



PréCiS

Autumn 2021

Bringing Christian faith and science together

Issue no. 101

This edition is looking at
Environmental issues with
our Autumn Conference
and COP26



Dr Mirjam Shilling



Oliver Barclay winner 2021 Dr Mirjam Shilling's thoughts on hopes and fears of 'living with Covid, and future pandemics'

Are there lessons we need to learn, or perhaps unlearn?

I think that in the last 18 months or so, we were again confronted with this false narrative that we all unconsciously believe in, namely that we are in control. We need to understand again that we are very little in control of things in this world. We are vulnerable and need salvation. At the same time, there are many things that we can influence. We are stewards of the created world. We need to think more deeply about how we deal with our environment and other ecosystems. Our decisions have an impact on how things develop in the future. Especially in discussions around climate change or the development of new pandemics this is easily visible. As natural scientists we need to learn how to better explain our science to avoid unnecessary scepticism against our findings, and to help non-scientists make their decisions. I think that living in this tension of seeing the power of a deeper understanding of nature, while being aware of the limitations of the natural sciences, is something we need to learn.

What lessons could the Church learn from the past 18 months?

I hope that the Church has experienced again how it is much more than just its physical gathering in a specific location. The Church is a reality because the Holy Spirit makes us a family. Every once in a while,

this is an important reminder in the midst of all our activities. I hope we have learned a certain flexibility in the way we live as church. Yes, meeting in person and in large congregations is great. But if for whatever reason this isn't an option for a while, we should have alternative ways of being church at hand. At the same time, I hope the Church has seen that there is something we as Christians can offer, that the natural sciences can't. We have a hope and a perspective that goes far beyond the limitations of this life and the limitations of our own actions. There is power in prayer, and wisdom in the way we can deal with grief or injustice through the perspective of the cross. I hope that this pandemic has reminded us of the simple ways to care for one another or engage in dialogue with society and share what we can offer. We especially need to engage with the natural sciences, and maybe also reflect on why we are so prone to fall for conspiracy theories. I also hope that all the things we had to develop during the pandemic can serve as new tools to interact with other Christians worldwide, and even connect with people outside the church.

How might we as scientists and Christians help the church handle new viruses or pandemics?

I personally think that it is key to engage in dialogue. As scientists we need to explain and translate scientific findings so that others can understand what is going on and why certain measurements are helpful. We need to explain how the scientific process works, how knowledge is gained, but also what the limitations are. When we as scientists and Christians are present in this dialogue, we can encourage discussion and education to limit the spread of conspiracy theories. Many Christians might be afraid of the natural sciences, because they were taught too many times that they are at war with their beliefs. At the same time, we should also encourage a reflection of our theology that benefits people outside the church. We have something to offer that the natural sciences can't. But we can only help other people think this through if we are visible as Christians and scientists.

What advice would you give an early career scientist regarding maintaining contact/fellowship with other believers?

For me fellowship with other believers has always been extremely important. First of all because I was blessed with many formative friendships. Life isn't easy, and I need people around me to support me when I am faced with challenges or work through difficulties. Other believers help me see Jesus when I can't see him by myself anymore. Very often faith

doesn't grow automatically and needs an environment with other Christians to flourish... ideally, every once in a while, also an environment where people don't necessarily share our opinion/world view. Also, church can be a place where we meet people from very different backgrounds. I always learn so much from people whose life experience is very different from mine. This helps me understand the world much better and pray differently. It also helps me to engage with people who don't necessarily understand my science. It's a place where I am encouraged to translate and reflect my knowledge.

How would you encourage a young Christian person/school student to follow a science career?

God created a world that can be explored and that gets more and more interesting the longer you study it. There is beauty to discover, even in places where you don't expect it... like when you study viruses. When people tell you that a career in science might cost you your faith, prove them wrong. Yes — many things can challenge your beliefs, but so do many things in everyday life, like unanswered prayer or suffering. If we want to draw closer to God, we need to face these tensions and deal with all aspects of reality, including the natural sciences. Instead of allowing them to create a distance between you and God, imagine how rich your faith could be, if you allowed the natural sciences to reveal to you a deeper understanding of the world God created.

