

InterSections

An Australian journal for Christian encounter and encouragement



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Editorial

As this issue was being finalised, our founding editor, Warren Holyoak, passed away on Thursday, 3 November 2011. Warren had been beset with cancer for several years. Despite regular hospital visits and bouts of pain, Warren and his wife, Pauline, bravely soldiered on. Up to his last days as an elder with The Point Church in Brisbane and editor of *InterSections*, Warren was unswerving in his good cheer, his kindness and gentleness, and his devotion to God and the Word. To honour Warren, we've invited Pauline Holyoak to write a short reflection on his life. Vale Warren – we will miss a fine and godly man.

To replace Warren as editor, Benny Tabalujan will step in – at least for the time being. We're also now looking to strengthen the editorial team as we move forward. So please pray for us as we take the next steps.

Meanwhile, at the point Warren graduated to glory, he had already edited much of this issue of *InterSections* which focuses on worldviews. Warren had a keen interest in worldviews and studied them in some depth. He believed – quite rightly – that a person's worldview affects that person's relationship with God. Equally, our relationship with God affects our worldview.

Last century, philosophers coined the term 'worldview' to describe a particular way of looking at the world. They also identified two major shifts in Western worldviews. The first shift was from what's called the 'premodern worldview' to the 'modern worldview' – a shift often associated with the 18th century Enlightenment. The second shift was from the modern worldview to the 'postmodern worldview' – this is usually taken as having started around the middle of last century.

In this issue, we begin with Steve Wilson's foundational article which examines the key features of a Christian worldview. The Christian worldview was probably strongest in the premodern period when belief in God and a spiritual dimension to reality was more generally accepted by Western society. Following Steve Wilson's article we have three shorter articles which touch on more recent worldviews. David Carr looks at the supposed tension between Christianity and science. This harks back to the modern worldview dominated by science and humanism. Bevan Jackel explores the challenge of Charles Darwin's theory of naturalistic evolution and the biblical account of creation. Finally, Marvin Ancell examines postmodernism and how it can affect our understanding of human reason and biblical truth.

On a related note, Brett Christensen reviews a recent book by James Spiegel, *The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief*. In this book, Spiegel discusses the moral and psychological reasons why an individual chooses to become an atheist. We have to understand atheism as a worldview and the possible reasons why a person is an atheist if we're to be effective proclaimers of the Gospel.

Rounding out this issue is an interview of Ian Campbell, a church elder who also happens to be a respected cancer researcher and scientist. □

We hope you find this issue thought-provoking.

The Editorial Team



Feature

A Christian Worldview

God gives great dignity to human beings. We are co-regents ruling with God over his creation, with our place as being 'a little lower than God' (Psalm 8:5).

James Sire in his book, *The Universe Next Door*, describes a worldview as a set of presuppositions which we hold about the basic makeup of our world.¹ To think in terms of a worldview is to think in very broad terms. A worldview is not synonymous with religion, though every religion reflects and flows out of a particular worldview.

For example, *theism* (i.e. belief in the existence of a god) is a worldview which encompasses many diverse religions ranging from Judaism (an example of *monotheism* or belief in one God) to Hinduism (an example of *polytheism* or belief in many gods). Some worldviews ignore or reject outright any notion of god (e.g. *naturalism* is normally associated with *atheism*).

Each one of us holds some kind of worldview. Each human being functions in life on the basis of beliefs he or she holds about the world and ultimate reality. Our presuppositions may be true, partially true, or totally false. The tenets or assumptions underlying our worldview may be held consciously or unconsciously. We may have thought about our beliefs deeply or we may not have critically examined them at all. At times our actions may even be inconsistent with our presuppositions. But all of us act out our life through the paradigm of our particular worldview.

Sire suggests that every worldview addresses seven fundamental questions. I propose to use six of these questions as a means to describe and explore a distinctively Christian theistic worldview informed by biblical revelation.

The first question relates to prime reality – what is really real? For the writers of the Bible, the existence and primacy of God is a given: in the beginning God made everything out of nothing (Genesis 1). Sure, our physical world is real, but it is not eternal nor is it ultimate reality. Only God who is the self-existent creator is eternal and ultimate – all else derives its existence from him and is sustained by him.

Because God transcends his creation, we attribute to God omniscience (God knows everything); omnipotence (God is all powerful); and omnipresence (God is not limited by time and space). Further, God is personal and immanent. God, as revealed in Scripture, is self-aware and self-determining. He is not a mere force or energy. He thinks and acts and, as sovereign creator, nothing is beyond his interest, control and authority.

