

## **A Celebration of Science and Faith**



By any standard our Science and Faith week in April was a great week – there was, and still is, a real buzz about it. Thankfully all the technology worked – so it should in such a week! DVD sets will be available before long. The only hiccup was that Prof Tony Hewish could not hear some of the questions properly – and gave the impression that he doesn't believe in the resurrection! In fact he most certainly does, and is sorry for any misunderstanding. We have 3 reviews of the week – by a scientist, a non-scientist, and a sixth former who went to the school forum.

### **Science And Faith Week – A Scientist's Perspective**

Great Malvern Priory has long-standing links to science. Its second prior, Walcher, was also an astrologer and mathematician. Great Malvern was home to the wartime Telecommunications Research Establishment and its successor organisations, now QinetiQ. Generations of scientists have worked in Malvern and many still worship at the Priory. It is therefore fitting that the first major event in the Priory's celebration of its 925<sup>th</sup> anniversary was “a celebration of science and faith”.

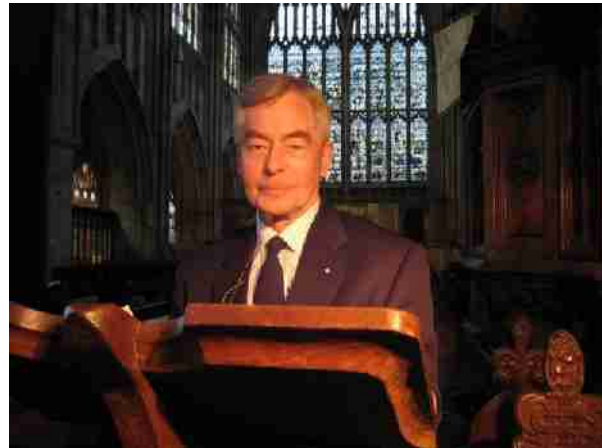
Five eminent scientists, who are also Christians, were invited to the Priory to speak about their science and their faith. Amongst the speakers professorships, doctorates and international awards were commonplace, three were Fellows of the Royal Society, and one was also a Nobel Laureate. The talks covered a wide range of science subjects: cosmology, evolution, neuroscience, theoretical physics, and model-based imaging radar exploitation. The speakers were, above all, committed Christians, who had thought long and hard about the relationship between their science and their faith. This is a difficult area for many people and the talks generated strong interest in the Malvern churches and town, with the Priory packed full to overflowing on all five evenings!

Prof Antony Hewish, who won a Nobel Prize for radio astronomy, gave the first talk on “Cosmology and Creation”. He explained the “inflation model” for the evolution of the universe (the current version of the Big Bang theory) and the strong evidence for it provided by radio astronomy. He linked this to the Christian view of an Intelligent Creator, and showed how the physical laws that govern the evolution of the universe have to be fine-tuned to incredible tolerances to support the evolution of stars with planetary systems supporting intelligent life.

Prof Sir Ghilleen Prance, former Director of Kew Gardens, gave the second talk entitled “Evolution or Creation? No, both!” He described the

wonder of the natural world and the total inter-dependency between species. He explained how evolution was compatible with his Christian faith, and his wonder in a God who could dictate the physical laws under which an ecosystem could create itself through the process of evolution. He concluded by describing his work in conservation and our responsibility, as Christians, for good stewardship of the world and its ecology. ►

Prof Edward Evans, Emeritus Professor of Auditory Physiology at Keele University, gave the next talk entitled “Is man a machine? A neuroscientist’s perspective”. He explained the operation of our senses and brain, showing how our mind can be thought of as information embodied in the brain. He linked this to the idea of the soul, the enduring ‘me’, illustrating the Christian view that we are much more than mere electro-chemical machines!



