

PréCis

Breaking News



Our new Development Officer, Stephanie Bevan, will start 2nd January 2020. To contact Steph please email do@cis.org.uk



Cara Parrett (2019 Oliver Barclay winner) and Prof Paul Ewart at Southern Conference

CiS Northern Conference

Will be in
Manchester

**Saturday 2nd
May, 2020**

All other details are currently being finalised and will be available on the CiS website at a later time.

2019 Southern Conference Report

This conference was themed on “Future challenges for Christians in the sciences” and encompassed the cognitive science of religion (as purporting to “explain away” religion in evolutionary terms), the ethical dilemmas around genetics, two lectures on how to motivate behaviour change to protect the climate, and the value of science as having “sufficient truth”.

The conference was opened by Paul Ewart, the CiS Chairman Designate, and a tribute was given by Godfrey Armitage to Miranda Harris and Chris and Susannah Naylor of A Rocha who had recently been killed in an accident in Africa, which also seriously

injured Miranda's husband, Peter.

This was followed by a time of worship, singing star-themed hymns, accompanied by Roger Tucker on the piano and an inspiring slideshow of deep space photographs on the overhead screen. There was a prayer by the poet Jenny Lunn, praying that we might tread God's earth lightly and that "we might live simply that all may simply live".

The first speaker was Neil Messer, Professor of Theology at Winchester University. Neil gave a wide ranging and helpfully objective and analytical overview of the science of cognitive religion, splitting it into a symmetric range of five types according to the relative strength of the scientific and "Christian tradition" voices. He recommended an attitude of "faith seeking understanding" – the view that the scientific study of religion adds value to our understanding of our own faith, outlining three main areas - the cognitive science of religion, in which humans are thought to have a hypersensitivity to agency; the evolutionary approach in which religion is an adaptation as it enforces co-operative behaviour, and neuroscientific models and mechanisms for understanding religious experiences. Neil argued that religion should be viewed as a natural phenomenon needing explanation, in which the idea of a real supernatural God should not be ruled out at the outset.

The next lecture was by Keith Fox, Professor of Biochemistry of Southampton University, on "Challenges of recent development in genome modification". Keith gave an overview of

the different gene editing tools used in recent years, and the recent experiments made by Chinese scientists to edit the MYBPC3 gene in human embryos and the real shock and revulsion this caused in the scientific community across the world. Keith listed the criteria by which genetic advances are now evaluated against, and argued that we could think of this new capability as an extension of Jesus' mandate to heal. Keith argued that when deciding on the ethics of a particular intervention, we should not rely on our emotional "Yuk!" or "Wow" reaction, but have



Prof Keith Fox

objective standards on considering risk and whether it is necessary, and to avoid simple hard and fast rules but to balance the greater good. Keith reminded us of public reaction to heart transplants when they were first introduced.

Keith then expounded the idea that "imperfection" should not be edited out but celebrated as part of human diversity. Keith challenged the view that high IQ was associated with high moral

value and suggested instead that excellence was about what we do with what we have. Keith ended by citing different voices in this debate, contrasting Dan McArthur's view that genetic manipulation was "just like vaccination", with the challenging view from cystic fibrosis sufferer Sandy Sufian that she would not have wanted her cystic fibrosis removed as there were "some great things" that came with her illness – a view that could not be espoused by a non-sufferer.

The third lecture, by Dr Hilary Marlow, was on Christian Faith and the Environment. She stressed the urgency that the environmental crisis needs response now, and quoted the top two interventions requested by the campaign community – "turn off light bulbs" but also that "faith groups must remind us of our duty to the planet" and the view by Gus Speth that the top ecological problems are selfishness, greed and apathy and that what is needed is a spiritual and cultural evolution. Hilary then reminded us of key verses and concepts in the Bible, especially the idea that creation is crying out against the injustice meted out by humans and is lamenting human sin. Hilary looked at the idea of completion and that Christians are

called to bring about real change as we bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth, and called us to



Dr Hilary Marlow

take action in our own lifestyle, be encouraged by the multiplier effect and the effect of leading by example, and the necessity to engage with complexity.

The AGM was then held, where we were encouraged to "make more noise" in our local churches by making ourselves available as speakers to challenge both the church and the secular science community and to develop a partnership in mission with the churches. We were urged to invite two people each to become CiS members in order to triple our membership and help us become financially self-sustaining.

