



Science and Christianity

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About Candour

Candour is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

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The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:
Amanda Wells (editor) on (04) 381-8285 or candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Advertising

One-quarter page: \$80 plus gst (87mm x 117mm)
One-third page: \$95 plus gst (87mm x 160mm)
Half page: \$130 plus gst (184mm x 138mm)

Any artwork must be supplied electronically and in a high-resolution format. Measurements are indicative only and subject to layout requirements.

The next deadline (for the April issue) is
31 March 2008.

Glen Innis Vacancies

March 9 - 16	Cottage
March 16-23	Cottage
March 23 - 30	Homestead/Cottage
March 30 - April 6	Homestead/Cottage
April 6 - 13	Cottage

Bookings for the summer school holidays are open to all Ministers, regardless of whether they have school aged children, from November 1.

To enquire about vacancies, please email glen.innis@xtra.co.nz or telephone 06 855-4889. Ministers are welcome to inquire regarding vacancies due to cancellations.

There is **refundable \$50 booking fee** for Glen Innis. This fee is payable to Margaret Black and refunded on arrival at Glen Innis.

Internet resources

Towards the end of last year, the editorial committee held a teleconference to plan the *Candour* themes for this year. I'm grateful for the advice of the committee, who are for 2009: the Rev Howard Carter, the Rev Mary Jane Konings, the Rev Allister Lane, the Very Rev Garry Marquand, the Rev Nathan Parry, the Right Rev Dr Graham Redding and the Rev Dr Kevin Ward.

One of the things we discussed was how to make it easier to share useful online resources. Perhaps we should have a regular column, by a different person every month, outlining what they find most useful; or perhaps we should just encourage people to send in snippets or urls pointing to good resources. If either of these approaches appeals to you and you have something to contribute, I would love to hear from you.

Please email candour@presbyterian.org.nz

Ministers' Information Forms

Ministers' Information Forms are an essential tool for ministry settlement boards looking to make a call. They are also an effective way for ministers to record their achievements throughout their career – including any additional training they undertake.

Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on juliette@presbyterian.org.nz for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

Viewpoints on Creation

Amanda Wells

On my desk sit two articles about Darwin, both sporting nicely alliterative headings. The first, “Defying Darwin” by Stephen Moss of the UK’s *Guardian* newspaper¹, is a subtle evaluation of Darwinism in light of Creationism’s current popularity. The second, “Darwin? Don’t bother” by Peter Barnes of the *Australian Presbyterian* magazine, is a charged and at times derogatory attack on Darwinism and Darwin himself.

One is a feature article, the other an opinion piece, so perhaps comparing tone is slightly unfair. But the contrast illuminates why I have difficulty engaging with Creationist literature. It’s not about the content; it’s about the level of respect with which opposing ideas (and by implication, readers) are treated. The all-too-often polemic tone of Creationists makes well-reasoned arguments in favour of evolution superficially more attractive, even if I don’t agree with all of Moss’s inferences.

In this issue of *Candour*, we have a handful of treatments of the theme “Science and Christianity”, all selecting quite different subject matter. I’m aware that this is an issue on which people often have divergent views. If you’d like to engage with any of the concepts or ideas, feel free to write something and send it to me and I’ll run it next month. (In this issue we also have some thoughts by Douglas Mansill on the prophetic voice in relation to crime and punishment in our society.)

I studied science at school; biology, chemistry and physics, though I was never particularly passionate about any of these disciplines. I remember my biology teacher, a Christian, expressing a certain nervousness about the evolution component of the seventh form biology syllabus. Not because she disagreed with it, but because she was tired of heated exchanges with fundamentalist students. It surprised my class that this would ever be an issue; those of us who were Christians hadn’t seen any potential for conflict. Naïve perhaps, but I’d still suggest that the bedrock belief of God creating the world can permit evolutionary layers.

Or perhaps it’s just not that important to me. For some people, the literal Creation story appears to be a key plank of their faith, which goes some way towards explaining

the huge amounts of effort expended on its promulgation. I’m sure that they would have convincing arguments as to why this must be. But what if people who have an interest in Jesus’ teachings get the impression that belief in a literal Creation is compulsory? It’s quite easy for misleading impressions to build up subconsciously. What if they then feel that their ideas about science disqualify them from any kind of Christian faith?

I’m not saying that thinking and theology around Creation aren’t important, or even quite important, merely that they might not be the most important thing that Jesus had to say. What really interests me isn’t setting up Christianity and science in opposition to each other, but in finding the ways in which our Creation reflects its Creator.

I’ve just returned from a holiday tramping in Fiordland; eight days on the Dusky track, which makes its way from Southland to Lake Manapouri via Dusky Sound. Being outside in majestic landscapes evokes a feeling of immanence in even the least religious of people, especially when the need to carry eight days’ food magnifies your vulnerability. Part of tramping is the idea of treading lightly on Creation. One of the super-fit in my group carried out all the rubbish we found, and all of us, whether Kiwi-born or not, felt a sense of outrage that people could deliberately defile “our place”.

I’d suggest that very few people genuinely ascribe totally utilitarian values to their environment. People have gardens and recycle even when they are reluctant to make the lifestyle changes that more and more are embracing. To care for Creation is to acknowledge something larger than ourselves; something that has an intrinsic value beyond its temporary use to us. Sometimes this realisation can be a bridge into deeper considerations about life, meaning and God. (Some of these concepts are explored in the latest social issues resource produced by the Church – see the ad on p13 for more info.)

The next issue of *Candour* will be on “Wealth and recession”. At the moment I’m short of contributions, so if you feel moved to send me something by 31 March I would be very grateful! Email your essays to candour@presbyterian.org.nz

¹ You can download Moss’ article at www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/feb/17/evolution-versus-creationism-science

Reading nature and Scripture today

Don Nield*

As just a minister's spouse, I can write with real candour! As a Christian, I am concerned about the number of students who lose their faith when they go to university to study science and learn something that appears to be contradictory to what they have been taught in their home church. As an educator, I am concerned with the number of students who are put off studying a science subject at university because they are fearful that they might lose their faith if they did so.

The conflict model of the relationship between Science and Christianity was popularised by the Americans A D White and J W Draper in the 19th century. In the current century, it is held by two groups of opposite polarity. On the one hand, it is held by atheists like Richard Dawkins; on the other, by Young Earth Creationists, exemplified by individuals such as the late Henry Morris, Ken Ham and Jonathan Sarfati, and by institutions such as Answers in Genesis (in the USA) and Creation Ministries International (in New Zealand).

The conflict model is comparatively recent, and it is misleading. The model takes no account of the fact that in the 17th, 18th

and 19th centuries, many of the most famous scientists (such as Newton, Boyle and Maxwell) were committed Christians. Dawkins is sound when he writes about science (as he does very well) but he goes overboard when he embarks on scientism and displays his ignorance about religion in general and about Christianity in particular.

A more accurate model is the "two books" model that has over 400 years of tradition behind it, going back to Francis Bacon and beyond. God is seen as the author of both the book of nature and the book of scripture. Since God is the author of both books, there can be no discrepancy between them when each is read in the proper manner.

