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CiS 2015 Southern Conference Report

“The Problem of the Suffering World”

The problem of suffering in the world is a recurring issue that individuals and humanity itself, has struggled with for aeons. Indeed, the classic treatment of the subject, presented in the book of Job, is one of the oldest parts of scripture. So, when we met in October for the annual CiS Southern Conference on this topic, there was a tacit acknowledgement that we wouldn't be fixing all of the world's problems in a day.

The first speaker of the day was Dr Vince Vitale, from the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics. Vince gave us a tour de force of the philosophical background to the topic. He also issued a warning: we must consider the very worst examples of evil in the world, if we are to have a credible response to suffering. Otherwise, we simply come across as being naive. Vince finished by introducing us to his own work, on what he calls 'non-identity theodicy'. The emphasis of this



Dr Vince Vitale, from the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics.

approach is on God's tolerance of evil in the world, to bring about the existence of the individual person's response. These new insights were intriguing and the talk as a whole was a comprehensive introduction that provided a great springboard for the rest of the day's agenda.

Dr Christopher Southgate then took us on to discuss the problem of animal suffering in the world. He pointed out that this aspect of suffering cannot be laid at the feet of human sinfulness, but is a part of the way the world works. Chris highlighted the issue of 'evolutionary evil', stating that the same processes of natural selection that give rise to beauty and diversity in the natural world also lead to animals suffering. He has come to the conclusion that the world is the way it is, because it must be. This 'only way' argument is persuasive but has admittedly been controversial since the publication of his book on the subject in 2008.

The final speaker of the morning was Bob White, Professor of Geophysics at Cambridge University, who examined the suffering that results from natural hazards such as earthquakes and volcanoes. Using examples from history and the modern day, Bob emphasized that the large majority of suffering can be attributed to human failings in managing these problems. Like the previous speaker, he mentioned that these natural processes are a part of why the earth is habitable and so, they are in some sense necessary. It is up to humans to use the wisdom gained from science to minimize the harm to humans that these natural events can cause.

As has become tradition for our meetings at the

King's Centre in Oxford, lunch was a simple bring-your-own affair. I personally enjoyed the picnic atmosphere and spent the time meeting up with new acquaintances from my local area (thanks to the Hereward family for sharing their food with me). The lunch and refreshment breaks during the day were a welcome time for catching up with folk that I only see once a year, at these gatherings. It also provided a great opportunity to pick up some bargains at the bookstall.



Professor John Wyatt is emeritus Professor of Neonatal Medicine at University College London

In the first of the afternoon talks Prof John Wyatt gave us his perspective on human suffering, from the view of a physician with over thirty years of treating children, in some cases suffering from truly horrific diseases. This talk brought home the reality of some of the very worst suffering in the world - that which Vince had earlier advised us is necessary to consider when talking about these problems. John candidly admitted that evolutionary explanations for evil were, for him, woefully insufficient explanation for what he has witnessed in his practice. I could not help but be reminded of Ivan Karamazov, famously railing against the injustice of suffering children. John went on to emphasise the role of Christian hope in tackling suffering, the role of Christians in standing beside those who suffer and ultimately witnessing to the final defeat of evil when God's Kingdom is fulfilled.

After a break for tea and coffee we headed into the first of back-to-back workshops led by each of the day's speakers. These were opportunities for delegates to delve deeper into the issues raised earlier in the day. In the two that I attended these sessions were simply

extended question times, with people taking it in turn to ask questions. Quite often, one finds that questions arise long after a talk has finished, so allowing discussion time at the end of the day provided a neat solution to this problem. I have often felt the need for more discussion time at conferences and the workshops were a much appreciated chance to get to the heart of the problem.

We finished with a closing reflection from Rev Dr Rodney Holder, who captured the essence of the day with the pastoral insight that you would expect from an ordained minister. The day ended as it began, with prayer and praise to the God who sustains us in all that we do. It seems there is an inevitable sense that we are simply 'chasing after the wind' in trying to fully understand the problem of evil. Nevertheless, we are at least getting better at weeding out the poorer explanations for suffering in the world, and surely finding out more about God in the process.