The fundamental character of God might be described as absolute goodness expressed through holiness and love (Matthew 19:17; Exodus 15:11; 1 John 1:5; 4:16). God *is* holy. Therefore he is the absolute standard of righteousness and the only fitting object of worship. God *is* love. Therefore he is the hope of humanity, even when we fall short of his righteousness.

The second question relates to external reality – what is the nature of our world? For the Christian theist, God's creation is an orderly cosmos of cause and effect. For example, the uniformity and predictability of the 'laws of

nature' (i.e. God's laws) make scientific enquiry and discovery possible. The world is no accident and the sun 'rises' and 'sets' according to God's design. But while the world is orderly, it is also an open system. God can, and does, intervene through natural means (i.e. providence) and supernatural means (e.g. miracles).

The third question asks what it is to be human. For the Christian, human beings are uniquely created 'in the image of God' (Genesis 1:26-27). As such, humans possess personality – we have self-awareness and self-determination or free will (e.g. intelligence, morality and creativity). As the 'offspring' of God (Acts 17:24f), our true meaning and value are derived from God and we are therefore accountable to him and one another (e.g. Matthew 22:36-40).

God gives great dignity to human beings. We are co-regents ruling with God over his creation, with our place as being 'a little lower than the divine' (Psalm 8:5). As stewards of God's creation, our rightful place in this world is above the rest of creation while remaining under God's rule.

Fourth, what happens to a person at death? The Christian worldview gives meaning to life, but it also sees meaning in death and beyond (Philippians 1:19-26). To be human is to be an embodied spirit (e.g. Ecclesiastes 12:7). Thus the apostle Paul speaks of the 'outward' man (corruptible body) and the 'inward' man (spirit) and points to the hope of Christ's return when our human spirit and our resurrected incorruptible body will be united so as to live in eternity (1 Corinthians 15; Corinthians 4:16-5:10; Revelation 20:11-22:5). If so, this present life is to be received and enjoyed as a gift from God, but it is not ultimate reality (Matthew 6:19-20). We are just pilgrims here as the really real lies beyond this world (Hebrews 11:13-16).

The fifth question is: how do we know what is right and what is wrong? The Christian responds: ethics and righteousness transcend human beings who are finite creatures (Jeremiah 10:23-24) and are based on the character of God who alone is good. God has revealed the ethical standard through the Bible (Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 3:16-17) and demonstrated it through Jesus (John 1:18; 14:7-11).

Finally, what is the meaning of human history? The Scriptures reveal God to be the architect of human history. History is linear in that it moves from a beginning in a meaningful sequence of events towards the fulfilment of God's purposes for humanity and the rest of creation (Romans 8:18-30). But a biblical or redemptive view of history is also cyclical in that it follows the movement of people away from God, only to be rescued by God and restored to his original intentions.

Feature: A Christian Worldview

This cyclic movement can be seen on a micro level. Consider the repeated cycles of *national unfaithfulness – consequences – deliverance – faithfulness* during the time of Judges in Israel, and the experience of the prodigal son in Luke 15. It can also be seen on a macro level. Consider this cycle in God's scheme of human redemption: *Tree of Life – the Fall – Messiah – Redemption – Tree of Life*.

It is no coincidence that John borrows imagery from the garden of Eden when describing the new Jerusalem and the fulfilment of God's restoration of all things (Revelation 22:1-5). History will come full circle with God's ultimate 'welcome home' for those who respond to his gracious invitation to be reconciled through and in Christ.

This, in broad terms, is what a biblical Christian worldview looks like. □

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1. James W Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (InterVarsity Press, 1997).



Food for thought

Worldviews on the Origins of Life

Two competing worldviews dominate the origins of life debate. The Christian worldview says we originate from God's act of creation. The materialistic or naturalistic worldview says humans emerge through organic evolution without any divine intervention. Although these worldviews are diametrically opposed, there are some remarkable similarities in the way people think about them and use them.

Many accept the theory of organic evolution without any personal examination of the evidence or its implications. They essentially accept it without question because they've been told it's a fact and the 'experts' must know what they're talking about. Equally, there are many Bible believers who accept the creation account in a simplistic way and who have no desire to ponder its implications for the physical universe (e.g. when, where and how did the moon get its craters?).