***Professor Edward Evans***

The Rev’d Dr. John Polkinghorne gave the penultimate talk entitled “The friendship between science and religion” in which he addressed directly the relationship between science and faith, drawing on his unique perspective as a leading theoretical physicist and an ordained Anglican priest. He talked about the complementarity of science and faith, with faith setting science in a deeper context and answering metaphysical questions. He pointed to God as the creator behind both our minds and the universe we are seeking to understand, and as the intelligent designer of a universe, the laws of which could lead ultimately to the evolution of complex life. He concluded that looking at the world through both science and religion provides a deeper and clearer understanding of the world than is possible through science or religion alone, and that there really is a friendship, rather than a conflict, between science and religion.

The final talk was given by our very own Dr. Chris Oliver on “Data, models and knowledge. How do we learn, and what can we know?” Chris talked about the derivation of knowledge from data, in his case radar imagery. He considered whether it was possible to derive knowledge of God from our observations of the world through science. He concluded that, while science allows a Christian to see part of the mind of God

through His creation, it neither proves nor disproves the existence of God. Ultimately, God's revelation to us through Jesus, and our relationship with Him, is more important.

The speakers in the Science and Faith series came from different scientific disciplines but all concluded that their science and faith were complementary. Both sought after truth and, while their science was very good at answering the "how" questions, only their faith could answer the "why".

*Andrew Horne*

### **Thoughts on the proceedings by a (definitely) non-scientist**

As someone who brought eternal shame on her family name by FAILING Form 111A's chemistry exam, I approached this series of talks with a certain amount of trepidation. Would I be sitting on those comfortable new chairs in a state of bemusement while all around me engaged with the speaker?

I need not have worried. Yes, there were times when I was not too sure, but the cogent and patient explanations made me think that perhaps I had been spotted, and things had been brought back to my level again.

The desire to know how the universe operates has long been thinking man's preoccupation. As we saw in the course of these lectures, there are different approaches to finding the answers, with each speaker showing respect for the others' disciplines, but each of those whom we heard had been brought to the same conclusion: that a Creator vastly superior to man is behind this world. There are, as we know, people who argue (noisily) against this concept, but even they admit to a sense of wonder as their knowledge expands, and we can pray that they will one day reach a different conclusion.

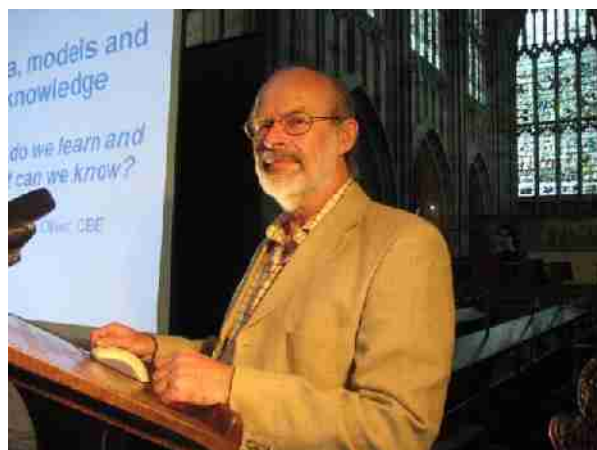
Professor Antony Hewish got us off to a good start tracing the development of radio astronomy from 1942 through the work of Martin Ryle and others. Much has been learnt: the fine balance of creation is akin to having to count each grain of sugar and flour before adding them to a cake mixture, surely arguing for a very Intelligent Designer. Even as knowledge increases, it does not answer the questions: What is the purpose of life, and why are we here? Science involves mysteries that seem to be unbelievable but can be proved by mathematics - mysteries of the same order as the great Christian mystery: how God could reveal himself in a man. We therefore need science to say what things are, and religion to say what they mean and what is behind them.

Sir Ghillean Prance took up the theme of the fine balance discovered in creation and his conviction of a divine Creator, and his concerns that the balance is being destroyed by man. His studies in the Amazon rain forests have shown him how deforestation has affected natural life, not just there but worldwide. This is man's abuse of Creation, and Sir Ghillean reminded us why Christians cannot sit back and let this happen: the Bible teaches that man is the steward of creation; if we do nothing, it is the poor who suffer the most; and it is Christ's creation that we are abusing. He reminded us of what each of us can do to arrest those things which we see to be abusing our universe.

