



the Lutheran

NATIONAL MAGAZINE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA

where love comes to life

JUNE 2018

SEARCHING for HEAVEN

*Is science
replacing God?*

EDITORIAL

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OUR MAG FLIES HIGH

The Youth & Young Adult Ministry Facilitator for the LCA's Victoria/Tasmania District, Maya Kraj-Krajewski had 'the right stuff' in hand recently, as she checked out some of the space transport and aircraft during a visit to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, in the United States.

Send us a photograph featuring a recent copy of *The Lutheran* and you might see it here on page 2 of a future issue.

People like YOU bring love to life



Lucas Ranse

Trinity Lutheran College, Ashmore Qld
Student

Enjoys Minecraft and swimming

Fav text: Daniel and the lions' den



Wilma Krieg

St Peter's Lutheran Church, Fullarton SA

91-year-old volunteer at church

Enjoys reading, current affairs, music and scrabble

Fav texts: Philippians 4:8 and John 3:16



Penny Ruthenberg

St Paul's, Murgon Qld

Works with children in various settings

Volunteering and breathing fresh country air

Fav text: Psalm 94:19

Surprise someone you know with their photo in *The Lutheran*. Send us a good-quality photo, their name and details (congregation, occupation, what they enjoy doing, favourite text) and your contact details.

EDITOR'S *Letter*



During primary school, one of my most-loved things on TV was *Curiosity Show* – an Australian program about science and technology for kids. It was great – learning about the world via quirky experiments and making machines out of everyday stuff! There was also natural history, astronomy, technology and puzzles. (Okay, so I don't actually remember all that from 40 years ago, I read it on the website.)

Later in school, science didn't like me as much as I liked it. But my curiosity about the world remained. Indeed, our curiosity is a gift from God – as is the amazing, intricate, unfathomable world we live in. That curiosity is also a blessing when, unlike in my case, it is coupled with aptitude in science and technology.

Because of such gifted people, we can fly across the world in a day, access information within seconds, communicate instantly with people thousands of kilometres away, or ride in a car that drives itself. We can eradicate deadly diseases and enable people to hear and see for the first time.

And yet, there remain great unknowns. There are huge telescopes trained on deep space and traversing the black beyond, endeavouring to see the beginning of time. It is almost as though they are reaching for heaven, or searching for God.

We need not worry about what they'll find. God created the heavens and the earth and has already revealed his face in Jesus – and shows his nature in Scripture.

However, we Christians have a reputation of being anti-science. That some Christians still believe the earth is flat because of biblical references to 'the four corners' of the earth (Revelation 7:1) does not help that. But, more likely, it is the concept of scientist 'playing God' through cloning, genetic modification, artificial intelligence and the like, which has aroused fear and antipathy.

But while it's wise to be wary, if God created science (and scientists), is there really anything to fear? In this issue we've asked two people experienced in this realm to address some questions about the relationship between faith and science. I believe their reflections and the themed Bible study will inform and challenge you.

And I pray you'll be encouraged, as I have been, by learning about some exciting work God is doing in our church through the National Youth Forum and New Horizons local mission retreat.

I hope you'll find plenty of reminders, too, that despite things in our world that alarm us, we can cast all our anxieties on the one who loves us beyond the moon and back. After all, he's got the whole world in his hands (Job 12:7-10).

Lisa

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Our cover: One of the radio telescopes at New Zealand's Institute for Radio Astronomy and Space Research near Warkworth, approximately 70 kilometres north of Auckland

Photo: Dreamstime.com



JESUS IS GOD'S LOVE.
HE GIVES US NEW HEARTS –
TO LAY ASIDE OUR OLD WAYS,
TO BELIEVE AND FOLLOW HIM,
TO LIVE WITH HIM EVERY DAY.

heartland

REV JOHN HENDERSON
Bishop Lutheran Church of Australia

ASCENSION – KEY TO MISSION

Thirty-nine days after Easter, and 10 days before Pentecost, Christians mark Ascension Day. Frequently we overlook it since it falls on a Thursday. Most congregations don't have a special service, but on the following Sunday we often have a special set of Bible readings.

Yet Ascension is far more important than that. It joins the dots between the Jesus of the gospels – a walking, talking, breathing human being – and the Jesus who 'sits at the right hand of the Father, and ... will come to judge the living and the dead' (Apostles' Creed). Ascension shows, not only who Jesus truly is, but also that the church's mission is actually the mission of Jesus today. Jesus ascended to heaven so that he could continue his mission through believers, through his church.