Then there are people in the middle area whose origins worldview actually connects with their lifestyle and behaviour and they're willing to defend it from attack. Some hold to evolution because it allows them to justify their continued ignorance of God, the Bible, and their accountability to our creator who is also our judge. For others it's a convenient excuse for their immoral or materialistic behaviour and the rejection of absolute truth.

Likewise, there are Bible believers whose creation worldview is driven by observations of design and order in nature implying and demanding a designer. For them, creation connects directly with fundamental concepts of who God is, what he's like and what he's capable of doing. It drives them to behave within a framework of morality and responsibility.

A naturalistic evolutionary view is compatible with a strongly atheistic mindset. Atheism needs the evolutionary explanation and naturalistic evolution feeds an atheistic worldview. Richard Dawkins is a prominent

spokesman for the militant evolutionary-atheistic cause. Opposing them are the militant creationists who are zealous of a literal interpretation of Genesis and in their rejection of the evolutionary worldview.

There's much good being done by some creationists to counter naturalistic evolution and to enhance our understanding of what God's done in creation. Unfortunately, there are also some creationists with a misplaced sense of overconfidence in their own abilities to fill in the answers where God has not given us details.

So, what can we make of all this? Reaching out to people who have a simplistic acceptance of evolution can be done with a good injection of common sense and some well presented facts from the wealth of information now available. People who accept evolution to justify their lifestyle are more difficult to persuade. Helping them to find salvation in Christ requires not only convincing them to repent of their lifestyle, but also to change their origins worldview. The zealots of the atheistic-evolutionary worldview are usually the biggest challenge. Overconfident creationists can likewise be a source of frustration.

Meanwhile, the available evidence for creation and against the theory of organic evolution has never been stronger. As Christians, we need have no fear about the validity of the creation worldview of origins as expressed in the Bible. The Bible gives us both the power of the Gospel to convict people's hearts regarding their behaviour before God, and the answer to where we came from, why we're here and where we're going. □

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Food for thought

Postmodernism and Christians today

Postmodernism is a significant worldview within Western society today. Its language is often obscure and oblique. It arose as a reaction against 'modernism'. Whereas moderns believed in human reason, science, order and strict categories (e.g. right and wrong, true and false), postmoderns tend to believe the opposite.

For many postmoderns, all that can ever be really known is that which is personally true and relative to the individual's own situation and perceptions. Most things are relative or subjective. There's only a very limited bit of factual knowledge. Most of that which purports to be factual knowledge is frequently nothing more than subjective views. There's little that's absolute.

For many postmoderns, this leads to a gradual disengagement with the Bible as the authoritative voice of truth. If the Bible asserts that Jesus is the only way to God, this is deemed far too absolute and categorical. If the Bible condemns selfishness or homosexuality, this is explained away as a cultural norm or Paul's personal views.

Many postmoderns see truth as characterised by plurality, relativity and subjectivity. This means there are no hard and fast definitions for us to fall back on. All language has to now be considered culturally and contextually and truth has become relative to the individual and his or her context.

Postmoderns are hence usually more tolerant and accepting than others. An individual may be alone in his beliefs, but he's right in every one of them because he has thought it through for himself. Thus, for him, it is so. With this postmodern tolerance, the individual reigns supreme in all matters of truth, morality and faith. You cannot say to such a person that an idea is biblically wrong and expect to get anywhere in the discussion.

In contrast for the Christian, there are boundaries that exist to which we are bound to uphold and an identifiable faith which we are to know and preach. Whilst some aspects of this faith are more difficult to understand than others, these truths apply to everyone. In fact, Peter instructs us to make a defence (*apologia*) for the faith that resides within us (1 Peter 3:15). Further, Jude reminds us that faith in Christ is a known and identifiable body of doctrine that he could call 'the faith' (Jude 1:3). Peter and Jude articulate positions that are very different to postmodernism thinking. □

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Food for thought

Science & the Bible: Conflicting Worldviews

Some people say that the Bible is about faith while science is about fact. The implication is that science is about provable facts while the Bible is about unprovable beliefs! How should we respond?

Firstly, it's true that the Bible doesn't focus on science and scientific theories. In fact, it's good that this is the case. Recall how many times scientific explanations of physical phenomena (like the origin and functioning of the universe, and the causes and cures of human diseases) have changed in the last 3000 years – even the last 50 years! If the Bible had included such theories – which regularly become obsolete – how much credibility would the Bible have?