That means paying attention to what the Bible says and what it does not say about itself. In particular, it is a mistake to assume a priori that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are to be treated as historical and scientific

statements. It is also important to have some humility in discussing the interface of science and religion, while at the same time insisting on those things that are truly fundamental. On the one hand, this means pointing out the limitations of science to speak on ultimate issues, and at the same time conceding to Caesar (secular science) the things that are properly Caesar's. This means that science should be allowed to proceed on the basis of methodological naturalism, i.e. the assumption that science can proceed using only naturalistic (not involving God explicitly) methods.

Having said this, it must be insisted that the conclusions based on methodological naturalism provide an incomplete explanation of the real world. Science cannot go beyond a certain point. To proceed any further requires metaphysical (beyond the realm of empirical science) considerations, and it is here that religion takes over.

The best that one can do is establish a model of that world based on the best evidence available, and revise the model from time to time as new evidence becomes available

It is important to get the philosophical foundations correct. Modern science is based on critical realism. By this I mean that it is assumed that there is a real world and it then follows that science

is not just a sociological construct. On the other hand, in contrast to the tenets of ideal realism, exact knowledge of that real world is not possible and it depends on the knower. The best that one can do is establish a model of that world based on the best evidence available, and revise the model from time to time as new evidence becomes available. Scientific theories are value laden and are influenced by social concerns, but only to a limited extent, because if a theory does not fit in with the available evidence then it is discarded, sooner or later, and replaced by something that does fit in better with the evidence. It is true that social concerns affect the priorities given to particular fields of research, but that is another matter.

Critical realism is also a good foundation for theology. We are also limited by what God has chosen to reveal about himself through revelation, as expressed in the Bible and especially in Jesus Christ. Thus we construct

models of God, which we improve from time to time. There is an absolute truth, but our knowledge of it is limited. We construct our theology on the basis of our total experience.

The claim that God creates and sustains our universe is the hypothesis that best accounts for its general structure – its very existence, its conformity to natural laws, its being fine-tuned to evolve animals and humans, and these latter being conscious beings with sensations, thoughts, beliefs, desires and purposes who can make differences to themselves and the world in deeply significant ways. The existence of evil of the kinds that we find on Earth does not count against this claim.

Reading God's Book of Scripture

First I need to point out that within the overall unity of the Bible, there is a diversity of types of literature. If one ignores this, then one loses the essential colour and sees only a monotone grayness. It is vital to distinguish the genre of the particular Bible passage being interpreted.

For a discussion of Creation, we need to consider Genesis 1-11, Job, Psalms, and Isaiah 40-66. Most people are willing to concede that the Book of Psalms

does not teach science or history. After all, this book is clearly poetry. Also, there is a general willingness to recognise that there are poetical passages in Job and Isaiah.

However, Genesis 1- 11, which provides the setting for the covenant between God and Israel, is in narrative form (apart from some speeches), and many people are reluctant to accept that it is not history, but rather a narrative written to express theological truths. In fact, many people claim that Jesus Christ in Gospel passages attested to the historicity of Genesis 1- 11 and that Paul in Romans 5 assumed that Genesis 2-3 was history. However, that claim is based on an inference that goes beyond what is written in the Bible. Jesus attests to the authority of Genesis, not its historicity. Likewise the Romans passage does not necessarily imply the historicity of individuals named Adam and Eve. The lack of historicity in Genesis does not affect the essentials of evangelical Christian doctrine.

One should not be surprised that theological truth can be conveyed by means of narrative. Jesus made an extensive use of parables in conveying his message, and few

people would regard these parables as based on things that actually happened. Thus one should be open to the possibility that elsewhere in the Bible one might meet stories used for a similar purpose, even if these are not explicitly flagged as being parabolic or symbolic.

When examined as a separate document (and without dragging in any connotations from other Biblical passages), Gen. 1-2:4a narrates the origin of the universe as a creation by God in six standard days. However, the original readers (or hearers) would not have questioned whether the passage was historically accurate or scientifically accurate. They would not even have thought about such things in the way in which modern people, with their background of science and scientifically based history, now do. What was important was the theological truth contained in this story – that God was in absolute control of the universe, and that the gods of surrounding nations were of no account.

Genesis 1 is telling us a universal truth, namely that God created the heavens and the earth. It does not describe

how God did it. The parallels between the accounts of creation days 1,2,3 and days 4,5,6 (e.g. re: light, waters, land), in which domains are first formed and

then populated, and with the light being created before the sun and moon, should be enough to indicate that this is a carefully crafted story, rather than a strictly historical account.

Likewise, it does not matter for theological purposes whether the flood described in Genesis 6-9 is global (as a surface reading of the text would indicate) or local (as the scientific evidence, geological and bio-geographical, indicates).

No concession to atheists is being made. Genesis is not pre-scientific in the sense that it has been superseded by scientific accounts of world history. Genesis is simply non-scientific. Genesis expresses universal truths that are as true today as when Genesis was first composed. Our understanding of science changes continually. Genesis and science are not in conflict because they are not talking about the same thing and therefore they are not using the same terminology.

Once the non-historicity of Genesis 1-11 is recognised, a lot of baggage can be jettisoned. We do not need to

Genesis 1 is telling us a universal truth, namely that God created the heavens and the earth

worry about the precise meaning in context of the Hebrew words *yom* and *erets*. We do not need to construct a detailed concordance between the account of Genesis 1 and modern physics. (Indeed, to attempt to do that is to make an unwarranted concession to science and the scientific way of looking at things.) In the same way, we do not need to construct theories of how the entire history of the universe could be compressed into an interval of not more than 10,000 years. We can start looking closely at the book of nature, and see what that says about itself and its Creator.

The Bible gives us deep religious truths without having to be scientifically accurate. It is a blessing, in fact, that the scriptures were written in the simple narrative and poetic language of a non-scientific culture. If they had been composed according to the standards of modern science, then most people of the past would have had difficulty getting anything out of them.

Reading God's Book of Nature

Except for those people who insist that the universe is less than 10,000 years old, the occurrence of stellar evolution is usually of no great concern. It is biological (or organic) evolution (abbreviated to "evolution" in the rest of this section) that raises problems for many Christians. The commonly used technical definition of evolution is changes in the frequencies of alleles in the gene pool over time. This is usually coupled with common descent: the idea that many or all organisms have descended from one or a small number of common ancestors.

Most biologists accept that natural selection coupled with random (with respect to outcome, but not necessarily in other respects) genetic mutations provides the main mechanism for at least limited morphological change within a population, but there are questions about the sufficiency of this mechanism as an explanation for the origin of major morphological innovations. One can accept all this without buying into the "blind watchmaker" atheistic thesis of Richard Dawkins, who claims that all new living forms arose as the product of an unguided, purposeless material mechanism. This thesis is primarily a metaphysical rather than a scientific one.

That means that evolution is not a religion. It is a mistake to use the label "evolutionist" to mean those who believe that evolution – in the sense of time, chance, and the struggle for survival – rather than the God of the Bible is responsible for life. To do so displays a lack of discrimination about what evolution is about, and it is an approach that alienates scientists who might otherwise be sympathetic to Christianity. It is a mistake to blame

evolution for the spread of immorality. It is a mistake to claim that those people who believe in evolution are being inconsistent, and in reality are destroying the foundations of the Gospel message.