Nick Higgs - Plymouth

BREAKING NEWS

2016 Student Conference

“Science in society: science and faith in action”

Speakers include:

Dr Mike Clifford Dr Pete Moore
and Dr Clare Foster

20th February 2016

St Luke's Church Centre
Birmingham.

BOOKING IS OPEN!

Earlybird tickets (before 26th January 2016) £5, standard tickets £10.

For more information please contact emily@cis.org.uk

Or visit <http://www.cis.org.uk/conferences/student-2016/>



Interview – Mary Browett

Mary Browett has been our Executive Officer since the summer, so here is a chance to get **to know her a little better...**

You joined CiS in July as the Executive Officer ~ how are you enjoying it?

I'm enjoying it very much. It's the first the first time I've worked for a specifically Christian organisation. I met a number of CiS members at the recent Southern Conference and hope to meet more in the future. I'm particularly enjoying the interaction with Christians from so many different backgrounds.

I've always enjoyed a challenge, and as this is a completely new role within CiS I'm enjoying the varied aspects of the role.

What does your role as Executive Officer entail?

As it's a new role within CiS the nature of activity is still unfolding. The first six months have involved familiarising myself with the way CiS operates (conferences, website, finance and systems in general). During this time I've worked mainly with Diana, Emily and Hugh. For me, the year ahead will involve working with Diana in organising the Southern Conference, taking on more of the day to day Finance role, producing the quarterly PreCiS and other activities as prioritised by the CiS Committee. I will also be the first point of contact for a wide variety of enquiries from both CiS members and the public. For example, recently a secondary school asked if I could recommend a Christian who works in one of the science disciplines to address the school on God working through evolution.

We often talk with interviewees about life in the lab, but your background is a little different. So, how has your life as a Christian impacted the business environments in which you have worked?

That's an interesting question. I enjoy being who I am whether I'm at church, at work, or in any kind of social setting.

Every day is different and often I don't say very much about God, but conversation with colleagues often comes back to church, God, Jesus, or why I do or

don't behave in a particular way.

Over the years I've worked for some very good managers and other times for managers who were not so good, particularly in how they spoke to or treated their staff. One day a particular manager was asking me a series of questions – which I answered. When he had left, a work colleague asked me why I wasn't reacting to the rude way he had spoken. As I thought about it, all I could say was that I know Jesus loves him as much as Jesus loves me. This lead on to further discussion.

I don't get it all right by any means. I've made mistakes, but God is faithful. Often I've needed to ask Jesus for patience, strength, wisdom, or just to chat with Him about what's going on. It's wonderful to know that we are never alone.

When and how did you become a Christian?

I gave my life to Jesus at a Billy Graham Crusade in Sydney when I was 12 years old. He has been with me ever since. I love walking with Him into every situation of life, and discovering how He feels about each situation – sometimes very differently to my own initial feelings.

Those who have met you already will know you're an Australian ~ how did you come to be living in the UK?

Our move to the UK came about unexpectedly. My husband and I became aware that God wanted us to move to the UK. We had never thought of moving to the UK and we didn't know why God wanted us here, just that He did.



Mrs Mary Browett—CiS Executive Officer



So, we sold both our home and our business and arrived in the UK in 1993 with our three children. Our daughter was 11 and our two boys were 13 and 15 at the time.

As time went on God unfolded His purposes in bringing us here – that related in part to specific people He led us to be with, and in part to things He wanted to teach us.

There have been some truly wonderful times and there have been some incredibly difficult times. My husband was seriously ill for a time in 1998. The hospital staff thought for days that he may die. I knew however the future unfolded, Jesus was walking beside me. Psalm 23 has always been important to me but never more so than at that time.

I find it very moving to see God's faithfulness in every situation.