Then followed the Oliver Barclay lecture by Dr Cara Parrett, on challenges in community based conservation. She told us about her year as a marine biologist in the Maldives. She cited frustrations which were affecting her own motivation, and the need for guidance on how to tackle the environmental complacency she perceived in the local community. Cara then led us through a helpful reflection that conservationists (like other environmental campaigners) are like evangelists; just as evangelists can expect frustrations, but should still persevere and gain encouragement from Jesus of the eternal value of their work, so too can conservationists be assured of the high value in what they do and gain spiritual encouragement to persevere in the face of apparent failure – taking our anxiety, despair and sense of bereavement to God, but taking encouragement in God's character and from our predecessors – Dietrich

Bonhoeffer's "Don't give up until the world actually ends" and that our labour will not be in vain.

The final lecture was by Professor John Wood and Prof Berry Billingsley, on "Trust in Science", the long title being "Big Questions, uncritical scientism, sufficient truth and the power and limitations of science". Professor Wood started by showing a chart of the most trusted professions from a recent survey, nurses being trusted the most. He discoursed on the way that science does not deal in certainties but often holds opposing ideas in tension, with vast areas which are still unknown and introduced the very helpful idea of "sufficient truth".

Berry Billingsley then developed further the idea of "sufficient truth" – the notion that although scientific truth is not absolute and universal, that nevertheless scientists can know enough to be able to make reasonably confident predictions which are helpful to humanity. Berry also set out the ideas of scientific thinking, analytical tools, experimental methods and universal principles as being particularly helpful, and that we can have epistemic insight which is transferable to many non-technical issues.

Professor Wood then gave an overview of the exciting current initiatives around Open Science, and the importance of developing a renaissance mind and involving everyone in collecting and evaluating data. He also gave an account of the Idea Square at CERN which is a creative and emotionally supportive space for children to share

ideas. He ended with the idea that fiction could be seen as a daring work to probe behind our settlements and challenged us with the thought that Jesus spoke in parables.

The ensuing panel discussion focused on a number of areas from the talks including the environment: the first question asking whether the climate change campaigners were verging on legalism and using a "guilt trip" emotional manipulation. The panel agreed that our motives needed to flow from the Christian story of both sin and



Speaker panel Q&A session

hope, and an emphasis on integrity when making promises – not to panic but to be clear on our duty and on what measures make sense. On veganism, the panel agreed that meat consumption needs to decrease and that meat is too cheap compared to vegetables, but that reducing food miles could have a similarly important impact.

We closed with the hymn "Be Thou my Vision".

By Dr Christina Biggs

Thank you to Andrew Halestrap - CiS Committee Chair

Prof Andrew Halestrap has been Chairman of Christians in Science for the past six years and has given the organization wise and gracious leadership during that time. Andrew is an internationally respected and highly-cited scientist and continues his important work as Emeritus Prof of Biochemistry at the University of Bristol.

When he took up the post as Chairman he recognised the importance to CiS of developing its activity amongst university students, especially those studying science. He drove the project to obtain and lead a major grant from the Templeton



Prof Andrew Halestrap

Religion Trust to work in collaboration with UCCF to establish student groups in UK universities through the work of our Development Officers (DO).

In spite of, what turned out to be, a disappointing response from UCCF in practice, Andrew's enthusiasm and energy at "launch events" organized by the DOs was always evident and well-received. His talks on "Science as a Christian vocation" were an encouragement to many and his leaflet on the topic was also part of his efforts to update and extend the series of such CiS pamphlets as a resource for students, local groups, churches and anyone interested! Andrew's vision for work with students is vital not only to extend the support of CiS to Christian students in Science, where it will enable and encourage their witness in colleges and universities, but also to establish the next generation of CiS members and help to equip them for ministry in their future workplaces and church communities.

As Chairman, Andrew has led by example and we have all benefited from his gentle, insightful and diplomatic guidance. He continues to serve on the Executive and Trustee committees – we are grateful for his ongoing commitment and to have the benefit of his wisdom and experience.

Thank you to Fran Armitage - CiS Membership Secretary

Fran Armitage has been the CiS Membership Secretary for many, many years and will start to progressively hand over the role to Dr David Scott during January.

Fran came from an administration background and brought many useful skills to the position. In her time with us, she has overseen a number of upgrades to our procedures, always ensuring we comply with regulations, and has been meticulous keeping in touch with everyone.