The theory of evolution is, in essentials, a biological theory, about biological diversity, and is neutral with respect to morality. It should be sharply distinguished from the accretion to that theory added by Herbert Spencer, who regarded it as a "theory of everything" – a basis for the propagation of the ideologies of "survival of the fittest" and "might is right", objectionable ideas that underpinned German militarism both during the First World war and under Hitler, and that also underpinned the eugenics movement and racist ideology. To blame the theory of evolution for such things is like blaming Christianity for the military excesses that took place during the Crusades.

Also, evolution is not something that is propagated as a conspiracy by the scientific community to corrupt the nation's youth and promote atheism. It is true that some scientists do advocate atheism, but when they do so they are moving from science to scientism. The way to combat such atheists is simply to point out that they are confusing physics (in its broad sense) and metaphysics.

It is also a mistake to suppose that evolution is just a philosophy based on an atheistic mindset and that it would collapse if its metaphysical underpinnings were taken away. Likewise it is a mistake to suppose that evolution is just a theory in the sense of an idea that a person can advance in an arbitrary fashion. Rather, the theory of evolution is something that is accepted by the majority of scientists because it provides a framework that explains so much, and ties together what has been discovered in a wide range of scientific fields.

Likewise it is a mistake to claim that evolution is invalid as a scientific theory because it is largely concerned with historical phenomena and so, because these phenomena occurred in the distant past, they cannot be properly investigated. It is true that no scientist was present at the Big Bang, or even when the Earth was formed, but that does not mean that one cannot obtain reliable information about such phenomena.

** Don has accompanied his wife Rachel from Somervell to Balmoral to St Davids, Khyber Pass to Epsom and back to St Davids. He has been on the staff of the University of Auckland since 1962 and is currently an Honorary Associate Professor of Engineering Science. He holds the degrees of MSc (N.Z), MA (Cambridge), PhD (Auckland), BD (Otago)*

Some good books for further reading

Denis Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do we have to choose?* Monarch Books, Oxford, UK, 2008

Richard G Colling, *Random Designer: Created from Chaos to Connect with the Creator*, Browning Press, Bourbonnais, IL, 2004

Francis S Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*, Free Press, New York, NY, 2006

Simon Conway Morris, *Life's Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, 2003

Darrel R Falk, *Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2004

Graeme Finlay, *God's Books: Genetics and Genesis*, Telos Publications, Auckland, NZ, 2004

Karl W Giberson, *Saving Darwin: How to be a Christian and Believe in Evolution*, Harper Collins, New York, NK, 2008

Owen Gingerich, *God's Universe*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2006

Deborah B Haarsma & Loren D Haarsma, *Origins: A Reformed Look at Creation, Design, & Evolution*, Faith Alive, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007

Daniel M Harrell, *Nature's Witness: How Evolution Can Inspire Faith*, Abington Press, Nashville, TN, 2008

John F Haught, *Science and Religion: From Conflict to Conversation*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ, 1995

John F Haught, *Responses to 101 Questions on God and Evolution*, Paulist Press, New York, NY, 2001

John F Haught, *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 2000

Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, GA, 1984

Denis O Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR, 2008

Alister E McGrath, *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes, and the Meaning of Life*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK, 2005

Keith B Miller (ed.), *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003

Kenneth R Miller, *Finding Darwin's God: A Scientist's Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution*, Cliff Street Books, New York, NY, 1999

Kenneth R Miller, *Only a Theory: Evolution and The Battle for America's Soul*, Viking Penguin, New York, NY, 2008

George L Murphy, *The Cosmos in the Light of the Cross*, Trinity Press International, Harrisburg, PA, 2003

Donald Nield, *God Created the Heavens and the Earth*, Telos Publications, Auckland, NZ, 2004

Ted Peters & Martinez Hewlett, *Evolution from Creation to New Creation: Conflict, Conversation, and Convergence*, Abington Press, Nashville, TN, 2003

John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, Yale University Press, 1998.

St Paul's Oamaru

The advent of tourism and a renewed appreciation of the worth of its historic buildings has brought a resurgence of community life in the centre of Oamaru. St Paul's is strategically placed in the heart of the town.

The Rev Colin Hay has recently retired from the charge, and the Board of Settlement is seeking a minister who will build upon the foundation that now exists and lead the congregation into a meaningful future.

Ministers who may feel drawn to the opportunities of this charge are invited to make contact in confidence in the first instance with the Convenor of the Settlement Board: The Reg J G Sinclair, 4 Franklin St, Dalmore, Dunedin, john.sinclair@clear.net.nz

How can we inform bioethics decisions?

Helen Bichan

As a high school student I surprised my mother when I reported that some girls in my biology class were arguing against evolution. In her view this argument had been worked through when she was at university in the 1920s/30s and there was no difficulty in being both a scientist and a Christian.

Today, the discussion between science and religion has become more urgent as the range of what science can do has increased, and questions are being asked about boundaries, benefits, risks and costs.¹

Biotechnology is an area of applied science and can be defined as the industrial use of living organisms or biological techniques developed through basic research. Genetic modification, some of the new reproductive technologies and stem cell research are examples currently of importance. Biotechnology products include antibiotics, insulin, interferon, recombinant dna, and techniques such as waste recycling. Much older forms of biotechnology include bread making, cheese making, and brewing of beer and wine.

Bioethics is the area of ethics concerned with biotechnology and its applications. The NZ government addressed this in 2002 by establishing Toi te Taio, the Bioethics Council, on the advice of The Royal Commission on Genetic Modification to:

- provide independent advice to government on cultural, ethical and spiritual issues related to biotechnology
- promote and participate in public dialogue
- provide information on cultural, ethical and spiritual issues/aspects of biotechnology

1 An example: In March 2007 the flyer for a national symposium “Unfolding the mind: prospects and perils in neuroscience” noted: “Neuroscience is a rapidly expanding field which offers significant potential to understand and intervene in the workings of the human brain. It includes new techniques in brain imaging, making it possible to scan or modify brain activity while the subject engages in specified tasks.” *It continues*: “What are the implications of neuroscience applications affecting cognitive processing, human memory, learning, performance and judgement? What are the issues around security, surveillance and military applications?.....And, what are the legal, ethical and political questions?”

The Council is unique in that similar committees in other countries tend to be composed of a broad range of ethicists while the NZ Council has people with a wide range of experience and networks in many fields and includes a strong Maori component. In addition, the Council’s brief includes cultural and spiritual aspects of biotechnology - not just ethical. What follows is based on my experience and reflections as a member of that Council from the time it was established until mid 2008.

Many people are of the view that communication between scientists and the public can be effected by providing information (on the science or biotechnology) to bring the public up to speed. In this context is the recent appointment of a professor for science communication at the University of Otago. When people have been given the necessary information, they can take part in dialogue to address any continuing community concerns. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that the ideology and methodology of scientific discourse will be used and cultural, ethical and spiritual concerns will be examined in these terms.

In my opinion, many in the Church have bought into this view over, at least, the past century. It has led, for some, into denial of aspects of science as illustrated by those who use the Bible as if it were a scientific document, such as my high school classmates. For others, it has led to applying the ideology and language of science to faith and theology with attempts, for example, to “prove” God or the efficacy of prayer in scientific terms.