Understanding mission from the vantage point of Ascension helps us avoid some common pitfalls. For instance, mission isn't continually thinking up new strategies to attract people to the church. That approach comes from the law, not from the gospel, and it can easily be a guilt trip. Christian mission is the outpouring of joy. That's what it was for the disciples when Jesus returned to heaven. Feeling guilty about mission contradicts the very message we want to share. The temptation to 'do' mission as a 'good work' that earns praise or because we fear declining membership is self-defeating. We want to show people Jesus, not ourselves or our church just so that we can be proud of it.

So what did Jesus' mission look like in his day? He gathered a small group of disciples and a wider group of followers. Particularly because of his teaching, but also due to some of his miracles, his name was on everyone's lips.

When Jesus died, however, he died alone. Some women endured and a few men returned, but they were anxious and fearful, even when they heard that he was alive. The ascension, however, as recorded in Luke's gospel, changes that. When they see him leave, fear turns into joy. They express that joy through attending worship, which is the driving force of all Christian mission (see Luke 24:52,53). Acts tells the same events, but includes angels who redirect the first believers, who are staring into heaven, back to earth. Jesus, while now in heaven, is also here with us (see Acts 1:1-12), and this is where his mission continues.

CHRISTIAN MISSION *is the outpouring of JOY.*

The joy that motivated the disciples for their mission came from knowing God's word. Jesus had 'opened their minds to understand the scriptures' and the meaning of his suffering and rising. He revealed that 'repentance and forgiveness of sins' would spread to the whole world. They had never known a gospel like it before, and he made them

his witnesses. Ascension, then, is the birth of the church and the key to its mission.

It all began with the joy of believers who knew the risen and ascended Jesus. They just couldn't keep him to themselves. Compelled by the same Jesus and the same joy, Christians all over the world are spreading the good news of forgiveness and freedom. Jesus goes on doing what he always said he would do – saving the world.

Our mission, then, is simply to join him and other believers in the gospel work that's he's already doing.

'The Ascended Jesus Active in Mission', presented by Dr Noel Due, was a major theme at the New Horizons retreat in April. [See page 21.]

The Hubble Space Telescope, the first major optical telescope placed in space when it was deployed in 1990, was named for astronomer Edwin Hubble, who discovered the expansion of the universe in 1929. This photo was taken by a servicing mission crewmember in May 2009, during a mission to upgrade and repair the telescope. Photo credit: NASA

Is science replacing God?

A founding member of the International Society of Science and Religion, a Fellow of ISCAST – Christians in Science and Faith network, and an author of books that explore the interface between God and science, Rev Dr Mark Worthing offers his view on how we confess our ancient faith in an age of science and technology.

by MARK WORTHING

There is an increasing remoteness between the biblical world and our own modern world.

When my grandfather was born in 1899 there were no automobiles, airplanes, telephones, radios, cinema, televisions or computers. No world wars had been fought; no tanks, poison gas or nuclear weapons had been developed. And no-one had even heard of global warming.

By the time of his death in 1993 he had sold his father's plough horses for tractors, hooked up the farm to electricity, put the carriages in the barn loft to be replaced by a succession of automobiles, repaired bi-planes in World War I, purchased the first radio, telephone and later television in the district and, on a warm summer day in July 1969, sat down with his

grandson in his farmhouse to watch a black and white feed of Neil Armstrong stepping onto the moon. I can still hear his words: 'Sit still and watch this, Mark. You'll want to tell your grandchildren someday that you saw this'.

In a relatively short space of time we have emerged from a largely rural and agrarian society with simple technologies, into an age of computers, virtual reality video games, international jet flight and modern medical care – all made possible by myriad scientific and technological advances.

And the science that has changed our world has itself undergone significant change. Up until the beginning of the 20th century science held firmly to the concept of a static and eternal universe – without beginning or end.



Within this context, talk about creation and end of time seemed quite nonsensical.

Einstein's theory of relativity, developed between 1905 and 1915, and Edwin Hubble's discovery of the expansion of the universe in 1929, through the observation of the red shift in the light of distant galaxies, turned scientific ideas about the universe on their head. And this was on top of the continuing debate about Darwin's theory of evolution and the new ways this opened up for looking at life on our planet, including human beings. The discovery of the double helix structure of DNA and the mapping of the human genome also opened up entire new worlds of understanding into what makes us who we are.

For many, science has replaced religion as the go-to source for answers to life's big questions. This has inevitably led to tension between science and faith.

Some scientists believe that faith, particularly Christian faith, has opposed science and represents a superstitious reliance on archaic beliefs that do not stand up to scrutiny. Some Christians believe science is at heart anti-faith and leaves no room for God.

