

Science & Faith

Music & More online

Supplement No. 80

The Revd Dr Mike Kirby, our Cathedral Curate, arranged a fascinating series of lectures in the Spring of 2016 on **Science & Faith** with distinguished speakers who attracted questioning audiences who listened closely to every word and asked searching questions.

1

The first lecture was given by Dr Kirby himself.

He asked:

'In view of

the current giant leaps forward in scientific knowledge and research, is there still room for faith – Christian or otherwise?' Mike led his large audience to give an unequivocal YES!



What led us to this decision?

(i) Mike's own impressive scientific knowledge and achievements, for he is a part time Lecturer in Radiotherapy Physics at Liverpool University, and

(ii) his own strong, practical Christian faith.

He's been on the staff of the Christie Hospital, and has contributed to some 140 scientific books, presentations and papers! He also has an active interest in choral music – for he conducts his own ecumenical Christian choir in Manchester.

Why was the evening so successful?



(i) Because, being a lecturer, Mike knows how to 'hold' his audience, and (ii) he had prepared a host of digital images to illustrate the points he made.

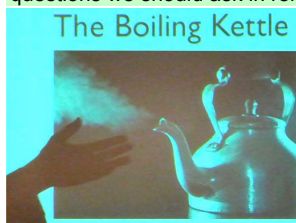
(So, we **heard**, and we **saw**, and so we **understood**.)

He illustrated current scientific knowledge of the very tiny and the

very big. (*The Very Tiny*) 'If the ball on my ballpoint pen represented the nucleus of an atom, the atom's circumference would be as far away as the cathedral's West door. And the rest of an atom is empty space.'

(*The Very Big*) 'But if the ball on my ballpoint pen represented the size of the earth, the nearest star would be in London!'

His *Boiling Kettle* illustration gave some of the answers to questions we should ask in relation to Science and Religion.



These clarified our thoughts re the difference between Science and Faith:

Why is that kettle boiling?

A scientific answer:

'Because the heat from the gas turns the water into steam.'

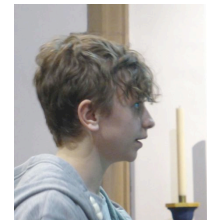
A 'religious' answer:

'Because I want a cup of tea.'

Both are equally true, but the second is, perhaps, the more significant for us.

Many questions were asked – including two by deputy head chorister **Zak Tayler** who asked about black holes, heaven and hell!

We eagerly looked forward to the next lecture!



The following week we were enthralled by a presentation on **2 Ethics and Life Sciences.**

This was chaired by the **Canon Michael Wedgeworth**, assistant priest at the cathedral, who introduced **Patrick Keating** who is a consultant surgeon in Obstetrics and Gynaecology – and a former colleague of Dr Kirby at the Christie Hospital.

And **Wahida Pervaiz** who is a Genetics Liaison Officer from Manchester.



Canon Michael began by noting that Down's syndrome can be detected up to 14 weeks from the start of pregnancy. Should the pregnancy be terminated? 'If we regard the foetus as a human being, then one's values will take precedence.'

Technical knowledge and practice are leaping ahead: Michael had recently seen an operation for prostate cancer where the surgeon was in one part of the room looking at a screen, and the patient in another part of the room. 'Technology is transforming the face of the earth.'

Patrick Keating said that faith was a personal thing for him. He is an active member of the Fulwood Free Methodist Church in Preston. 'Faith and work affects us all.' He works with a confirmed atheist but, of course, they are not allowed to discuss faith with their patients.

However there was one occasion when he comforted a patient who was dying, but who wasn't sure of God's forgiveness. 'I was able to assure him of God's forgiveness, and so he died in peace.'

Patrick's job is full of pressure, and so he needs an outlet, which he finds by playing his guitar at his church. 'There's even a Rock Band in Preston which is full of consultants!'



Wahida Pervaiz was born in Whalley in 1968 – 'at a time when folk of a non-white colour were very few.' But she survived.

Wahida works with people who tend to marry within family groups, (i.e. in-breeding) which results in some children being born with inherited defects. 'I have to wrestle with these problems – and there are many of them.'

Deputy head chorister **Zak Tayler** asked a question about cloning. 'Is it right or wrong?'

Dr Keating said, 'I honestly don't know!'

But then he said: 'Some Christians believe that, once they've committed their lives to Christ, everything will be OK. No! They *Crucified* Christ!' But then he added: 'But people who have faith in God are able to take what life throws at them.'

He asked, 'Do people with a strong Christian faith have a more peaceful death? Yes! God has put into our hearts a sense of Eternity. **That is a blessing to take away with us.**'

3 The third lecture, with the eye-catching title 'Science, Faith and the Extra-Terrestrial Life Debate', was given by **Professor John Brook** – Emeritus Professorial Fellow, Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford.