Each way of looking at or making sense of the world has its own ideology or framework and the scientific framework is only one way of perceiving reality. There are others.² As a shorthand description I talk of poetry and physics – both express human understandings of reality. Both are valid and each needs the other.

As the Council worked at engaging the public in its various forms, we tried a variety of methods that enabled people to articulate their cultural, ethical and spiritual concerns in response to well-presented information about the biotechnology under consideration. Communities, cultural groups, churches and other faith communities

2 For example - the global economic summit works with a market ideology and framework.

have their own ways of expressing their underlying values. Traditional language may be a barrier to understanding for those outside such communities. We learned that dialogue had to enable people to express their values and to apply these to their views on the proposed applications of the biotechnology. A full understanding of the science was not necessary for good dialogue.

The rich Maori cultural input in the Council helped to underline how much various cultures and religious traditions have in common. Values on cultural, ethical and spiritual issues in relation to biotechnology can be grouped around three areas:

- the health of people and communities (personal and population health)
- relationships between people in the clan and beyond (functioning of society)
- relationships between people and the whole environment (the world – the universe – the creation – God)

This reflects a systems approach that appreciates the complexity and interconnectedness of living, the importance of relationships, the way in which alteration of one part of the system affects the whole, and the importance of developments over time. It contrasts with the reductionist approach required in much scientific research. Both approaches are important and contribute to our understanding.

These understandings are expressed and may be codified through rules/laws, codes, lore, wisdom etc that address the underlying issues. Many historic rules are now seen as archaic or irrelevant – eg modern food handling practices make some prohibitions unnecessary. It is inappropriate and misses the point if we argue about the rules or the ways people express their beliefs – the underlying issues remain important. The challenge is how we express these underlying values as they affect the present discussions about the development and applications of biotechnology.

Various dialogue processes brought to light a number of deeply held values shared by New Zealanders, whether from faith communities, cultural groups or concerned citizens. These included the importance/ uniqueness of being human, a compassionate response to the suffering of people and animals, Kaitiakitanga or stewardship for

the Earth and its life forms, fairness, safety, who benefits from utilisation of technology, and freedom of choice. For more information on the values, see the reports published by the Bioethics Council and available at www.bioethics.org.nz.

Respectful dialogue and sharing understanding is not enough. In the face of competing interests, decisions are too important to be left to scientists, industry or governments on their own. We live in a world where communities/the public are demanding their say when decisions are being made that will materially affect them and the future of their children and grandchildren. The previous Government committed itself to requiring public consultation or representation on a wide range of issues. It remains to be seen what importance this will be given by the new regime.

Throughout the Council's processes of engagement, it was clear that New Zealanders had a high regard for science and technology and were interested in learning

more. Of greater importance, however, were their shared values and their concern that decisions should be made based on these values. It was evident that not all values were given

equal weight and that people were prepared to trade some against others in particular situations.

As an example – those who hold personal autonomy paramount had to balance this by considering the consequences to society of allowing everyone choice when driving on the roads! Questions arose about what research should be permitted and how it should be regulated and about what treatments should be available and to whom. Who benefits from developments? An overseas example is the use of technology to determine the sex of a foetus – and the selective abortion of females as occurs in China and India, with a distorting impact on society as a whole. At home, those holding life sacred may yet agree to abortion to save the life of the mother. Should ability to pay enable some people to get access to scarce resources?

If decisions are to be based on values, what happens when these are incompatible and a trade off has to be made? We noted the tension between personal autonomy and the greater good of the community. Decisions made at a personal level if replicated by others can have a major effect on the wider community, as illustrated by the effect

on maternity services and schools of more women deciding to have babies a few years ago. We are told that our society has become more selfish, more concerned with personal success and material wellbeing and less caring about the needs of others. The Council's most recent dialogue on "Who gets born" tried a method for involving groups of the public in working through what choices they would like to see made.³

The good news is that we found people not formally associated with any faith community sharing many of the values, even if they found them difficult to articulate. Also

3 For description of the process see 'Who gets born? A report on the cultural, ethical and spiritual aspects of pre-birth testing' by Toi te Taiao: the Bioethics Council, published June 2008 and available on www.bioethics.org.nz

good news for our country is that Maori and Pacific understandings of spirituality and cultural values uniquely enrich NZ society. The challenge to all of us is to ensure that spiritual, cultural and ethical issues become integral to decision making in the scientific, industrial and economic worlds.

Helen Bichan served on the Bioethics Council from its establishment in 2002 until mid 2008. She is now a Presbyterian representative on the Interchurch Bioethics Council (ICBC). Her background is in psychiatry and in public health medicine and she continues to be involved in population health issues at community level in Porirua.

From a backyard point of view

Bob Eyles, minister emeritus, Manawatu Wanganui

The first half of my career was as a teaching and researching earth scientist in the university system; I grew to appreciate, respect and, finally, to love the Earth and its formative natural systems. As a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, I realised that my love for the natural world reflected God's love. This is clear in many verses of Scripture – John 3:16 and Romans 8:18-23, for example. So, for me, Christianity and science fitted and continue to fit like hand and glove!

Both science and Christianity involve relationships; the area of greatest commonality is in what is now known as "ecology". The term is derived from two Greek words - oikos, meaning "house" or "place to live" and logos, meaning "study of". Ecology, then, is the study of the relationships of living organisms with each other and with their environment. The Greek oikos is also the root of two other key words: "economy" and "ecumenical". So, the scope of ecology is vast; for example, my old subject "geography" can be termed "human ecology", and I was once referred to as a "spiritual ecologist"!

I am fortunate in retirement to live on a one hectare rural property on the outskirts of Levin. Lois, my wife, has lived on the same site for 28 years and I have been around for three. We have a small remnant of natural bush – a

dozen large Karaka trees, a couple of old Tawas and several old Kowhais, Caprosmas and Lemonwoods. I spend many hours in the bush, my first task being to remove the carpet of small Karakas – I have pulled out 7000 and each year hundreds more spring up as seeds germinate. This allowed Lemonwood, Caprosma Grandiflora and Kowhai seedlings to grow. I then planted Miro, Totara, Rewa Rewa, Pigeonwood, Titoki and Rimu seedlings, which came either from local nurseries or the Taupo Native Plant Nursery. A path allows visitors to enjoy a cool walk under the trees.

Last year we bought a 415 square metre strip, which we call the shelter belt, along our eastern boundary to enable us to extend the little patch of bush, to give added shelter from the occasional easterly gales that sweep down from the Tararuas and to give us privacy should the adjacent farm ever be subdivided. Once the fence had been made sheep-proof, the long task of removing Arum lilies, planting and improving the soil, could begin.

Soil under 100 years and more of grazing by sheep and cattle is very different from the soil that had developed under the original native bush. Typically, soil under grass has lost much of its depth, structure and water-holding capacity - in a drought, pasture land is stressed much more quickly than forested land. I removed the dead and dy-

ing trees, which have become next year's firewood, and bought a line trimmer to keep the grass in check. I transplanted many seedlings from our original patch of bush, began to spread lawn clippings and bought woodchips across the soil surface to provide a mulch. I planted a line of quick growing Pittosporums along the new boundary and then two Matai, a Kahikitea, three Totara, a Miro, a Ribbonwood, two Lacebarks and a Kamaki – slow growing and ultimately large trees. A two-person seat has been strategically sited so that we can watch the late evening sun on the Tararua.