Secondly, science and the Bible each have their place. Science seeks to find truth about the physical world, while the Bible speaks of truth about the spiritual world. This is why science and the Bible don't have to be enemies. In fact, many scientists are believers in God. From a Christian worldview, all physical reality ultimately has a spiritual origin – God – but this doesn't mean that such physical reality can't be given deeper understanding through scientific research. Conversely, a scientific approach to the understanding of life doesn't rule out the reality of a supernatural God. This is why science still can't really explain the origin of the first life.

Scientists and Christians should be people who are interested in the evidence that leads to the truth of their disciplines. The evidence for God, Jesus, the Bible, and the world to come is a different kind of evidence to that for nuclear reactions, biochemistry, botany or human physiology. Scientists shouldn't belittle Christians who are trying to find spiritual truth, and Christians shouldn't be afraid of scientists who are trying to find physical truth. Both fields of endeavour have their rightful place.

The problem comes when either discipline goes beyond its field of endeavour and encroaches on an area it's really not qualified in. For example, when scientists try to explain the appearance of new bacteria and start talking about mutation and evolution, Christians shouldn't intrude and say that scientists must have it wrong because evolution is false.

Evolutionary concepts of mutation and natural selection are very helpful in explaining how new types of bacteria develop.

Continued page 6

Reflections



on Warren Holyoak



Warren was raised among *acappella* Churches of Christ, first at Pendle Hill and later at Merrylands, NSW. His mother and father placed their membership with these congregations after his Dad waged a losing battle against what he saw as the drift away from biblical teaching on baptism among the conference Churches of Christ.

In his teenage years, Warren drifted away from the church. He was under the influence of the evolutionary teaching that accompanied his interest in geology. When he and I became engaged, he began to reconsider his spiritual position. After studying with men like Bill Hall and Arthur Arnott, we were both baptised into Christ on 16 September 1973.

Warren soon realised that if he was going to teach the Word he needed to really know what it said. So began his lifelong passion as a serious Bible student. He believed Bible reading was good and necessary but not sufficient. One had to seriously study the Book.

Warren found that with all the demands on his time it was easy to become slack with Bible study. So he found it best to enrol in programs that included an assessment or at least required regular attendance. For many years he was a regular student at the Monday night classes at Macquarie School of Preaching (now MSOBS) in Sydney where men like Dale Hartman began to deepen his understanding of the Bible.

When we moved to Brisbane, he enrolled in a BA in Bible at Christian Heritage College. However, he found that the transfer from the faculty of education to the faculty of ministry involved a shift into very Pentecostal teaching. Then he enrolled in Moore Theological College and completed two diplomas with credit – yet resisted their Calvinist doctrine. When he discovered Nations University on the internet, he enrolled in that too.

Warren had a passionate desire to get others to be serious about Bible study – particularly young men. He believed that if a man was going to lead his family (and then the church) well, he needed to know God's Word well. He constantly looked for ways to accomplish this. He was

always happy to discuss the Word with anyone – you didn't have to agree with him; you just had to have a well thought-out position from Scripture and have a commitment to its authority. He could not abide the 'Well I think' attitude that made Scripture say whatever we might find comfortable.

He loved to discuss his understanding of a passage he was studying at the moment and was delighted to receive feedback and engage in discussion. Visiting preachers and academics were often taken out for a day. He would discuss the state of the church where they were from and talk theology. He also loved having American students in our home to challenge their thinking to see if it was biblical or just tradition that they hadn't bothered to think about.

Warren had wide ranging interests. Sport and music were near the top of the list. He always seemed to be able to find something to chat about with virtually anyone. He had opinions on most things and he loved to talk; hence his nickname 'Mr Have-a-chat'. The chats usually took place over coffee so he could see where you were at and offer encouragement. There were never enough hours in the day to do all the things he wanted to do. He thought retirement would give him the time he needed but soon came to wonder how he ever found time to go to work.

The two things I will remember most about Warren are his kindness and gentleness – as a husband,

father, friend and shepherd. He would rather encourage than rebuke; but he didn't walk away from the latter when it was necessary. He had an extraordinary ability to 'let things go through to the keeper' (as he put it) and so he rarely took offence. He really didn't believe anyone could be mean spirited because he couldn't be so himself. So he always put the best possible interpretation on any situation.

To me, Warren epitomised the characteristics Paul described as love in I Corinthians 13. □



Written by Pauline Holyoak in memory of her husband. Pauline and Warren had been married for 37 years by the time Warren passed into eternity on 3 November 2011. Warren is survived by Pauline and their sons, Adam, Nathan and Craig and grandson Samuel. Pauline, Nathan and Craig are part of The Point Church in Brisbane where Warren was an elder. Adam is part of the Townsville Church of Christ.