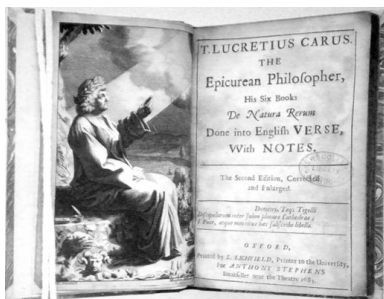
Professor Brook spoke well – not only presenting many ideas about the possibility of Extra-terrestrial life, but also because he knew how to use a microphone in our North Transept, which is so challenging for audibility – his every word was crystal clear.

He made the point that if there is ET life somewhere out there, it would provide problems both for Science and for Religion.

The more that Science knows about life on earth – that life can survive in the most extreme conditions – the more it seems that life could exist in many places in the Universe. And, taking into consideration the age of the Universe, some ET life may even have run its course and now be extinct.

On the other hand our planet has an exceptionally large moon – which has enabled life on earth to flourish. Maybe many other potential earths do not have such large moons.

But one present day scientist has said that there is 100% chance of ET life. He said that if each star in the universe was the size of a pin head, Miami's Orange Bowl stadium could be filled to overflowing 3 billion times! So it is scientifically impossible for our Sun's system to be the only one with life.



But religion believes that man was made in the image of God.

Professor Brook quoted many historical sources for thoughts about this subject.

What does God's Incarnation on earth mean if there were ET life?

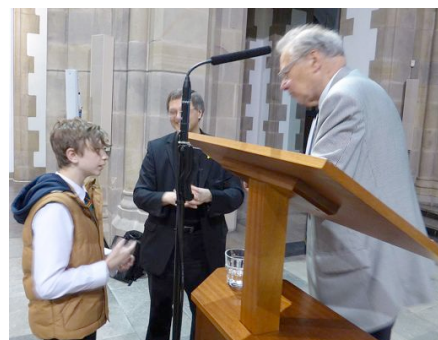
On the other hand if God is all-powerful, why couldn't He have made more than

one world? Perhaps an infinite God could have created an infinite number of worlds or an infinite number of universes? In which case Christ must have been born and died innumerable times – which is, perhaps, unthinkable.

Whilst many base their disbelief in ET life because of the teaching of the Bible, yet Jesus did say that '[In my Father's house are many mansions.](#)' Could this be interpreted as '[many worlds](#)'?

Professor Brook said, 'We still walk in a huge field of ignorance in this and so many other matters. The next 50 years could see huge advances in our knowledge of ET life which may give rise to further theological discussions.'

'But perhaps life on other planets has not experienced The Fall – therefore they may not need a Saviour? Jesus' parable about the lost sheep implies that only one sheep was Lost – therefore the 99 were not Lost.'



Again, there were many questions from members of the audience, and **Zak Tayler**, our deputy Head Chorister was in the forefront of these.

He even engaged our speaker and Dr Kirby in a discussion for several minutes afterwards: '[Do you think God created the earth to see what fallen man would do – before he created other worlds where there might be no Fall?](#)' They didn't know!!

4 The fourth lecture in Dr Kirby's series of Science and Faith was, '**Stephen Hawking, Quantum Physics and the Death of Materialism**' which was given by **Professor Keith Ward**, of Christ Church, Oxford, and Professorial Research Fellow, Heythrop College, London.

Dr Kirby wrote: 'Dr Ward is, by nature and conviction, an Idealist philosopher, somebody who believes in the supremacy of Spirit or Mind, and who thinks that the material universe is an expression or creation of a Supreme Mind.'



Dr Ward blew our minds by his avalanche of scientific thoughts. For example, he seemed to imply (to prove?) that there was no such thing as 'matter'. Stephen Hawking believes in the theory of *super strings* which have length, **but no breadth or height!**

Professor Ward is a Christian – due, in large measure, to his scientific research.

Much of Keith Ward's talk had to do with theories published by Stephen Hawking – these thoughts and theories came so fast that it was difficult to keep up with their torrential flow. So here are some of the one-liners which your reporter managed to write down:

Young people tend to be materialists.

He said, 'I give lectures on religion, but the last thing I should do is try to define what religion is!'

The problem with religion is that theologians don't keep up with scientific discoveries.

Today physicists are talking more about God than theologians!

Stephen Hawking's views are much nearer to believing in God than he realizes.

'Parallel Universes imply that if I raise my arm, there's another 'me' somewhere who doesn't raise his arm!'

'Where are the other Universes? That is as impossible to answer as the question: 'Where is God?'