Not everyone lives on a large semi-rural section but – of course – we all live somewhere and most of us have the opportunity to care for a garden and its soil! So, while most of us are not trained in science, and we may even wonder if science and Christianity are compatible, we can all be applied ecologists and care for our gardens in the name of Christ!

Most of the steps we need to take in caring for our land are plain common sense or can be discovered by asking questions of neighbours, local and regional councils or through the Internet. There are four basic principles in ecology – everything is connected to everything else, everything must go somewhere, nature knows best and there is no such thing as a free lunch. These principles warn against human arrogance and personal or institutionalised greed.

The history of land use over the past 150 years in lowland New Zealand has been one of replacement of the natural bush by grassland to support an economy based on the farming of sheep and cattle and cropping. The consequences and cost of this profound change are still being worked out in the nature of the soil, in rates of erosion and in local climates.

The dense natural bush around Levin, for example, was cleared before the beginning of the 19th century, with very few bush remnants being left. Some of these bush remnants are designated reserves, while others are on steep or otherwise inaccessible sites. Ecological awareness among farmers and other landowners is leading to replanting of native trees – the sort of change that we are trying to make to our small property. Biological diversity is thus starting to increase, with many implications.

Bird life is enhanced – tuis are now to be seen across Levin – as fruiting trees are planted and corridors of native trees appear among the farmland and lifestyle blocks. Native birds such as grey warblers, herons, wood pigeons, tuis and bellbirds are becoming more common. Subtle changes in microclimates and in productivity are also occurring.

Ecosystems are very good at coping with natural changes of climate and events, such as wind storms and flooding. A natural forest, for example, will maintain its existence indefinitely in all but the most extreme events, such as a volcanic eruption or the onset of an Ice Age. But sudden events in the hands of humans, such as bulldozing, chain sawing or burning, can devastate ecosystems. In extreme

natural events, there are likely to be refuge areas in which the ecosystem is preserved and from which vegetation can recolonise the land. Planting and recreating something

like the pre-human ecosystems in small areas such as reserves, shelterbelts and gardens, increases the number of these refuge areas and adds to the variety and health of the landscape.

Almost none of our ecosystems in New Zealand are perfectly natural, in the sense of being free of humanly introduced influences such as grazing and browsing animals. Another important influence on our ecosystems is the escape of plants from suburban gardens; plants that often become weeds. New Zealand is perhaps the weediest country in the world! So, the “backyard ecologist” will need to be vigilant and spend time eliminating weeds. In our little patch of bush, for example, we are continually pulling out Arum Lilies, Wandering Jew and Convolvulus.

As clergy, we seldom are the best-informed member of our congregations on business, scientific or even social issues. Our distinctive contribution is to bring out the spiritual dimension in the whole of life. My vision of humans as co-creators with God is of people of all faith-persuasions learning how to love and care for the earth in our local areas across the planet. If we do this, we are acting as God's agents of love.

Science and Christianity face an identical foe

Dr John Kernohan*

Science is one of Christianity's children. But from time to time the two have found it an uncomfortable relationship. In a Postmodern world, however, they must face up to similar if not identical challenges in order to have a future.

It is widely accepted that science - as distinct from technology- was born out of Christianity.¹ The unique Judeo-Christian contribution to philosophy and culture that the earth and heavens were created *ex nihilo* and were seen as "good" or consistent is a requirement for the basis of science, or the series of consistent universal laws of nature that produce the behaviour of the cosmos. The linear concept of time, introduced at an early stage by the Jews to replace the cyclical understanding (repetition) that was previously universal, and their contribution of desacralisation of things and places including their centres of worship (the Temple in Jerusalem was an exception but they had some misgivings about that), which we have followed in Christianity, also allowed science to develop.² But the Jews also had the unique idea of one sovereign God.

The pivotal condition for science is that there is ultimately only one truth out there. You can't have one law of physics in Auckland and a different one in Wellington! Our knowledge of truth through science may be a provisional one, updated as new understandings are tested by hypothesis and experimental result, but none-the-less it is a single indispensable truth for science. As in science, the knowledge of the one God for Christians is indispensable but also only provisional. Not only do the truths of science and Christianity share similar characteristics, they are both part of the same objective reality of truth and we learn about truth through revelation to us in the same way.

Scientific and theological method both require a relationship between the subject (us) and the objective truth in order that knowledge of truth is revealed to us. The actual details of scientific experiment and theological method differ somewhat. The scientific method involves the design and testing of a hypothesis through the perturbation of an object and us (the subject) observing object's reaction as it is revealed. By definition we cannot perturb God as in the scientific method so we must focus on how God "perturbs" us (the subject). In this way our knowledge of truth, our existing suppositions, hypotheses and tacit understandings are advanced by refining and revision in both science and Christianity. So knowledge of truth is

neither entirely fixed as in fundamentalism, nor entirely subjective but is an interactive process involving intuition and revelation. It is very much relational. Sometimes scientists and Christians get it wrong and so over time, using the scientific and theological method and review and discussion, our knowledge of truth is advanced. We are reforming and being reformed by God - sound familiar? It seems that at least science and Christianity share the same epistemology.

An important contributor to the philosophy of science, Michael Polanyi, outstanding scientist and subsequently philosopher, is only now - 32 years after his death - being recognised for his contribution to the understanding of how we get our knowledge of truth.³ Along with others, he pointed out that Science provides truth about what and how. The scientific method produces data. Knowledge of truth, claimed Polanyi, was much more than just about science. Data alone cannot add to knowledge without what he called "tacit knowledge". Tacit knowledge consists of experience, the established body of knowledge, tradition, religion and other understandings "more than we are able to describe", including "personal obsession". He rated religion at a much higher "level" of importance than the other elements. Religion adds meaning or purpose. In other words, creation of knowledge is not solely objective. Subjectivity is just as critical.

As a scientist and intimate observer of the process of scientific discovery, I totally agree with Polanyi. This of course goes against Cartesian-Kantian philosophy and some of the 20th Century's popular philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell and, more recently, Richard Dawkins.

What do Postmodernism and our secular society have in store then for Christianity and science? Randall Prior in his first keynote address at GA08 gave one of the most eloquent presentations on this subject, especially with respect to truth. Consider the nature of truth. Harold Turner in his excellent book⁴ described the Christian model of truth as a box with an open top where truths as they are discovered and have been adequately tested (through tacit knowledge) are added or have existing elements replaced with new ones. Fundamentalist religions have truth in a locked box - no possibility for change or reform.

But modern secular society regards anyone's idea of truth as just as acceptable as anyone else's. In fact, multiple

truths are encouraged and are regarded as temporary. Tacit knowledge and scientific fact are discarded or unimportant. These ideas have appeared in parts of our education system, where they're called constructivism. Children (and others) create their own truths. Harold Turner has called Postmodern truth a series of plastic containers of different dimensions. Thus does modern Western society treat religion, especially Christianity. It's a just a throwaway container. Furthermore, one container is as good as any other. This idea of truth is simply inconsistent with both Christianity and science. Both share other characteristics too, but none seems more important right now than their common epistemology. Can they survive?