Once in a while you may have seen Fran's name pop up here or there, but she has consistently and tirelessly worked in the background, ensuring the many facets of the position were fulfilled. A very small selection includes sending a welcome pack to every new member, updating our database with membership changes, reports for the regular committee meetings and the essentials like reminding us when our subs are due. We are currently doing a major overhaul to automate many functions of our database, but these processes Fran has manually done every year, including going through the bank statements to account for each subscription, or donation and whether the donations were Gift Aided. (That process has been no mean feat in itself.) At key times in members' lives, when things inevitably change, she has been a wise and sensitive voice.

Fran worked with sister organisations around the globe, gathering information on which members would like to receive the Science and Christian Belief journal, invoicing and seeing to their delivery.

We are very grateful for all Fran has done for CiS. (As mentioned, the information above is a very small snap shot of what Fran has regularly accomplished.)



Mrs Fran Armitage

We will miss her and wish her well for the future.

Winning Student Essay 2019

By Isaac Chidlow

MPhys in Physics, The University of Bath

How can we wisely use the Bible and modern science to enhance our faith and studies?

Modern science and biblical faith represent two major cultural forces in the world today. Their dialogue internally and indeed with other disciplines such as philosophy, represent an important intersection for academics and laypersons alike.

A helpful intellectual framework for mapping this relationship is given by Ian Barbour. He envisions a dialogue that leads to an enhanced mutual understanding^[1]. This approach, although limited, offers an important foundation when taken in conjunction with the philosopher Mary Midgley's 'multiple maps' approach to perceiving the fullness of a complex reality^[2]. This employs the helpful analogy of a 'huge aquarium' with each discipline only possessing a small window that stresses the importance of multiple sources of truth and knowledge. With this in place, an engagement between Biblical faith and modern science can occur by exploring each as a map that helps to explain reality. The concept of a map will be used as a sustained dialogue medium to discern conceptual and methodological similarities between the two. This will allow opportunities to explore the possibility for enhancement.

Firstly, a map as a description of a greater reality. Critical realism, as defined by N.T. Wright, affirms both 'the reality of the thing known, as something other than the knower', while also acknowledging the only access we have to this reality is via an 'appropriate dialogue or conversation between the knower and the thing known'^[3].



Isaac Chidlow and Prof Paul Ewart

A map is required to engage with this reality and is the result of probing from different disciplines. The map of modern science, although possessing some variance in methodology, probes uncharted waters with experimentation and analysis. Similarly the map of faith describes how the Christian positions themselves in the historical events of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth and onwards to the New Jerusalem. Both the task of theology and science is to make sense of reality and create a big picture that allows humans to orient themselves in the world^[4]. A synthesis of these maps allows the believer to greater understand God's work of creation, this in turn leads to worship and a renewed vigour to investigate the natural world. This is an example of how the reading of multiple maps leads to an enriched vision of reality that neither could enlighten independently.

Another theme is that of a map as depicting simplicity. The beginner who has not come across contours before will not understand how a two-dimensional set of lines represents a mountain. Comparably both theology and science rely on an agreed set of simplifications to expound concepts and construct theories. An example in science is that of solving the Schrödinger equation for the particle in a box example. It represents one of the few scenarios where an exact solution can be found and is

therefore used as a simplification of much more complex systems to gain a partial understanding. A comment on simplicity in theology can be found in the area of Biblical interpretation. John Calvin suggested the Bible should be interpreted in light of the fact that 'revelation presents a scaled-down or accommodated version of God to us, in order to meet our limited abilities'^[5]. Both science and theology rely on simplifications to allow the reality about God or a phenomenon to be probed initially. However, quantum theory and the doctrine of the Trinity represent the limitations of such a methodology. Or to express in terms of maps, there is no real comparison between the contours of Scafell Pike on a map and the full-bodied experience of climbing its steps and enjoying the vista. A reading of both maps encourages the believer to strive for simplicity in the explanation of their faith to others, whilst always trying to expand their vision of a God beyond understanding.

Lastly, a map as an instrument for discovery. Just as explorers of the past such as Columbus and Magellan wanted to expand the edges of the map of the known world; scientists today want to work on the frontiers of science to propose new theories and explain new phenomena. The motivation to explore these edges and indeed to do science in the first place has been argued persuasively by Peter Harrison; he notes that the first scientists expected to find order in the universe in light of their belief in a creator God^[6]. This is an example of where a reading of the map of faith was able to shed light on an undiscovered region of the map of science. Furthermore, science often comes across questions that its own map and methodology are unable to shed light upon. This is often demonstrated at the beginning or end of life where ethical and religious maps are needed to provide a truly human

and well-rounded response^[7]. In this case, the theme of discovery carries with it responsibility as well as wonder at what is learned.