Modern people are not well served by either of these views. The reality is that many key early scientists were people of strong personal faith, such as Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday and Lord Kelvin. Also, many

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contemporary scientists are devout Christians. Graeme Clark, who invented the bionic ear, is one of Australia's most famous scientists. But he is also a person of very strong Christian faith who credits prayer as much as his groundbreaking research for his success.

So are science and faith adversaries or friends? Dialogue between science and faith has become easier with more identifiable contact points since the rise of Big Bang cosmology. But it would be wrong to assume that there are not still a number of difficult and perplexing problems. In wrestling with these problems, both science and faith can benefit.

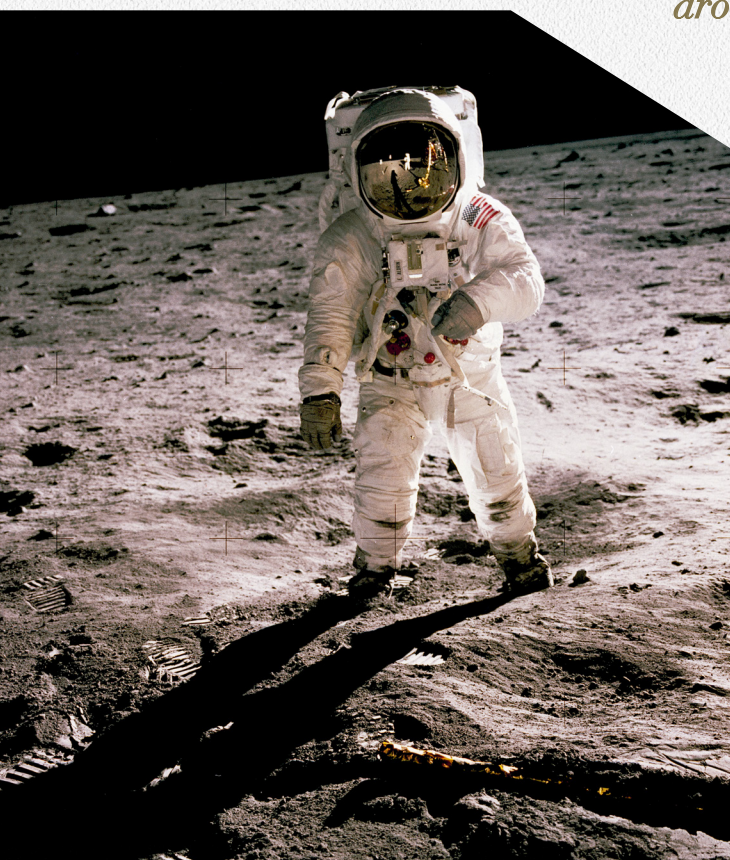
Science is challenged not to reduce all things to the level of the physical, and to be open to the idea of purpose. If science fails to recognise the metaphysical and theological implications of its findings and to find room for purpose in the universe, then it runs the risk of impersonal reductionism. And people of faith, particularly Christians, are challenged to take seriously our own confession of God as creator. As Christians we have learned that if we really believe what we confess, namely that God is creator of heaven and earth, then we must listen carefully to those who study the physical universe that God has created and will redeem.

As the Psalmist confessed, 'Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them' (Psalm 111:2). If we fail to speak about such things as creation, the end of the world and even human beings in light of what science can tell us about the physical world around us, then we run the risk of becoming irrelevant.

The task of the Christian church within this context is to help people within our faith communities and beyond, both those who are scientifically informed and those who are less informed, to come to terms with the ongoing dialogue between the natural sciences and Christian faith.