The essential pillars of scientific and Christian truth are at stake. The existence of both is at best incompatible with Postmodernism and our secular culture. Both are threatened by modern culture. At the same time, they themselves are a threat to Postmodernism. It seems that Christianity and this child of ours, science, need to keep close for a while yet.

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Intelligent Design: the way forward?

Don Nield

A number of New Zealanders have been introduced to Intelligent Design (ID) through the video *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*, which was widely distributed to schools by the Focus on the Family organisation, or through the writings of the journalist Ian Wishart. The ID movement is an American movement led for a decade by Phillip Johnson, a Berkeley Professor (now Emeritus) of Law [*Darwin on Trial* (1991), *Wedge of Truth* (2002)]. This movement is largely funded by the Center for Science and Culture (formerly Center for the Renewal of Science and Culture) of the politically active Seattle-based Discovery Institute.

The best known scientists associated with the ID movement are the biochemist Michael Behe [*Darwin's Black Box* (1996), *The Edge of Evolution* (2008)] and the mathematician and philosopher William Dembski [*Intelligent Design* (1999), *No Free Lunch* (2001), *The Design Revolution* (2004)]. Philosophers associated with the movement include William Lane Craig, J P Moreland, Alvin Plantinga, Paul Nelson and Stephen C Meyer.

The ID proponents argue that the theory of evolution is flawed. They point to a book by Michael Denton (who now works at the University of Otago) *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (1984). This is a negative argument. On the positive side, Behe (pronounced BEEhee) argues that the existence of complicated biological systems at the molecular level (such as the flagellum of the bacterium *Escherichia coli*, which has been likened to a complicated outboard motor) provide clear evidence for design by an intelligent agency. Dembski claims that such design is empirically detectible.

Behe argues that the *E. coli* flagellum is “irreducibly complex”. In other words, it consists of multiple parts such that if any one part is taken away, the remnant will fail to function; and this means that the structure cannot have evolved by gradual steps by the process of natural selection. Dembski argues that if something is both improbable and exhibits “specified complexity”, then design can be inferred.

Intelligent design is poor philosophy

Phillip Johnson claimed that methodological naturalism (MN) (the framework that scientists use when they do not invoke supernatural explanations while doing science) leads inevitably to philosophical (or metaphysical) naturalism (PN) (the assumption that everything can be explained in naturalist terms). Most scientists would disagree with Johnson.

Alvin Plantinga is a widely respected philosopher of religion, but he is much less persuasive when it comes to philosophy of science. He has argued that MN is incoherent, that the notion of scientific law is untenable, and that the notion of MN is fuzzy. In reply Michael Ruse, a philosopher of science, argues that Plantinga has given us no reason to give up on MN except that it conflicts with his

prior commitment to his own version of Christian theism and that there is no reason why we cannot continue to draw the distinction between MN and PN. Ruse is not prepared to accept that methodological naturalism is a philosophy opposed to theism.

ID proponents claim that their ideas are scientific, not religious, and should, therefore, be taught in science lessons as an alternative view to evolution

accept that methodological naturalism is a philosophy opposed to theism.

Intelligent Design is poor science

ID proponents claim that their ideas are scientific, not religious, and should, therefore, be taught in science lessons as an alternative view to evolution. This led to the recent Dover Trial in which a public school board in the US was taken to court for trying to have ID taught in the science classroom (the board lost – ID was judged to be religion not science).

There are two main problems with ID as science. The first problem is what counts as a scientific theory. The purpose of scientific theories in biology is to explain the relationships between all of the materials that comprise living matter. A scientific theory must be testable against empirical evidence, otherwise it remains vacuous. A successful theory leads to a research programme that will aim to establish its truth statement. ID fails to count as science by these criteria. Saying something is designed leads to no increase of understanding between relationships. Labeling a biological entity as designed leads to

no experimental program that could be utilised to test the hypothesis.

The second problem is that it is not possible to define certain biological entities in a meaningful fashion. All living matter is composed of thousands of components, all of which need to work together in a coordinated manner to maintain life. Hence one cannot identify “designed entities” in biology against a background of “natural entities which science does not understand”.

What one has in ID is the “fallacy of large numbers”. As soon as one has a multi-component system, then the chances of it coming into being all at once are remotely small. But no biologist thinks that is how evolution works. Evolution works incrementally.

ID is essentially a “God-of-the-gaps” argument. The (flawed) argument

here is that “god” provides an explanation for things that science cannot (yet) explain. But what invariably happens is that in the fullness of time the gap in scientific knowledge closes and the “god” or “designer” disappears. Behe’s book *Darwin’s Black Box* provides many supposed examples of irreducible complexity but many of these proposed gaps have in fact already been filled in the decade since his book appeared.

I add that there are some major technical weaknesses in the basic ID arguments of Behe and Dembski, which I will mention very briefly. For example, in arguing that the *E. coli* flagellum is irreducibly complex, Behe assumes that such an organism has a single function, that of locomotion. In fact, a subset of the proteins making up the flagellum constitutes another organism that has a role in secretion. Dembski cannot apply his explanatory filter (which separates out design from chance and/or necessity) to biology because he does not know the values of the probabilities that are involved.

Intelligent Design is poor theology

Dembski titled one of his books *Intelligent Design: A Bridge Between Science and Religion*. However, the bridge fails to bear the designed weight. Dembski sees ID as providing epistemic (relating to knowledge) support for Christianity but elsewhere in the book he adopts a conflict mode. According to Dembski, ID is incompatible with “theistic evolution”. He says that theistic evolution

takes the Darwinian picture of the biological world and baptises it, identifying this picture with the way God created life. He argues that when boiled down to its scientific content, however, theistic evolution is no different from atheistic evolution, treating only undirected natural processes in the origin and development of life.

According to Dembski, ID and theistic evolution differ fundamentally about whether the design of the universe is accessible to our native intellect — design theorists say yes; theistic evolutionists say no. For Dembski, the “theistic” in “theistic evolution” is superfluous. He wants to dump methodological naturalism. This leaves him on a collision course with a large number of scientists who are

Christians. Dembski’s bridge turns out to be a ramp with a discontinuity at its end.

There are difficulties for ID relating to the nature of the designer. In the case of

such fields as forensic science or archaeology, we already know that the designer is human, and thus we are aware of the range of mechanisms that the designer is capable of employing, and we also know something about the likely motivation of the designer. In the case of design in biology we have no similar information.

Indeed, ID proponents deliberately say nothing about the nature of the designer. They admit that on their argument the designer could well be an alien from outer space, or that there could be more than one designer. This may well be a suitable strategy from a political viewpoint, but it means that it does little to advance theology. In fact the refusal of ID proponents to specify the characteristics of the designer or the designer’s mode of operation is a major weakness in their argument.

There is a further weakness with ID. The ID proponent requires the designer to interfere from time to time to produce special things like the *E. coli* flagellum. That implies that the designer is inactive at intermediate times. In other words, ID is essentially periodic deism.

General design is OK

Having acknowledged some of the difficulties with ID, it should be pointed out that the more general aspects of design do provide a sound basis for demolishing the more outrageous claims of atheists.

