



# PréCiS

## Winter 2021

Bringing Christian faith and science together

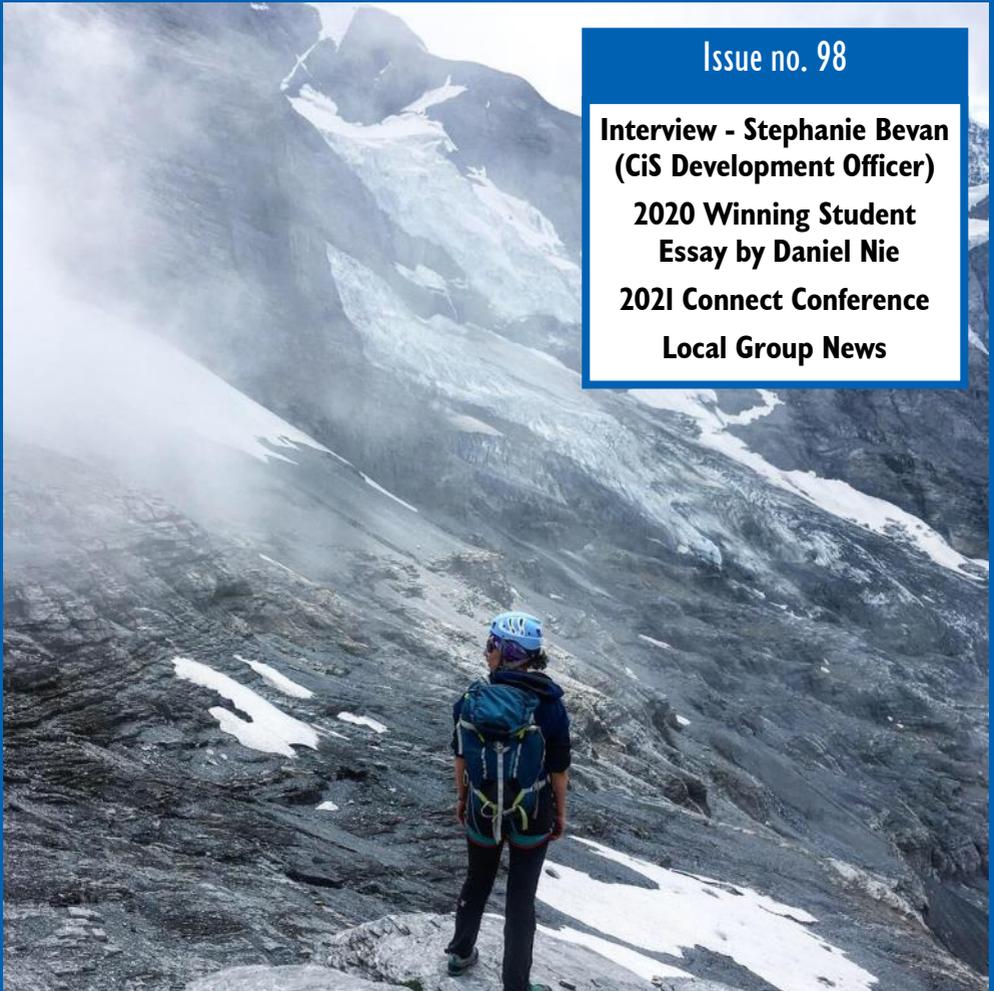
Issue no. 98

**Interview - Stephanie Bevan  
(CiS Development Officer)**

**2020 Winning Student  
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**2021 Connect Conference**

**Local Group News**





University where I studied Physics with Music, having developed an interest in acoustics. At University, I loved the range of opportunities to try new things, particular outdoor sports such as whitewater kayaking, climbing and mountain biking. It was the perfect way to get out and explore God's creation.

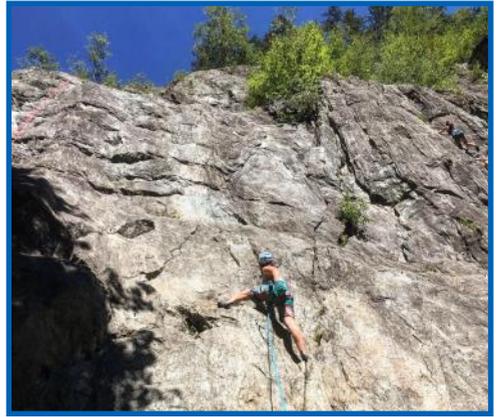
*'Come, let us climb God's Mountain. He'll show us the way he works, so that we can live the way we're made.'* Isaiah 2:3

