?

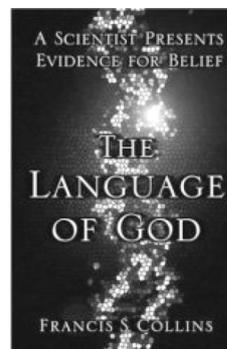
*Ruth Banciewicz, CiS Development Officer*

PS - The recording of Francis Collins' talk is available at <http://www.asa3.org/>

**Book Review**

*The Language of God: A Scientist Presents  
Evidence for Belief*

by Dr Francis S. Collins, Director of the NIH  
National Human Genome Research Institute



Simon & Schuster, UK edition, Sept 2006,  
304 pages, £17.99.

In his new book Francis Collins, who took over from James Watson as director of the Human Genome Project, sets out his own journey to faith, and how his Christian beliefs affect his views on science. In the first part he describes how as a student he realised that Christianity has an effect on people's lives, and that he had never examined the evidence for God, or even made his mind up about what he believed. He tackles the issues that he had to address as he discovered Christianity, such as moral law, suffering and miracles.

In the second part Dr Collins describes humankind's discoveries on the origins of the universe, the origin of life on earth, and the human genome. For him, all this serves to glorify God by revealing more of his incredible creation.

In the final part he discusses evolution, and the various positions that people take: atheism and agnosticism (science trumps faith), young earth creationism (faith trumps science), intelligent design (science needs divine help) and his own view 'BioLogos' (science and faith in harmony) - "Science is threatened by God; it is enhanced. God is not threatened by science; He made it all possible. So let us together seek to reclaim the solid ground of an intellectually and spiritually satisfying synthesis of *all* great truths"

This would be a great read for interested sixth formers, students, people in your church, and your non-Christian colleagues who wonder how you survive as a Christian in the scientific world!

*The UK edition will be available from CiS as soon as possible. Don't forget that books are available to CiS members at a 10% discount. See [cis.org.uk](http://cis.org.uk) for details.*

## Education

A number of initiatives have been developed following the CiS/Stapleford/ACT education conference, April 29<sup>th</sup> 2006. This report focuses on one such initiative in the area of “Global Citizenship”. Anne Fagg, a teacher from Herne Bay in Kent, has been working hard with her school. Anne describes the project below:

### **“Love your Neighbour – advice or command?”**

A group of 9 and 10 year old children sit watching a DVD of a rock group belting out one of their hit songs. Some of the kids join in with singing the words; others watch the lighting effects with the comment “Cool!” An ordinary scene perhaps – but this is an RE lesson for a Year 5 class in Herne CE Junior School, Kent. The lesson aim is to consider whether there are modern-day prophets, and the person under scrutiny is Bono, lead singer of U2. In particular, the kids have been discussing Bono’s assertion that “Love your neighbour is not good advice – it is a command.”

The class listened to Bono’s message that “An earlier generation made the amazing feat of space travel possible – you can do something even more remarkable by making life and trade fairer for Africa.” They felt this challenge was aimed at them, and their generation. The examination of this message, and what “Love your neighbour” really means, generated commitment to a project involving liaison with, and later fundraising for, Kissetika School in Uganda.

The link with Kissetika School, near Kampala, came through the conference organised by John Ling in April 2006. Christine Wright’s workshop introduced the work of Living Hope ministries in Kissetika. Her description of the school and its children highlighted the vital importance of the school’s work in educating children who might otherwise face limited future opportunities. Christine arranged for the Kissetika School to write diaries for their Herne counterparts, which would include photographs showing where they lived and worked. Many obstacles had to be overcome – not least the lack of electricity supply in Kissetika, which made it impossible for some of the photos to be developed – but eventually the diaries arrived from Africa onto the desks of the very excited children of class 5AF.

The children in Herne Junior School read about the African lives with fascination, humility and in some respects, disbelief. A video of life in Kissetika made the contrasts between the two schools very real. On learning about the deprivations and suffering which were all too often a part of the African children’s lives, a common reaction was “How can they all look so smart and work so hard when they have so little?” The Herne children made their own diaries and video in return. A non-uniform day raised £150 for Kissetika, and contributed 6 boxes of books for their library.

The link between Africa and a quiet, semi-rural Kent village school showed how important it is to make the concept of global citizenship real to children. The kids in Kissetika are not just statistics to Class AF – they are friends, who love football, athletics, and science just like the Herne kids do. In the words of Emily (age 9), “Loving your neighbour means making things fair for them, making change happen so they can get on properly with their lives”.

So did Class AF conclude that there were modern-day prophets? Certainly the children gained a Christian perspective of caring and commitment. Perhaps the summary of their learning needs to be left to Tony, who told me: “Those people Bono was talking about did an amazing thing when they sent men to the moon. But if we are Christians, we have got to do amazing things to change what’s wrong to what is right”.