The refusal of ID proponents to specify the characteristics of the designer or the designer’s mode of operation is a major weakness in their argument

As Owen Gingerich [*God's Universe*, 2005], Michael Denton [*Nature's Destiny*, 1998] and Paul Davies [*The Cosmic Jackpot* (in the US)/ *The Goldilocks Enigma* (in the UK), 2007] (to mention a few people) have pointed out, the universe is remarkably fine tuned for the existence of life. This is consistent with a universe created by God. (The atheists try to wriggle out of this implication by postulating multiple universes.) In fact the basic Christian claim is that God created the heavens and the Earth and continuously sustains them.

Whither the Intelligent Design Movement?

Thomas Woodward [*Doubts about Darwin* 2003; *Darwin Strikes Back: Defending the Science of Intelligent Design*, 2006] is an insider historian of the ID moment and its rhetorical arguments. He sees a rosy future for ID. Woodward uses the language of warfare (he happens to have a military background). He sees the ID movement as conducting a blitzkrieg, but in my opinion it is reduced to trench warfare after a legal setback in the Dover trial and various failures in scientific matters. These include the general failure to establish a scientific research programme after a decade of trying, the failure of Behe to convince the scientific community about the existence of irreducible complexity in biological systems, and the failure of Dembski to convince mathematicians about the validity of his application of “no free lunch” theorems to the information contained in molecular systems.

A better way forward

Thanks to the efforts of John Polkinghorne [*Science and Theology*, 1998] and others, a contemporary revival of natural theology is taking place. Polkinghorne notes that this is one revised in relation to its predecessors in two important respects. First, it is more modest in its claim. It does not assert that God's existence can be demonstrated in a logically compelling way but that theism makes more sense of the world, and of human experience, than does atheism.

Second, its appeal is not to particular occurrences or particular entities, in contrast to the way in which William Paley in the 19th Century discussed the optical system of the eye or Behe today discusses particular complex systems. For the new natural theologians, the occurrences of such phenomena are part of the history of the physical world that is science's legitimate role to seek to explain as fully as it can. Instead, the new natural theology looks to the laws of nature that science has to take as assumed, and it asks whether there is more to be understood about these laws than their mere assertion. It is in no way a rival to science within science's proper domain.

Rather, it serves as a complement to science, going beyond the latter's self-limited realm of enquiry. There is no recourse to a “God of the gaps” but to the God whose steadfast will is held to be expressed in the laws of nature that science discovers but does not explain.

Alister McGrath [*The Open Secret*, 2008] is another theologian who thinks that a natural theology is viable, but only if one starts from a theistic viewpoint.

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The submission deadline is 31st March 2009.

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Enquiries to:

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Closing date for applications is 31st March 2009

What kind of justice?

Douglas Mansill, minister emeritus, Auckland

Prior to the election last year, I read a publicity statement emanating from the Howard League for penal reform that summarised the law and order policies of the various parties. There were wide variations in emphasis between punitive and rehabilitative emphases but with one exception they were set in the context of a world view that was dominated by the presupposition of a Westminster understanding of Government administration.

That one exception was the policy proposals set out by the Maori Party, which invited the voters to focus on law and order policies through a different lens. On offer was a policy that was premised on the care and welfare of one's neighbours and family as a measure of social well-being; development of processes that were restorative rather than punitive; the desire to empower communities to engage in criminal justice processes; education that exemplified values and kaupapa that enhanced human well-being; empowerment for victims of crime and support for processes whereby offenders were treated as part of the community rather than as isolated individuals.

These policies are food for thought. Our New Zealand criminal justice system, with its adherence to an adversarial/punitive/rehabilitative system of doing justice, is creaking badly at the joints or in some instances simply not working. We human beings are a funny lot – if we find something that doesn't work we often do it harder – and this applies especially in our attitudes towards crime and punishment. The high-profile calls to build more prisons, impose longer and harsher sentences and provide boot camps to discipline young offenders may be a pre-election ploy for politicians to enhance the likelihood of their re-election by playing on public uncertainties about community safety, but these initiatives contribute little towards making our communities more cohesive and safer places in which to live.

Furthermore, many of these aforementioned options have been tried before with little demonstrable success. For instance, corrective training, in vogue in the 1970s, operated off the “short sharp shock” theory and had a 90 percent recidivism rate, producing fit, angry young men who rapidly re-offended, simply because the root causes of their offending were not dealt with. Certainly I do not believe our current approaches to penal policy are producing the best outcomes for tax-payer investment. We lock up people in our prisons at a rate second only to

the United States of America; disproportionate numbers of Maori and Pacific Island people engage as clients of the Criminal Justice system and despite the media hype and high-profile, distorted advocacy of groups such as the Sensible Sentencing Trust, our communities are not safer places in which to live.

As Christian people, we hold unique perspectives regarding concepts such as justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and the inherent dignity of people and yet, uncritically, our voice has been subsumed by populist, punitive notions for dealing with offending behaviour. If we believe that we still have important things to contribute towards the well-being of New Zealand society, then it would make sense to form strategic alliances with groups such as the Maori Party and become more pro-active in advocating for a paradigm shift for the development of policies that actually work rather than perpetrate those which patently do not. As a contribution towards this proposal, I offer the following three areas for consideration.

In contemporary usage we often hear of justice being described as a punitive concept. “Justice is done when an offender is punished more heavily or receives a longer prison sentence” and so on. Yet the First Testament concept of justice is different. Essentially, justice is a relational concept and not one of punitive intent. Justice occurs when right relationships are established or restored between God and people or between various groups of human beings. Being merciful and meeting obligations to redress past wrongs often occur as deliberate interventions to counter the perpetration of historical grievances and deal with offending behaviour. When relationally focused justice is set in place, shalom (wholeness and well-being), rather than the perpetration of fear or violence, then becomes a significant outcome. It would be fair to assume that this social end-goal would be in accordance with the wishes of most New Zealanders. If this is the case, the issue then becomes one of developing strategies that are consistent with the achievement of this aim rather than counterproductive notions of revenge and punitive retribution that are currently so much in vogue. Here is mission enough to preoccupy our attention for the first half of the 21st century, should we care to take it up.

Alongside our consideration of our understanding of justice, there is also a need to re-think our approach towards the concept of “human rights” as a basis for developing

effective penal policy. Contemporary concepts of rights have their origin in the 18th century Enlightenment period and the American and French Revolutions, as the American colonists and the French populace sought to throw off the hegemonic suzerainty of their respective monarchies. These concepts may have been appropriate for their time and context, but the question needs to be raised as to whether they are an appropriate ideological basis for the implementation of effective penal policy in 21st century New Zealand.

In any offending situation, there are three groups of people who need to be considered: offenders, people who have been harmed by their actions and the community of interest that has been affected by the offending behaviour. Rights-based strategies for implementing justice tend to focus on the “wants” of each of these groups (e.g. victims’ rights, prisoners’ rights, the right to a fair trial), thus compartmentalising the key players in this situation into separate groups as each seeks to defend their own interests as a first priority. In contrast, the enactment of relational concepts of justice, with an end-goal of the achievement of shalom, requires consideration of the needs and obligations of everyone affected by instances of community disruption.