## Interview with Stephanie Bevan, CiS Development Officer.

At the beginning of January 2020, we welcomed Steph onto the staff team of CiS to undertake the role of Development Officer. What we thought would be the plan for the year ahead turned out very differently. Due to C-19 and lockdowns, it has been a very "unusual" year indeed with cancelling face to face events and holding meetings online instead. Steph has helped us set up our own CiS YouTube Channel and assisted many of the local groups having their talks online as well. But firstly, a little bit about Steph:-

### What you've been doing until now?

I grew up in South London and was brought up in a vibrant and lively church community. I was incredibly lucky that my parents encouraged me to challenge myself in everything I do which has always made me curious about others' experiences and beliefs. I became a Christian aged 14, and years later I went to Cardiff



I was unsure what I wanted to do at the end of my degree, besides a love of working with people. I decided to take a year out to work at Christian Youth Enterprises in Chichester as an Outdoor Activity instructor. After an incredible year spent celebrating God in the outdoors, I chose to train to be a Physics teacher, to pass on my enthusiasm for science. I worked as a teacher in London before marrying my husband, Will and moving back to Cardiff where we had met. I then began working part-time for the Institute of Physics on the *Improving Gender Balance* project, an initiative to get more diversity in areas where men or women are under-represented.

## What has your science-faith journey looked like?

When I was a teenager, I thought that a 'good Christian' must take religious studies at school all the way through to A Level. I had no special interest in science (partly because my mother was a physics teacher, and I was rebelling as all teenagers do!) but I was very good at maths. On the day I had to choose my A Level Options, I suddenly felt very disheartened by my ability to write articulate essays in religious studies, so



reluctantly changed my option to physics at the last minute. I know now that God was teaching me that a pursuit of science can be just as important for being a 'good Christian' as religious studies.

## How do you view science in relation to God?

One of my favourite quotes is from Galileo '*Mathematics is the language in which God has written the Universe.*' I completely subscribe to this, that science provides an insight into the mind and works of our Creator. The more I find out about science, the more wonder and awe I

am in. Just because we are able to provide an explanation about how God has done something, does nothing to explain him away.

## Which field of science interests you and why? What sparked this interest?

I have always been a passionate musician. When I started to find out how and why different instruments produced different sounds and also the neuroscience around how our brain responds to music I was completely blown away. Our anatomy and brain respond to resonance in our ear canal to dampen the perceived sound, without which, certain frequencies would be far too loud. The frequencies to produce an octave are perfect harmonics of each other (2:1 ratio, e.g. 440Hz and 880Hz). This and many more examples make me think that God made us and the world intentionally with music in mind. Science is often misunderstood to be very rigid and unimaginative but finding out more about our ability to create and the need for it in the development of science is something that really needs to be recognised and valued more.

## What has your role as the DO involved over the last 12 months?

As you can imagine, the last year has not quite been what I expected but I have enjoyed adapting to the new challenges faced over the past few months. My first big task was to get the student conference organised, which was all ready to go until (with a week's notice) lockdown came into place. At this point, no one

had even heard of zoom, but I didn't want to lose the opportunity to connect with our student members. With a week to go, we managed to arrange the event to be online for the first time, and even though I feel it was far from perfect, we were able to reach a much wider audience as a result. It has been exciting to develop our online presence and support our local groups in delivering online events. Once we can meet in person again (for which I cannot wait!) I hope that we are able to maintain a strong online platform for those unable to travel and connect in person.



## What challenges, if any, have you come across as a Christian and a Scientist?

I have to say that some of my biggest challenges has been managing people's expectations of science and its role in society, particularly when it comes to the Christian faith. I say this because there are still many Christians who have a fear of science which has often been built on misunderstanding and misconceptions. I guess the same goes for non-Christians who can hold science so highly but don't understand it in any depth to begin to challenge it and can simply say

'science says so.' I fear that the growth of misinformation and conspiracy theories is only adding fuel to the fire. This is something I feel I need to be very compassionate and understanding about when I discuss matters of science and faith with people of differing views.

## And finally, what are your hopes for your role as DO with CiS?

I would love to grow our network and support of students, graduates and early career scientists. We can often lose contact with our students once they leave university, so I would like to grow a space for graduate and early career members to continue to feel welcome and involved in CiS. I think the development of our online presence and social media will be a part of this, which will also help connect with members who can struggle to be part of a local group because of where they are based.



# 2020 CiS Student Essay Competition

## *“A Christian response to pandemics”*

**First place winner - Daniel Nie  
studying at Bart’s and the London  
School of Medicine and Dentistry**

### **Introduction**

The year 2020 has been an exceptional year, with very few people anticipating the wide-ranging implications resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The statistics show the devastating effect of the coronavirus with over 750,000 deaths directly attributable to the virus and over 20 million confirmed cases spanning 213 countries, as of 20th August 2020<sup>[1]</sup>. The whole world has ground to a halt, with forced change to ‘normal’ livelihoods and it seems inevitable that life beyond COVID will be significantly different to how it was before.