Therefore both the map of the Bible and the map of modern science allow a path to be walked that both illuminates and enhances the journey of a Christian believer. A dialogue of enrichment encourages a renewed engagement with both science and the Bible to fulfil Paul's vision of 'being transformed by the renewing of your mind'^[8]. This demands the use of the mind as one of the ways in which the reality of Christ changes the Christian's vision of reality. Moreover, just as maps often have keys to guide the user in how to interpret the symbols used, the resources available today are greater now than in any other age to equip the persevering cartographer in whatever discipline they are so inclined.

References

- 1) Barbour, I.G. (1966), *Issues in Science and Religion* (1st Edition), Prentice-Hall.
- 2) Midgley, M. (2011), *The Myths We Live By* (1st Edition), Routledge.
- 3) Wright, N.T. (1992), *The New Testament and the People of God* (1st Edition), p 35, SPCK.
- 4) McGrath, A. (2015), *Inventing the Universe: Why we can't stop talking about science, faith and God* (1st Edition), Hodder and Stoughton.
- 5) McGrath, A. (2010), *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* (2nd Edition), Wiley-Blackwell.
- 6) Harrison, P. (2017), *The Territories of Science and Religion* (1st Edition), University of Chicago Press.
- 7) Wyatt, J. (2009), *Matters of Life and Death* (2nd Edition), IVP.
- 8) Romans 12:2

LOCAL GROUP NEWS

BRISTOL

For more information, including locations, please contact Christina Biggs - cmbbiggs@gmail.com
Discussion groups – first Friday of every month.

Friday January 31st, 7pm:

Science, creativity and faith in the classroom

Speaker: Lizzie Henderson. Venue: Redland Church Hall, Redland Green Rd, Bristol BS6 7HE

Friday March 20th , 7pm: *Genes, free will and human identity – are humans just gene machines and do scientists have the right to shape them?*
Speaker: Professor Keith Fox. Venue: Redland Church Hall, Redland Green Rd, Bristol BS6 7HE

CAMBRIDGE

For details of events in Cambridge please go to www.faraday-institute.org/

DUNDEE

For more details on Dundee events please contact christiansinsciencedundee@gmail.com

EDINBURGH

For more information please email cisedinburgh3@gmail.com

HARROW

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

HUDDERSFIELD –students

For details please contact Omololu Fagunwa on fagunwaomololu@yahoo.com.

IPSWICH

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

IRELAND

Please contact Dr Neville Cobbe - neville.cobbe@yahoo.co.uk for more information.

LONDON

For more details about the London group please email cins.london@gmail.com

MANCHESTER

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

NORWICH

Please contact sfnorfolk1@gmail.com for more details.

OXFORD

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

OXFORD - Students

For details please contact Matthew Patterson - matthew.patterson@physics.ox.ac.uk

READING

For information on Reading events please email Dave Law at cisreading@yahoo.com

SHEFFIELD

1st Wednesday of every month at 11am, there is a monthly meeting in Jessops Café for staff at Sheffield University. For more details please email rhoda.hawkins@sheffield.ac.uk for more detail.

Details of all events are also available on the CiS App and at www.cis.org.uk/events.

If you wish to start a Local Group in your area, please get in touch with Stephanie, our Development Officer, at do@cis.org.uk



SHEFFIELD - Students

For details please contact Rory McBride - rmcbride1@sheffield.ac.uk

SOUTH WEST

For more information on events please email cissouthwest@gmail.com

SOUTHAMPTON

For information about the group please email Peter May (southampton@cis.org.uk)

ST ANDREWS

Monday 16th March, 5.15pm: *Climate Change: Facts, Fictions, and our Faith* Speaker: Prof Katharine Hayhoe. Location: Main Physics Lecture Theatre, University of St Andrews.

For more information about the undergraduate group, please contact Dr Andrew Torrance (abt3@st-andrews.ac.uk). For more information about the postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

For information please contact Joy Perkins at joyeperkins@googlemail.com

SURREY HEATH

For more details please 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 please contact Godfrey Armitage on g.n.armitage@warwick.ac.uk

WORCESTER

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

YORK

For more information please email christiansinsciencyork788@gmail.com