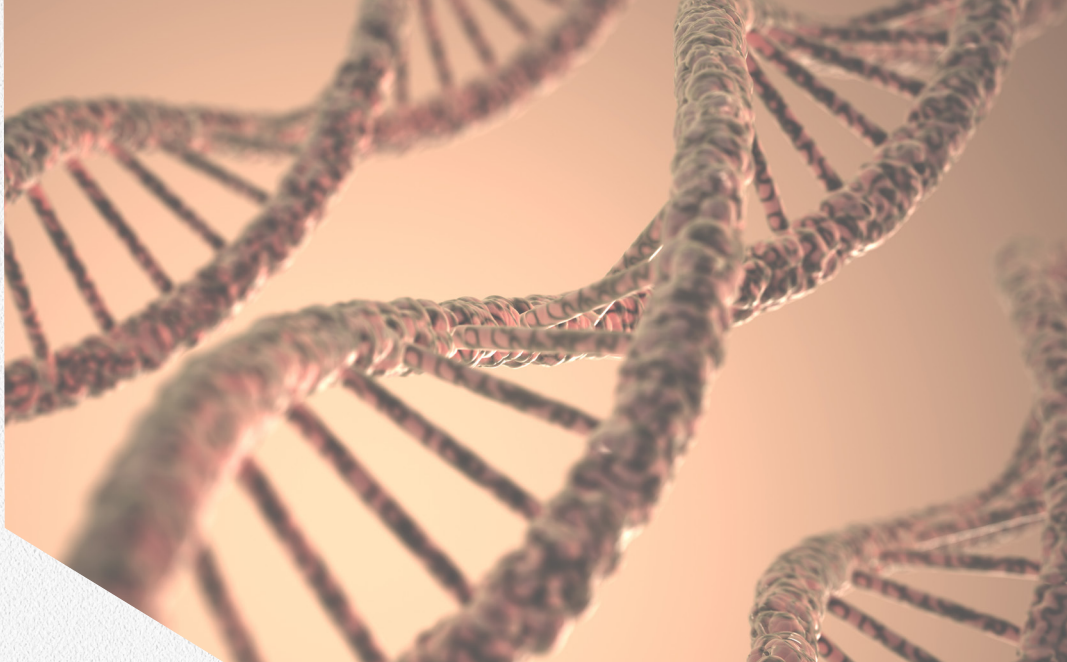
Science and technology form one of the dominant background settings in most Australians' lives (right after sport!). It is an area we cannot ignore in our sermons, our youth groups, our Bible studies, even our Sunday schools. If people walk into our churches and feel that they have stepped back into the intellectual context and world view of a previous century, we reinforce an unfortunate and erroneous perception that Christianity is quaint, useful for Christmas and Easter celebrations, mostly harmless, but otherwise irrelevant for our daily lives in the modern world.

Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. The God who took on human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ has affirmed and dignified the physical



Below left: Astronaut Edwin Aldrin, part of the crew of the US Apollo 11 mission, walks on the moon's surface in July 1969. Astronaut Neil Armstrong, who took the photograph and was the first to stand on the lunar surface, can be seen reflected in Aldrin's helmet visor. Photo credit: NASA

Right: Rev Dr Mark Worthing says the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA, which is graphically represented here, and the mapping of the human genome have 'opened up entire new worlds of understanding into what makes us who we are'.



world. God not only created the physical world, but became a part of it so that he might redeem it. 'For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible ... And through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or in heaven' (Colossians 1:16,19). As Christians we want to understand the physical world in which we live because God created it, because God dignified it by becoming a part of it in Jesus Christ, and because God redeems it.

We need congregations today in which the gospel is effectively proclaimed within the context of the modern scientific and technological world. We need congregations in which Christians can live integrated lives and in which there is recognition and support, both of their faith and their knowledge, of their worship and their work, of their lives on Sunday and their lives the rest of the week. Such congregations will have made peace with the modern scientific world, and will have done so with integrity.

This does not mean we must accept uncritically everything that science or some individual scientist says. It does not mean adopting a physical reductionist view of reality. And it does not mean going quiet about what we believe about God and salvation, so as not to offend people.

It does mean, however, that we cannot assume that science is the enemy of faith and something of which we need to be suspicious. After all, we have no reason to fear the knowledge of the world that God created.

It means we should not engage scientists in conversation as adversaries, but rather as allies. It means that even though we may find some of the results and theories coming out modern science challenging, we should not dismiss them out of hand simply because they do not fit with our existing world view. It could be that our existing world view is not based on what Scripture actually says. Finally, it means that we should not assume that those working in the

sciences, many of whom are in our churches every Sunday, are not people of strong faith.

If Christianity is not only to survive, but also to thrive in the 21st century and beyond, we need to positively and constructively engage the modern world, including the natural sciences. If our confession of faith in the God who is 'maker of heaven and earth' means anything to us, we must not be afraid of what the sciences tell us about the world around us – even when this knowledge forces us to ask difficult questions or to re-think the way we articulate our faith.

These issues must be taken up faithfully, with intellectual integrity and pastoral sensitivity, within Christian communities. Only then will effective progress be made toward realising a healthy and vibrant expression of Christian faith within the context of our scientifically influenced and technology-dominated world. When we listen to those who study the natural world and seek to understand what they have discovered about it, we honour the God who created this world, who became a part of this world through the Incarnation, and who redeemed this world through the cross.



Mark Worthing is pastor at Immanuel Lutheran Church, North Adelaide. He is author of God, Creation and Contemporary Physics; Graeme Clark. The Man Who Invented the Bionic Ear; and Martin Luther. A Wild Boar in the Lord's Vineyard, and co-author of God and Science in Classroom and Pulpit. He has been invited to present this year's Tony Morgan Lecture at the University of New South Wales on the topic 'Unlikely Allies: Monotheism and the Rise of Natural Science'.