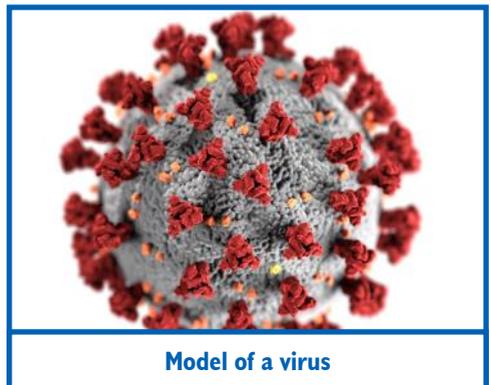
This topic particularly interested me as I am studying in the field of medicine with an interest in global health but also as a Christian. It forced me to ask some of the deeper questions, such as, ‘Where is God in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic?’ It moved me to investigate whether the Christian faith has sufficient and robust answers to such questions. The world is crying out for hope and meaning and I am convinced the Christian Gospel is more than equal to the task.

### **Viruses: friend or foe?**

The word ‘virus’ conjures up negative connotations, since it is usually associated with a group of pathological micro-organisms that cause disease and death. But was that always the case? In other words, were viruses intrinsically malevolent from their inception? After all, if we affirm a central

Christian doctrine that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth<sup>[2]</sup>, this must surely include viruses and if viruses are intrinsically evil then it calls into question the goodness of God for including viruses in His creation.

Surprisingly to many, viruses are very much essential to the world’s ecosystem. Viruses are non-living micro-organisms consisting of genetic material (DNA or RNA) covered with a proteinaceous coating that reproduce by attaching to target cells and using its ‘machinery’ to replicate copies of itself. There are over 100 million different types of viruses present on the earth, with only 21 types known to be harmful to humans<sup>[3]</sup> meaning only 0.000021% of all virus types are infectious to humans, a microscopically small percentage.



**Model of a virus**

Furthermore, their role in the ecosystem is more crucial than the reputation often ascribed to them in the media. In fact, virologists say that if all viruses were eradicated off the face of the earth, life (including humanity) would be finished<sup>[4]</sup>. How come? For example, in mammals the placenta is one of the essential organs for reproduction. Having a closer look at the gene that codes for syncytin, which is a membrane protein for the placenta, we find that the gene finds its ancestry in retroviruses which incorporated their genetic information by infecting their host genomes long ago<sup>[5]</sup>.

There is a civil war within the micro-organism community where phages (a type of virus) infect bacteria to limit their population in the ocean. Without phages, these bacterial populations would exponentially increase leading to the eradication of oxygen-producing plankton from the oceans due to a lack of available nutrients<sup>[6]</sup>. There are multitudes of other examples of how viruses, let alone bacteria and fungi, confer huge benefits to the world's ecosystem. So far from exposing a flaw in God's character, the existence of viruses and micro-organisms in general should increase our awe and wonder of God through His creation.

### A Christian response

Phillip Yancey was once asked if he could name one thing the Christian faith offers to the world that the rest of the world cannot. He replied with one word: 'grace'. The Apostle John goes one further when he writes in his timeless gospel prologue 'grace and truth' and they both come together through the one person Jesus Christ<sup>[7]</sup>. Christians can proclaim to the world about Jesus who is able to comfort us with grace and truth in a time of crisis.

The topic of viruses can lead to a lengthy philosophical discussion on theodicy but oftentimes we find that what we want is not necessarily a sound argument that satisfies us intellectually (helpful though that may be) but a presence that satisfies us experientially. Professor John Wyatt once said: *"Suffering is not a question that demands an answer; it is not a problem that demands a solution; it is a mystery which demands a presence"*<sup>[8]</sup>. And we find this true, don't we? Sound reasons won't make the pain go away but a friend who comforts us does a great amount of good<sup>[9]</sup>, both in the short-term and the long-term.

In Christ, we have a human Presence who exercises grace by empathising with us in every way

in our sorrows<sup>[10]</sup>, having experienced intense grief and anguish Himself whilst on earth. He also weeps with compassion with those who are going through the most extreme suffering<sup>[11]</sup>, while commanding His people to weep<sup>[12]</sup> with those who weep for mutual encouragement and comfort. Furthermore, He also reveals to us the truth about this world, that it's not what it's supposed to be like, corrupted by sin and in a trajectory of decay<sup>[13]</sup> and yet offering us a certain hope of a new heaven and earth descending from heaven free from sin, suffering and death<sup>[14]</sup>. This is the hope we can offer to the world.