The Biblical tradition of justice places emphasis on responsibilities and obligations rather than defending the rights of interest groups. (*Love your neighbour as you love yourself ... The kind of fasting I want is this ... What (the Lord) requires of us is this ... Leave your gift at the altar and go and make peace with your brother ... When you pray say this ... Go and do likewise.*) God’s requirements for community safety are not difficult to understand – that we exercise responsibility for the creation of right relationships with God, our neighbour and ourselves. Real justice is achieved when this takes place.

Any criminal justice policy that seeks to isolate or exclude any of the key players is fundamentally flawed in its intention. Our continuing preoccupation with victims’ rights only serves to highlight this point. Much contemporary criminal justice thinking has placed a growing emphasis on victims’ rights and the need to empower victims and obtain a fair deal for them, with the implication that this must take place at the expense of the offender. I would not dispute the need for victim interests to be placed at the centre of any criminal justice process, but, as I have already indicated, other parties also need to be considered if the ends of effecting justice are to be achieved. From a Biblical point of view, a perusal of the Gospels indicates that Jesus encompassed victims’ as well as offenders’ needs within his teaching. Both Prodigal Son

and the Father whose goods had been squandered were required to effect reconciliation; Nicodemus was as much in need of restoration as the woman taken in adultery; and the man attacked by robbers needed medical attention as much as the Priest and the Levite needed to re-focus their attitudes. Jesus focused attention on the needs of “outsiders” and their reconciliation with God, community and themselves, rather than the sectional interests of either victims or offenders.

This failure to recognise our mutual accountabilities is, I believe, a fundamental reason why so much of our penal policy fails to produce satisfactory outcomes. Offenders are isolated from their communities of interest in prisons, offenders are dealt with through legal processes that encourage denial as a matter of self survival, victims’ interests become subservient to those of the state, we fail to recognise that many offenders are themselves victims, and offending cycles are perpetrated by way of the introduction of sentencing options that are designed to inflict yet greater levels of pain and hopelessness. The paradigm shift for creating an effective criminal justice policy not only needs to be away from adversarial and punitive attitudes, but also from “what I or we want” to “what can we can and must do.”

In presenting these thoughts, I am aware that I have dealt largely in the realm of theory and that the implementation of these ideas is another matter. Yet, the last issue of *Candour* was a timely reminder to its readers of the need to recapture our prophetic voice and speak with authority to the wider community on matters concerning public interest and well being. Historically, the Presbyterian Church has engaged actively with Government and public opinion regarding matters of penal policy and reform, and during the 1940s, 50s and 60s the mainstream churches had a considerable influence on the formation of effective penal policy.

Within our basket of knowledge we have unique perspectives for creating a paradigm shift that could bring change to a criminal justice system that is patently under pressure and failing to meet the needs of New Zealand society in 2009. It seems to me that we have two alternatives. We can remain silent, and by our silence allow for the continuation of current populist attitudes towards crime and punishment, and thus perpetrate a system that is both wasteful of human resources and ineffective. On the other hand, we can strive with others of like mind to bring about a justice system that is relational, constructive and restorative in its endeavour and intention. To speak and act in this way will not bring about universal acclaim; but this is the task of prophecy.

Doing what you do

Clint Eastwood (as Dirty Harry, burned on my teenage brain, in the scene where he says “go ahead, make my day” to a particularly unsavoury thug weighing up his options, crouched at the receiving end of Harry’s famous 45 magnum) is now 78, and what a guy. He’s the snarling Korean war vet Walt Kowalski, a malevolent Archie Bunker figure of our modern times, in his role in the film *Gran Torino*.

There are a few memorable lines in the movie, but what sticks in my mind are the words Dirty Harry/Clint/Walt speaks to the young priest who has just buried his wife: “I think you’re an over-educated 27-year-old virgin who likes to hold the hands of superstitious old ladies and promises them everlasting life.” Despite this rather troubling start, as the movie progresses we encounter deep theological themes of faith and hope and redemption (and the Ford *Gran Torino* is pretty special as well), with the final scenes imbued with an implicit soteriology.

So what is a plump-ish, virgin, man-of-the-cloth/over-educated-priest going to do? I am not sure whether any or all those qualities applied to me as a 27 year old, two years after my ordination in 1985. But perhaps all of those of us who are ministers have experienced that social awkwardness, the minute pause in a conversation, when we answer the question, “so what do you do?” In fact I have been breathalysed for admitting to my calling after being stopped driving past the Railway Tavern in Thorndon back in ‘87 (yes, the crystals did stay green).

People know what plumbers, doctors and taxi drivers do, but what do ministers do? In a previous congregation, my office was over the fence from a building site. Each day I walked up the drive from the manse to the office. Most days I would see the builders arrive in the morning. We all knew what they were doing. Perhaps it was just some kind of oversensitivity on my part as I interpreted their glances to me and then one another as I meandered into the church. One day the house they were building would be completed, they would drive off in their Toyota twin cab and begin work on the next house. Eventually you and I leave a congregation, become part of a memory, which may be given some substance in the form of a photo hung alongside others in a particularly poorly lit part of a church corridor.

Perhaps an intellectually more troubling scenario in terms of what ministers do emerges from the string of attacks launched against religion by people like Cambridge Professor Richard Dawkins and his predecessors. The assertion is that religion is the cause of conflict and strife in the world. Explicit in such an analysis is that you and I, as the apologists and promulgators of the Christian faith, are

doing the world a grave disservice. In his book *The God Delusion*, there is no doubt in Dawkins’ mind that the evils of the world are to be laid at the doorstep of the church (and the mosque and synagogue for that matter), and that science must be our salvation.

If Dawkins is the modern apologist for Darwin, then the writer Marilynne Robinson is a contemporary champion for Calvin. The Times of London described Robinson as the world’s best writer of prose. She is a member of the Congregational Church, and her award-winning novels *Gilead* and *Home* relate to the relationship between a Presbyterian and Congregationalist minister. But she also writes theology. If you want to read a terrific essay by her on Darwinism (and a lot more), then grab a copy of her book *The Death of Adam*.

Robinson is sharply critical of debates that set science and religion as representing contrasting and conflicting world views. For example, we could say that science has given us eugenics and the bomb, while religion has given us the inquisition and suicide bombers. Robinson reminds us of the 19th century abolitionist, feminist, essayist and ordained minister Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who made the always-timely point that, in comparing religions, great care must be taken to consider the best elements of one with the best of the other, and the worst with the worst. So Robinson says of our discussion on science and religion.

Wrestling with our faith, our doubts, and the complexities and ambiguities of life is part of the deal. But the strangest thing I have found in ministry is that the greatest sense of God’s presence and even (without wanting to sound arrogant) the rightness of my calling, is not the times when I have just preached what I think must be the mother of all sermons. It is the times, walking up the driveway to see the parents of the young woman killed in the car accident, when I can think of no words to say and nothing is sorted out. It is the helplessness that we share in our awkward presence with the family, our stumbled prayers and the assurances we may read from Scripture that actually do make a difference when there is nothing else that will. It is those times when I think it is in fact our learning, our Biblical study and theological education that helps us avoid the temptation of burying the significance of the moment in religious clichés or superstitious conjecture.

In the year of Darwin’s 200th and Calvin’s 500th birthdays, let us not only reflect on the best writings and endeavours of people of faith and science, but also let us each encourage one another as we seek to fulfil the ministry to which we are called.