*Anne Fagg (AF) is a teacher and Geography Co-ordinator at Herne Junior School, Kent. She qualified as a mature entrant to teaching three years ago, and is a staff governor at the school.*

Further details of this project will be placed on the education section of the website as well as recordings of some conference talks. If anyone is interested in setting up a project like this, or would like to directly support this work then, in the first instance, please contact John Ling on 01227 274395 or by email: [jjling@btinternet.com](mailto:jjling@btinternet.com)

In the next PreCiS, the Sheffield GP whose electric car is also a mobile advert for A Rocha and whose concern for the environment is derived from a distinctly Christian perspective.

*John Ling, Education Secretary, CiS.*

Joint CiS-American Scientific Affiliation  
Conference 2007

**New Frontiers in Science and Faith**

Pollock Halls, Edinburgh University,  
Fri 3<sup>rd</sup>-Sun 5<sup>th</sup> August 2007  
(Excursions on Thurs 2<sup>nd</sup>)

*Speakers include:*

Prof Simon Conway Morris  
Prof Sir John Houghton  
Prof Gareth Jones  
Prof Alister McGrath  
Prof Joe Perry  
Rev Dr John Polkinghorne  
Dr Jeff Schloss

Details at [www.cis.org.uk](http://www.cis.org.uk)

**Courses & Events**

**The London Institute for  
Contemporary Christianity**

**Faith at Work: career,  
lifestyle and Christian vocation.**

Sat 16<sup>th</sup> Sept, 10.00am – 3.30 pm, Manchester.

**Toolbox - A high intensity training programme  
to help you engage in today's world**

Mon 18<sup>th</sup> - Fri 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept, LiCC, London

**Can a Scientist Pray?**

John Polkinghorne  
Mon 27<sup>th</sup> Nov, LiCC, London.

More information at <http://www.licc.org.uk>

**The Faraday Institute for Science and  
Religion, Cambridge**

**Science, Faith and Society**

Fri 22<sup>nd</sup> - Sun 24<sup>th</sup> Sept

**Science and Religion for Church Leaders**

Tues 7<sup>th</sup> - Thurs 9<sup>th</sup> Nov

*Substantial discounts for students and postdocs.*

Go to <http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/faraday>  
for more details, or call or 01223 741281

**Manchester Bible School 2006**

**Maker of Heaven and Earth:  
God, Creation and the Scientific Enterprise.**

Sept 18<sup>th</sup> – Oct 16<sup>th</sup>

Mondays from 7.30 to 9.30 pm;  
Nazarene College, Dene Rd, Didsbury,  
Manchester

Lecturer: Professor David Watts

Further details: <http://www.network-ea.org.uk/index.php>

**Change of address? Graduated?  
New e-mail address?**

If any of your details have changed, please contact  
Tom Moffat at:

The Manse, Culross, Dunfermline, Fife,  
KY12 8JD. Tel. 01383 880 231

E-mail: [subscriptions@cis.org.uk](mailto:subscriptions@cis.org.uk)

**News from CiS local groups**

**Cambridge**

The CiS – Faraday Lecture Series in Science and  
Religion:

Dr Graeme Finlay

(Dept. of Medical and Health Sciences, Auckland  
University, New Zealand)

*'Human Genetics and the Image of God'*

Tuesday, 7th November, 5.30 p.m.

Queen's Lecture Theatre, Emmanuel College

For further details, and previous lectures go to  
<http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/cis/>

**Central South**

Next public lecture, in conjunction with  
Southampton University:

Prof Alister McGrath, Director of the Oxford  
Centre for Christian Apologetics

*'Dawkins' God - Genes,  
Memes and the meaning of Life'*

Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> November

e-mail [Rob.Heather@gmail.com](mailto:Rob.Heather@gmail.com) for details

**Oxford**

Professor Colin Humphreys, Goldsmiths'  
Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge  
University, will speak on *'Miracles'*

Friday, 24th November, 7.30-9.30pm

St Andrew's Church, Linton Road, Oxford.

Contact Diana Briggs to join the mailing list for  
future events ([diana.briggs@gmail.com](mailto:diana.briggs@gmail.com)).

**Ireland**

Sunday, 17<sup>th</sup> September, 3pm

First Presbyterian Church,  
41a Rosemary Street, Belfast

For further information on the Irish Branch and its  
activities please contact either Scott Peddie  
([s.peddie@pattersonpeddie.com](mailto:s.peddie@pattersonpeddie.com)) or Martin Brown  
([martin.oldcross@btinternet.com](mailto:martin.oldcross@btinternet.com)).

**Nottingham**

A discussion group meets on the first Tuesday of  
even numbered months. Next meeting is on  
Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> October, discussing the 'Soul'.

Contact Geoff Bagley on 0115 925 8801 or email  
[gbagley@ntlworld.com](mailto:gbagley@ntlworld.com) for more details.

**Submissions for next PréCiS**

Items for the next PréCiS should be submitted to  
Caroline Berry at [cberry@pncl.co.uk](mailto:cberry@pncl.co.uk) or  
4 Sackville Close, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 3QD