We lived firstly in Scotland, and for the past twelve years in the south west of England.

We do miss family in Australia. Skype has enabled some fabulous opportunities to catch up with family, often with just a brief "coffee by Skype". It's wonderful to be able to see each other and chat.

How do you view science in relation to God?

I've had a lifelong interest in Science. I find all aspects of God's creation absolutely fabulous. I love that He created this whole amazing world for us to enjoy with Him.

To me, every aspect of science reveals a small part of God's incredible creativity. I don't understand how some people can see all that has been created and not believe that there is a God.

My main interest in science is biology, but I find geology fascinating, or chemistry, or physics, or astronomy, or! Our eldest son teaches physics and astronomy and I love chatting with him about his work.

What are your interests outside of work?

My husband and I are very involved in our local church in Exeter. We have some very good friends here who we really enjoy spending time with. Devon is a beautiful area, there is always plenty to see and do as well.

I rather enjoy crafting - creating story books for my grandsons, designing printed t-shirts for them, or making greeting cards. I have three little grandsons who

I think are delightful. I would like to live closer to them, but two are in Scotland and one is in Sydney, Australia. Once again, Skype is fantastic – we can watch them run around or whatever they are up to. Sometimes we try to Skype over breakfast, when they are sitting still (momentarily). I also enjoy photography, cooking and gardening. My current garden would be the smallest I've had, but I still manage to pack in plenty of herbs amongst the flowers and I enjoy growing a few vegetables over summer.

What Christian book have you enjoyed most or found most helpful?

It might be a bit of a sideways answer, but the most helpful book I have read was an old family Bible. It was an old 4" thick leather bound book that had been in my father's family for 100 plus years. While I was at high school I had a rather busy life with studying, working part time and helping at my local church. I often didn't get a chance to read the Bible until everyone else was in bed. I had a conventional bible, but I loved to look at this old one. It was beautifully illustrated with stylish calligraphy and pictures. The best feature was that it had explanations beside passages throughout the bible. As a young person, I found those really helpful.

The book that has stirred my heart most in recent years is, "Faith like Potatoes" by Angus Buchan. I picked it by accident (or so I thought) at a charity shop last year. I was very moved as I read this book about an ordinary man, living today, who simply believes God, and the amazing things God is doing in and through him, – simply because he believes God and steps out with Him.

UPCOMING NEWS

2016 Northern Conference

Date and venue to be announced
early next year.

Watch the website for details -
www.cis.org.uk/conferences/

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 any more information on meetings please contact David Ely at aberdeenlocalgroup@yahoo.co.uk.

ABERGAVENNY

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 events in Birmingham please e-mail cis@guild.bham.ac.uk or join the Birmingham CiS Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/ciscbirmingham.

BRISTOL

Friday 22 Jan 2016 is the start of the Mind 2016 series. Prof Alasdair Coles will speak on "What can neuroscience tell us about faith?" 7:30pm at the Tyndale Baptist Church.

Friday 18 March 2016 Prof Glynn Harrison will speak on "Ego Trip: does the self-esteem movement promote, or impede, human flourishing?" 7:30pm at the Alma Church.

For details on the remaining talks in the Mind series please see <http://www.cis.org.uk/groups/bristol/> or contact Tina Biggs for more information (cmbbiggs@googlemail.com)

CAMBRIDGE

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

CENTRAL SOUTH

CiS Central South is a group aimed at people in and around the Southampton area who are interested in discussing the relationship between science and Christianity. 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

February 8, 2016 Professor Eleonore Stump, Robert J. Henle Professor of Philosophy, Saint Louis University will speak on 'Natural Law, Metaphysics, and God as Creator'. Starting at 5:15 pm Location: To be confirmed

April 11, 2016 Dr Jennifer Wiseman, Senior Physicist, at

Goddard Space Flight Centre will speak on 'Universe of Wonder, Universe of Life'. Starting at 5:15 pm Location: Physics Department, Lecture Theatre A, St Andrews, KY16 9SS.