The Climate Crisis: A Christian Response Speakers



Climate Change - Prof Euan Nesbit

Methane is a major anthropogenic greenhouse gas. It's rising very rapidly, and this growth is arguably the largest deviation from the hopes of the Paris Agreement. The causes driving methane's rise are not well understood, though much of the growth may be coming from tropical biological sources such as wetlands and cattle.

'Moya' means 'air', 'wind', 'breath' in some Southern African languages. It also means 'Spirit', Holy Spirit. MOYA — Methane Observations and Yearly Assessments — has been a major UK consortium studying the Global Methane Budget, with field work and flight campaigns in the Arctic, tropical Africa and South America, as well as remote locations like Ascension and Antarctica.

Unlike CO₂, managing methane growth is not just a task for the industrialised world. Although gas and coal industries are major sources, the MOYA results show that the tropical countries will have to share in the task of mitigating methane. Ethically we all now have to share in the task of managing methane. We've left Eden: we need to live with the consequences.

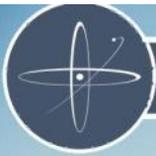
Bio: Dr Euan Nisbet works on modern greenhouse gases, especially methane, and also on the early history of the Earth. He led the Natural Environment Research Council's MOYA: The Global Methane Budget project (2016-21), and spent many years studying early life and volcanism in Africa, Canada and Australia. His books include "The Young Earth", on the planet's early history and "Leaving Eden", on environmental pollution.



Climate Justice - Dr Ruth Valerio

2016 saw world hunger increase for the first time in a decade, with the climate crisis being one of the key factors behind that. Whilst the changing climate is beginning to affect everyone, it's the poorest people who are currently being affected the worst. This session will explore how that is happening, including looking at the links between climate and conflict and at the inequality of resource use and carbon emissions, and will consider why this is a topic of Christian concern and how the Scriptures can inform our response.

Bio: Dr Ruth Valerio is Global Advocacy and Influencing Director at Tearfund, and environmentalist, theologian and social activist. She is the author of "*L is for Lifestyle*" and "*Just Living*".



The Climate Crisis: A Christian Response



AUTUMN CONFERENCE

SATURDAY 16TH OCTOBER 2021



CHRISTIANS · IN · SCIENCETM

Christians in Science warmly invites you to our annual autumn conference. With COP26 on the horizon and the urgency for change, we will be exploring what the Church community can be doing to play their part.

Speakers

Climate Change - Dr Euan Nesbit

Climate Justice - Dr Ruth Valerio

Climate Action - Hannah Malcolm

Climate Hacking - Dr Meric Srokosz

Oliver Barclay Lecture — Dr Mirjam Schilling

This will be our first 'hybrid' conference which will allow the option of joining us live at Emmanuel Church, South Croydon, or from the comfort of your own home.

Book via a link on our website or Eventbrite - <https://bit.ly/3nHw4LN>



Climate Action - Hannah Malcolm

Hannah's presentation will offer a theological reading of the growing participation of UK Christians in climate initiatives over the last five years. In many cases, climate science is cited as a necessary consideration for the fulfilment of already-existing Christian commitments. This represents a significant shift in the ways UK Christians understand the role of dialogue between theology and the sciences; previous science and theology dialogue has usually been treated as an area of expert concern, primarily offering insight into apologetics or specific ethical problems. By contrast, the dialogue between climate science and theology has seen the emergence of non-technical leadership amid the expectation that climate science plays a critical role in re-examining the meaning of Christian life, both for individuals and as communities.

Bio: Hannah Malcolm is currently training for ordained ministry and writing a PhD on theology and climate/ecological grief. She regularly speaks about and organises around climate justice and recently edited "*Words for a Dying World: Stories of Grief and Courage from the Global Church*".