### References

- [1] Coronavirus Death Toll and Trends - Worldometer [Internet]. Worldometers.info. 2020 [cited 20 August 2020]. Available at: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-death-toll/>
- [2] Genesis 1:1
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- [4] Nuwer R. Why the world needs viruses to function [Internet]. BBC.com. 2020 [cited 23 August 2020]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20200617-what-if-all-viruses-disappeared>
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- [7] John 1:17
- [8] Wyatt J. Matters of Life & Death. 2nd ed. IVP; 2009.
- [9] Proverbs 17:17
- [10] Hebrews 4:15
- [11] John 11:33-35
- [12] Romans 12:15
- [13] Romans 8:20-22
- [14] Revelation 21:1-4

# 'Coping with Controversy'

26 - 27<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Register here: [cis.org.uk/connect-2021/](https://cis.org.uk/connect-2021/)

CONNECT CONFERENCE 2021  
Students, graduates and early careers



CHRISTIANS · IN · SCIENCE

## Wish to watch a great Science/Faith talk??

Some of our local groups are putting together online events and everyone is welcome, no matter where you live.

Some are listed here in PrÉCiS but more are being planned. Do check the Events on the CiS website or listed in the monthly CiS Update.

Why not host an online “gathering” of friends or colleagues to watch a talk then discuss together.

The talks from this year are available on the CiS YouTube channel - [www.youtube.com/c/ChristiansinScience](https://www.youtube.com/c/ChristiansinScience)

## LOCAL GROUP NEWS

### BRISTOL

For more information, including locations, please contact Andrew Halestrap - [ahalestrap@hotmail.com](mailto:ahalestrap@hotmail.com)

### CAMBRIDGE

For details of events in Cambridge please go to [www.faraday-institute.org/](http://www.faraday-institute.org/)

### DUNDEE

For more details on Dundee events please contact [christiansinsciencedundee@gmail.com](mailto:christiansinsciencedundee@gmail.com)

### EDINBURGH

For more information please email [cisedinburgh3@gmail.com](mailto:cisedinburgh3@gmail.com)

### HARROW

For details of future events in Harrow please contact Revd Lyndon North - [revlnorth@aol.com](mailto:revlnorth@aol.com)

### HUDDERSFIELD –students

For details please contact Omololu Fagunwa on [fagunwaomololu@yahoo.com](mailto:fagunwaomololu@yahoo.com).

## **IPSWICH**

For more information about future events please contact Dr John Ling - [jjling@btopenworld.com](mailto:jjling@btopenworld.com)

## **IRELAND**

Please contact Dr Neville Cobbe - [neville.cobbe@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:neville.cobbe@yahoo.co.uk) for more information.

## **LONDON**

For more details about the London group please email [cins.london@gmail.com](mailto:cins.london@gmail.com)

## **MANCHESTER**

We will have a meeting at 7pm on the first Monday of every month. Please register via Eventbrite or contact [sec.cismanchester@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sec.cismanchester@yahoo.co.uk)

January 4th – Science as a Christian Vocation, Professor Andrew Halestrap (Bristol)

February 1st – New Speakers Evening (in partnership with God and the Big Bang project)

March 1st – Theology of the Quantum World, Professor Mark Harris (Edinburgh)

April 12th – The Spiritual Interpretation of Scientific Imagery, Rev. Dr David Gregory (Croxley Green Baptist Church)

## **NORWICH**

Please contact [sfnorfolk@gmail.com](mailto:sfnorfolk@gmail.com) for more details.

## **OXFORD**

For more information, please contact Diana Briggs at [diana.briggs@wolfson.oxon.org](mailto:diana.briggs@wolfson.oxon.org)

## **READING**

Please email Dave Law to discuss restarting this group at [dave@readingatwork.org](mailto:dave@readingatwork.org)

## **SHEFFIELD**

For more information please email [rhoda.hawkins@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:rhoda.hawkins@sheffield.ac.uk)

## **SOUTH WEST**

For more information on events please email [cissouthwest@gmail.com](mailto:cissouthwest@gmail.com)

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



## **SOUTHAMPTON**

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

## **ST ANDREWS**

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

## **SURREY**

For information please contact Joy Perkins at [joyeperkins@googlemail.com](mailto:joyeperkins@googlemail.com)

## **SURREY HEATH**

For more details please contact John Russell at [chynoweth.jw@gmail.com](mailto:chynoweth.jw@gmail.com)

## **TYNESIDE & NORTHUMBERLAND**

For information on Newcastle events, please contact Bill Clegg at [bill.clegg@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:bill.clegg@ncl.ac.uk)

## **WEST MIDLANDS**

For more information please contact Godfrey Armitage on [g.n.armitage@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:g.n.armitage@warwick.ac.uk)

## **WORCESTER**

For more information please contact Jim Smith on [jgsmith29@aol.com](mailto:jgsmith29@aol.com)

## **YORK**

For more information please email [christiansinscienceryork788@gmail.com](mailto:christiansinscienceryork788@gmail.com)