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

DURHAM

Please 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

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

LEEDS

Wednesday February 10, 2016 - Rev Dr Roger Abbott, Cambridge University, will speak on "The Absurdity of Natural Disasters: a scientific and theological perspective". Starting at 8pm, South Parade Baptist Church, Kirkstall Lane, Leeds, LS6 3LF.

Further details of meetings please contact John Lockwood at jglockwood1@me.com

LIVERPOOL

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

LONDON

For more details about the group contact Benjamin Chang on cins.london@gmail.com, and visit the website <http://cislondon.org/>

MANCHESTER

Thursday 10th March 2016 – Prof. David Watts, Professor of Biomaterials Science, University of Manchester will speak on “Can a scientist believe in heaven and angels?” Starts at 6pm.

Thursday 12th May 2016 - Prof. Peter Budd, Professor of Polymer Chemistry, University of Manchester will speak on “Evolution and Creation What’s all the fuss about?” Starts at 6pm.

The group meet in the Common Room, St. Peter’s House, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9GH.

For more information please contact Alma Budd, on ec.cismanchester@yahoo.co.uk.

NORWICH

Tuesday 8th March 2016 - Dr Denis Alexander, Faraday Institute, Cambridge will speak on “Evolution and Adam: Reality, Myth and Symbolism”. Starting at 7pm at Norwich Anglican Cathedral

Monday 16th May - Professor Russell FRS Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge will speak on “Nanoscience: a new aspect of God’s creation”. Starting at 7:30pm at Trinity Meeting Place, Holy Trinity Church, Essex St, Norwich NR2 2BJ.

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 meet bimonthly in central Reading. Contact Dave Law for details on dave@readingatwork.org.

ROYAL HOLLOWAY

For more information about the Royal Holloway group 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 their mailing list please e-mail shefuni.cisc@gmail.com or join their Facebook group www.facebook.com/groups/shefuni.cisc/

SOUTH WEST

Friday 18th March at 7:30pm. 'Science and Faith: a marriage made in heaven.' Speaker: Prof. John Spicer, Professor of Marine Zoology, Plymouth University.

For more info on events in the South West, please contact Prof. David Huntley (dhuntley@plymouth.ac.uk).

ST ANDREWS

8 February 2016 – Professor Eleonore Stump, Robert J. Henle Professor of Philosophy, Saint Louis University will speak on “Natural Law, Metaphysics, and God as Creator”. Starting at 5:15 pm Location – TBC.

11 April 2016 - Dr Jennifer Wiseman Senior Physicist, NASA Goddard Space Flight Centre will speak on “Universe of Wonder, Universe of Life”. Starting at 5:15 pm in the Physics Department, Lecture Theatre A, St Andrews.

For more info about the undergraduate group please contact Dr Andrew Torrance (abt3@stinformation.andrews.ac.uk), Joshua Sharp (jas29@st-andrews.ac.uk) or Laura McCullagh (lsm4@st-andrews.ac.uk). For the postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

Tuesday, April 12, 2016 - Professor Andrew Sims will be speaking on - 'Is Faith Delusion? Why Religion is good for your Health.' Doors open at 6 pm to start at 7pm. Christ Church, 861-863, Brighton Road, Purley, CR8 2BN.

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. 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

For information on The West Midlands Group please contact Godfrey Armitage at g.n.armitage@warwick.ac.uk.

WORCESTER

19th January 2016 – “The Changing Debate Between Science and Religion”. Speaker: Professor John Hedley Brooke. Starting at 8pm, Lindisfarne House, 4 Barbourne Terrace, Worcester, WR1 3JS.

23rd February 2016 – “Marriage and Cohabitation Compared”. Speaker: Philippa Taylor. Starting at 8pm, Lindisfarne House, 4 Barbourne Terrace, Worcester, WR1 3JS.

For more info on events please contact Jim Smith on jgsmith29@aol.com.