Climate Hacking - Dr Meric Srokosz

Given the climate emergency that the world faces due to increasing levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, geoengineering (aka climate hacking) has been proposed as a solution. This means that we (human beings) would "solve" the problem of increasing carbon dioxide levels by applying engineering solutions on a planetary scale. Various geoengineering schemes have been proposed, including carbon capture and storage, ocean iron fertilization, adding reflective aerosols to the lower stratosphere, spraying seawater into the lower atmosphere to enhance marine cloud formation, launching giant reflectors into space to reflect sunlight, and so on. All these solutions raise ethical questions such as: who decides which of these options is safe to pursue? What will be the impact of the proposed solution on people living in different parts of the planet, particularly on the poor? Can a country pursue one of the options unilaterally? This talk will explore these issues and try to bring a Christian perspective to them.

Bio: Dr Meric Srokosz is professor of physical oceanography at the National Oceanography Centre, with research interests in the ocean's role in climate, satellite oceanography and waves.



Viruses: Connecting climate and human identity

In the last 18 months we have not only been challenged by a pandemic, but also by the consequences of climate change. Melting glaciers, devastating floods and fires are pressing issues that need tackling. From a Christian perspective it is quite tempting to think of these challenges as individual natural evils. But what if these phenomena are somehow connected?

A proper understanding of the biology of viruses shows that the topic is more complicated, and that there are lessons to be learned about the connectedness of the whole of creation, our identity as human beings and our role in this world.

Bio: Mirjam Schilling received a PhD from the Institute of Virology, Freiburg, Germany in 2016 and is now working as a Postdoc at the University of Oxford. Her research focusses on the interplay of viruses and the innate immune system. In her free time, she has been studying Theology part-time in Stuttgart, Freiburg and Oxford and is currently working on her DPhil in which she explores the theological aspects of viruses.



Christians have been engaged with the issue of climate change since the early warnings emerged over forty years ago. Prof Sir John Houghton CBE FRS, a former vice-president of Christians in Science (CiS) and a prime mover in the establishment of the John Ray Initiative (JRI) was one of the group of scientists who first recognised the threat posed by global warming as a result of increased carbon dioxide emissions.

On Tuesday 9th November, CiS along with The Faraday Institute and JRI will be exhibiting at COP26. All three organizations share a concern about climate change and a commitment to care for the environment by uniting understanding and appreciation of science with our responsibility as Christians to care for God's creation. Our exhibit stand will provide information about our principles and practices as well as on our activities in the area of Climate Change.

Why are we doing this? We are concerned to live out Christian principles of care for the world God made and into which he has placed us to act as stewards, to care for it and the people who live in it, where those who will suffer the worst effects of climate change will be the poor and disadvantaged. Therefore we take seriously our Christian duty to speak the truth about what science tells us, and our calling to care for the world and its poor.

LOCAL GROUP NEWS



If you wish to start a Local Group in your area, please get in touch with Steph, our Development Officer, at steph.cis@outlook.com

Details of events are available on the CiS App and on our website www.cis.org.uk/events.

BRISTOL

For more information about the Bristol group please contact Prof Andrew Halestrap ahalestrap@hotmail.com

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

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

For further information please check their website - <https://www.cis.org.uk/ireland/>

MANCHESTER

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

NORWICH

Please contact Nick Brewin on sfnorfolkl@gmail.com to register your interest and to receive meeting details nearer the date. **OXFORD**

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

SHEFFIELD

For more information on the Sheffield group please contact Dr Rhoda Hawkins on rhoda.hawkins@sheffield.ac.uk

SOUTHAMPTON

For information on meetings please contact Peter May on southampton@cis.org.uk

SOUTH WEST

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

ST ANDREWS

For details on the Undergraduate group please contact Dr A Torrance (abt3@st-andrews.ac.uk) Postgraduate group, please contact Dr Rebecca Goss (rjmg@st-andrews.ac.uk).

SURREY

For more details please contact Joy Perkins at joyeperkins@googlemail.com

TYNESIDE & NORTHUMBERLAND

For information on Newcastle events, please contact Bill Clegg at bill.clegg@ncl.ac.uk

WORCESTER

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

YORK

For more information please email christiansinscienceryork788@gmail.com