Was there something else *before* space and time? One can't ask *when* God created the Universe, because there was no time or space beforehand. And God cannot have thought about creating the Universe, because that implies that there was time before time!

Stephen Hawking wrote that without mind, the Universe probably wouldn't exist. Without observation you don't get matter. We create history by observation rather than history creating us.

It is necessary that there is a God because this Universe was necessary and eternal. Therefore an Eternal Necessary Being created this Universe: its ongoing life depends upon Him.

Our observation of reality changes what reality is.

The material world could not exist without a Mind observing it.

Nothing in the Universe would be there without an Observing Mind.

That's a strong argument for belief in God!

Truth matters!

Again, there were many questions from the audience which were not easy to hear. But Zak Tayler again asked a question which challenged our speaker: '[Would different Universes have different laws from ours?](#)'

This led Dr Ward to state (in relation to parallel Universes) that things can only bump into each other if they are in space. But if they are in space-time they cannot bump into each other, so other Universes cannot bump into ours.

5 For the fifth talk, Dr Kirby had brought together four of his distinguished colleagues and friends to answer questions submitted in advance by faithful members of the audience.



Mr Glyn Shentall, Head of Radiotherapy Physics, Rosemere Cancer Centre
Mrs Helen Clements, Head of Radiotherapy, Rosemere Cancer Centre
Dr Alison Birtle, Consultant Clinical Oncologist and Senior Lecturer, Rosemere Cancer Centre
Dr Shabbir Susnerwala, Consultant Clinical Oncologist, Rosemere Cancer Centre

Again, it was not always easy to hear every word, due to the challenging acoustics of our North Transept. But enough could be heard to enable us to understand that the panel's faith did sustain and motivate each one of them in their professional lives.

The questions themselves were indeed challenging:

Question 1. What inspired you to become the professional that you are; and did your faith contribute to that inspiration?

The speakers' upbringing played a large part in their choosing of professions – their faith was ever present – and it was especially apparent when caring for individuals. *All* patients are individuals.

Question 2. Are there any cases or incidents in your scientific lives which have challenged your faith?

Their answer was a unanimous 'No'.

Question 3. What correlation, if any, do you see in stress bringing on Cancer in people – even if they have a strong faith, and trust God's plan for them.

Answer: stress certainly doesn't help at any time, but people with a strong faith are able more easily to deal with their cancer.

Question 4. What would be the main achievements in your professional career working with cancer patients?



Dr Birtle (R) answered that, after treating a long-term patient who was in his early 20s, he said to her that she had become his friend, and that this had meant a lot to him. It meant a lot to her, too.

Question 5. Is there any connection between a person's psychological condition and risk of Cancer?

It was not easy to give a 'yes' or 'no' to this question, for Cancer strikes where it will.

Question 6. Working in a hospital environment and the NHS, are there any difficulties which arise in practising your faith?

Dr Birtle answered that, in the present political circumstances, the NHS is a difficult place in which to work.

Question 7. What gets you up in the morning?

There were many amusing answers to this practical question – the best being, 'My wife!'

But there were many thoughtful answers, too:

What gets you up in the morning?

'My duty to others, both patients and staff.'

'My 9-year old son who is a gift to me from God.'

'What can I do to make my patients' life better?'

'Team work and a sense of belonging.'

'A sense of duty which has increased the older I get. I strive to do something good for people.'

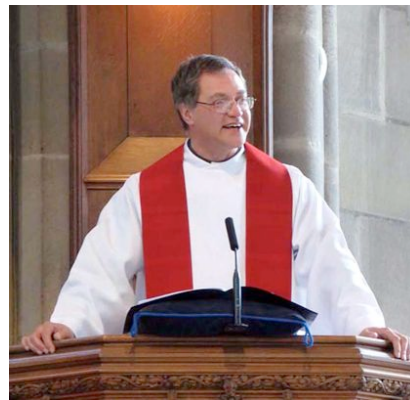
Then there were questions from the audience:

Here is one:

'Does prayer make any difference to patients' recovery?'

Yes, I do believe that prayer makes a difference. Our souls and spirits and bodies are all intertwined.

The overall impression we received that evening was that doctors and surgeons really care about their patients. They care for them as people, not just 'cases'. This will give much comfort to those who have to undergo life-challenging operations.



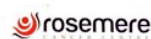
We are most grateful to the Revd Dr Mike Kirby for arranging this illuminating and so-rewarding series of inter-active lectures.

We look forward to more such evenings during Dr Kirby's caring cathedral ministry.

Support Cancer treatment!



www.rosemere.org.uk
 Call 01772-52-29-13



Rosemere Cancer Centre