

S&CB EDITORIAL - Following the Science

I am writing this Editorial in the twenty third week since restrictions were imposed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Life has changed a lot in the intervening weeks as various restrictions have been imposed or later relaxed, with apparently conflicting or contradictory pieces of advice or legislation at different times. We are told that we are 'following the science' and it is heartening to hear that, at least in theory, governments recognise the importance of scientific evidence and knowledge when making decisions and preparing responses to the crisis. But what do they mean by 'the' science? They talk as if there is a single subject with one absolute authority, whereas of course we know that there are wide range of scientific disciplines, each composed of individual scientists with their own special expertise (as well as human prejudices). Virologists, immunologists, epidemiologists, biochemists, pharmacologists, psychologists and many other disciplines explore the virus's replication, its mode of transmission and our body's responses to infection, as well as the mental, social and economic consequences of any restrictions. In all this we have had to remember that science is only part of the picture and that its theories, predictions and conclusions are provisional, based on the best explanation of available evidence and knowledge. At the start of the pandemic people made assumptions about how the virus would spread, based on knowledge from other infections, such as influenza. Some of these subsequently proved to be inadequate or inappropriate and the advice changed accordingly. Does that mean that science is unreliable and can't be trusted or that we should make scape-goats of scientists who change their minds? No! In science there is no shame in changing one's mind in the light of new knowledge, for scientific theories are self-correcting. As Christians we of all people should be willing to acknowledge that we only see through a glass darkly. U-turns in science are not wrong if they are driven by new discoveries. Moreover, determining what exactly 'the science' says is only one part of the equation. Deciding how to respond presents different challenges for policymakers as they 'follow' the science on issues like opening offices or public spaces, wearing masks or sending children back to school. We should be grateful that we live in a world where science is possible; in which science does work and gives reliable answers. Although scientists may be fallible, science itself can be trusted. As Christians, we know that God has created a good world that is comprehensible, and in which science is possible. We are called to use science to care for his good creation and to play our part in taming the chaos that comes from disease. The pandemic has forced us to realise that we are not totally in control of nature. Science has achieved some remarkable successes, but its limitations have been exposed during this crisis. That should not drive us to despair, but compel us use our limited, but God-given powers to this combat disease. As scientists we must work for better

understanding of all aspects of pandemics and pray for all scientists who are working to combat this disease. Science will play a crucial role in defeating the virus, but we will also need Christian care and compassion to cope with the devastation and the personal tragedies that it has produced. Both hard science and Christian values must together play their part in combatting this pandemic and its consequences.

Those who look at the small print in the journal cover pages will realise that AlphaGraphics (working as Pasternoster Press) have decided to withdraw from publishing academic journals. So, along with some other theology journals, we are looking for a new publisher, though in the meantime this issue has been produced independently. S&CB is sponsored by Christians in Science and the Victoria Institute and their members automatically receive the journal. However, the previous publishers have not been able to give us their list of the journal's other personal and corporate subscribers. We are seeking to restore this, but please do pass information about Science & Christian Belief to libraries and other organisation, as we seek to restore our database of subscribers.

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