LIFE, LOGIC and the

LIGHT of the WORD

How do science and faith interact when it comes to understanding human life? As a former bioethics researcher at the Southern Cross Bioethics Institute in Adelaide and at the Queensland Bioethics Centre, Kimberley Pfeiffer has faced that question in both her work and her Christian walk. Here she shares her biblically based reflections on the topic.

by KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER

We have learnt so much about human life through scientific advancement. By the study of science, we observe life and death, health and disease, growth and decay.

Scientists have crafted theses, methodically tested them, weighed theory against theory, and settled old contentions and created new ones, all in an attempt to gain understanding and develop the body of knowledge that informs the human sciences.

We use this knowledge to develop medicines and technologies to help the sick, find cures, to fight diseases, to improve surgeries, and promote the health of communities. We have lowered infant, childhood and maternal mortality rates, and reduced death rates from communicable diseases and illness from infections. More people are surviving cancers and living longer.

It is good to give God thanks for scientific and technological advances because we benefit from them whether we are aware of it or not.

Yet it is wise to remember that science cannot provide itself with a moral compass to govern experimentation and regulate the way we use technology.

The very same ultrasound used to confirm early life in the womb can be used to guide a needle aimed at ending the life of the unborn. Experimentation can help us develop cures and treatments, but scientific progress does not justify any and every experiment. We only need to be reminded about the torture of concentration camp prisoners in the name of scientific progress during World War II to find a sober mind about these things.

Science and technology cannot ask questions or make choices about how we value human life or what is good medicine. These are not scientific questions. These are questions of ethics: what is good, right,

responsible, just, beneficent and non-maleficent. The answers to these questions are informed by so much more than science. That is where our faith comes in.

In the New Testament God reveals to us how we should understand life at the deepest level, which is always in relation to God and, even more specifically, in relation to Jesus. The book of John begins by referring to the 'beginning', before the creation of the world. It reads, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made' (John 1:1-2).

'Word' in Greek is 'logos', from which we derive the word 'logic' and the suffix '-ology', which refers to reason, study and pursuit of meaning. In health sciences we recognise these in the academic disciplines such as biology, pathology, immunology, physiology, and so on.

The object of our study is creation already in existence and, in our study, we expect to find meaning and gain understanding. So in the study of all things 'created' – all those '-ologies' – we are seeking a logic that points to truth.

The John text continues, 'In him was life, and the life was the light of men' (John 1:4). As we pursue this deeper meaning and truth, the illumination we seek comes from God himself. He sends the light into our darkness and gives the true wisdom from above to weave throughout our scientific endeavours.

So what light does this shed on human life? True life is from him, the Word, and through him and in him. This points us to the truest and deepest sense of what human life is and what it means: its origin, purpose and goal. It is something science can never measure, but needs to be revealed to us by God. It's this fundamental Christian truth that informs so much of how Christians will answer those deeper ethical questions associated with science and technology.

Of course, those very questions can still be perplexing and difficult. This is in no small part because life as we experience it in this world is terribly broken because of sin.

This is where God's revelation is even more important. Incredibly, Jesus Christ, this Word from which all life came, took on our very human life to redeem and make it new. 'The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). True human life not only comes from him, but because of his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension, true human life also finds its purpose and goal in him.

For us as Christians, the value we place on human life is not limited by what we've learnt through scientific discovery, nor does our faith limit all forms of medical advancements. We can be confident in our endorsement of medicine that relieves suffering and promotes life and health because life is a gift from God. We serve our neighbour by encouraging their life.

We can also have the confidence to reject medical practices that devalue or take human life, because doing so is simply beyond our call to faithfully love and serve our neighbour. We also need not be intimidated by disease and suffering that reminds us of the sin that has corrupted our nature. We can faithfully research and learn about disease with the hope of finding a cure and restoring health, for it is a sign of the redemption we have in Jesus Christ.

We know that 'everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God' (1 John 5:1) and 'everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith' (1 John 5:4).

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Kimberley Pfeiffer is the editor of the Lutherans for Life publication Life News and is a member of the LCA's Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions. She says she became interested in 'life' from a biological, philosophical and theological perspective 'after spending far too much time studying disease and death' while majoring in Pathology at the University of Adelaide. She currently works part-time as a Support Officer in the LCA Reconciliation Ministry office.

One bite isn't enough, is it?

Here's
how to
get the
whole
apple.



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