Professor Ted Evans is a neuro-scientist who considered whether Man is a machine, as has been argued by Crick and others, or something infinitely more. Development through 200 years from phrenology to functional MRI has helped to understand the working of the brain, making sense of the messages coming into it; but how does the brain relate to the mind? Are they two separate "stuffs" or two aspects of one substance of the same thing? And where does "Me" come in - perhaps as soul? Nor must the body be overlooked, as St. Paul reminds us in Romans 12 vv1 and 2. Definitely more than a machine!

The Rev. Dr. John Polkinghorne lived up to his reputation as a physicist of international repute, a Christian who is convinced that science and religion are friends, pursuing the truth and offering each other their respective gifts, and a very effective communicator. The mind of a Creator lies behind the universe we know – a very special universe, starting simply and developing through 13.7 billion years. The more we learn, the more the cumulative case for theism builds up. It is an evolving world in which God is not the puppet master, but through the gift of love makes for the independence of his creatures. If we look at the world with two eyes, one scientific the other religious, we discover that science and religion are indeed linked.

We finished the series with our own Dr. Chris Oliver who shared with us his life-time passion for seeking the truth and finding his relationship with Our Lord in the midst of his research and discoveries. He linked his work on Synthetic Aperture Radar with thoughts on how we build up a context model in our brain, so that we can recognise



**Dr Chris Oliver**

not just “dog” but “golden retriever”; not just “golden retriever” but “Chris’s golden retriever”. Learning about God merely by observation may not be feasible, but seeing him in the world around us, as part of a wonderful creation, certainly is. Our knowledge is built up by Reason, Research, Revelation and Relationship, and the relationship that is formed by knowing Christ personally is so much more important than just knowing *about* God. Grasping the science leads to understanding part of the mind of God. Chris very neatly summed up the whole series’ themes and left us rejoicing that the more we learn about the world, the more God’s place in it is confirmed.

This was a wonderful week, in which God’s encouragement was keenly felt. We are so grateful to all who made it possible, and to those who gave time and energy to come to us. We rejoice that so many visitors joined us and pray that they found their visit fruitful. As I listened, other words from Form 111A came back to me; from Eng Lit - in which I came Top:

*And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew  
That one small head could carry all he knew.*

*(Oliver Goldsmith “The Deserted*

*Village”)*

And Who gave him that head?

*Elizabeth Dunnett*

### **Sixth Form Forum And Service Write-Up**

It wasn’t exactly a usual Saturday afternoon on 24<sup>th</sup> April; instead of revising for A levels (or not), sixth form students had the fantastic opportunity of hearing the Rev’d Dr. John Polkinghorne KBE FRS speak about science and faith at a forum held in the new Malvern College sports centre.

It was a chance for students (and others) to hear the world famous physicist/theologian briefly share some of his thoughts on why science and religion support, not contradict, each other. There was then an opportunity to ask questions, some of which were a little difficult to answer in a few minutes (the first one was something along the lines of “How, as a scientist, can you believe in life after death”, which is a complex topic in anyone’s books!).

I think I can safely say that everyone found the forum at the very least interesting and I feel very honoured that I had the chance to be there.

**But that’s not all...**

The Sunday morning service the next day wasn’t completely normal either; the usual Priory congregation was joined by the boarding

community of Malvern College. There were 700 people in the building (give or take a few) so it was necessary to have a camera projecting the image of the front to TV screens throughout the Priory. It just so happened that the camera was pointing at the choir stalls on the pulpit side – needless to say, all the visible choristers were on their best behaviour!

The Rev'd Dr. John Polkinghorne preached about the much-debated question: "How can a scientist believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?". There were many helpful points, one being the fact that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection – women were not always trusted in Jesus' day so it ironically makes the resurrection accounts even more credible. But most importantly, he said that, yes, a scientist can believe in the resurrection and that he definitely does.

It was wonderful to be able to meet and listen to such an eminent physicist and theologian: he confirmed my belief that science and faith mix rather well.

*Joanna Barr*