Reflections

Quiet is the Soul

Quiet — the soul
which rests in peace
thru storm and tempest
tho' it rage
since dawn to dusk
o'er many days
and so in earnest
will it wage,
to hurl relentless
'gainst the one
who has been
purchased by the Son,
for hope's been
giv'n — not by charm
that those in Him
ne'er come to harm,
for hope that's promised
will not fail
'gainst the fears of
life's stormy gale,
and ne'er will it
e'er take its toll —
O the quiet
giv'n to the soul.

Regi Nald

Alien in this Land

Going home
One day—
no more a child.

Going home
thru the skies—
yet still a child
in his Creator's eyes.

Regi Nald

Food for thought

Science & the Bible: Conflicting Worldviews

But science gets out of its depth when it extrapolates evolutionary theory to account for the origin of all life and the universe.

The origin of life and the universe isn't really a scientific issue. You can't set up an experiment to recreate the origin of the universe. You can't observe the original creation. As a one-off event, creation is neither repeatable nor measurable. It's an historical truth that can only be known if a witness or the originator reveals how it happened (and God has!).

Similarly, science can tell us that certain behaviour will produce certain consequences (e.g. multiple sexual partners increases the risk of HIV infection). But science can't tell us whether such behaviour is morally right or wrong. That's the province of God.

That's why scientific and Christian worldviews aren't antithetical to each other. In fact, they can – and should – be mutually supportive. □

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InterSections

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Book Review

The Making of an Atheist: How Immorality Leads to Unbelief by James Spiegel, Moody Publishers, 2010.

The recent flood of publications and campaigns against the belief that there is a God has brought on a counter-tsunami of material from religious publishers. This book is part of that wave.

James Spiegel is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the evangelical Taylor University in Indiana, USA. He looks at why people believe what they believe—which sheds some light on theists and atheists alike. But his particular focus is on the moral and psychological basis for the beliefs of atheists: their denial of God's existence in spite of overwhelming reasons to believe. He sums this up thus:

'The descent into atheism is caused by a complex of moral-psychological factors, not a perceived lack of evidence for God's existence. The atheist wilfully rejects God, though this is precipitated by immoral indulgences and typically a broken relationship with his or her father. Thus, the choice of the atheistic paradigm is motivated by non-rational factors, some of which are psychological and some of which are moral in nature.'

Whilst the book brings helpful insights to this topic, it's not a ground-breaker. If you know what God's Word teaches about why people reject submission to God or even deny his existence, then Spiegel's book isn't going to rock your world.

But the book does substantiate and illustrate the truth that 'lack of evidence is not the atheist's problem'. Instead, the atheist chooses to 'subjugate his quest for truth to his personal desires'. Spiegel says, 'My thesis is...that religious scepticism is, at bottom, a moral problem.' Further on he says 'atheism is the product of moral corruption'.

Spiegel knows very well that his thesis 'will likely draw the ire of many people'. It isn't hard to see why. Professing atheists declare that their belief that there is no God is based on reasoning from the evidence (or lack thereof) for there being a Creator. Their position, they maintain, is the rational and reasonable one, for the evidence is on their side.

But Spiegel says, 'Atheists are cognitively handicapped' and that they 'are unable (or unwilling) to perceive how their view actually undermines rationality itself'. He says: 'It is just an ironic fact that they have analysed religious believers in terms that actually apply to them.'

He uses philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn's concept of the paradigm, 'that scientists do not observe the world objectively but always interpret what they see in light of the scientific theory to which they are committed'. Spiegel invokes Kuhn and other respected authorities to support his thesis that atheism is not the product of evidence, but of preference. 'People are inclined to believe according to their desires; we tend to believe what we want to be true.'

The book doesn't give space to exploring how this applies to theists; that is not within the book's scope. However, it probably would have strengthened Spiegel's thesis had he addressed the obvious objection which atheists would raise in response to this claim ('Theists want to believe there is a God').

Further on he says, 'Those who see the world through the lens of a false or distorting paradigm suffer from what I call paradigm-induced blindness. Their theoretical framework prevents them from seeing the truth, even when it is right in front of them.' This truth is as evident today as it was in Jesus' day. It can even manifest itself among those professing to serve God today. So this isn't just something applicable to atheists; it's a helpful reminder to each of us to watch our life and doctrine closely.

Oddly enough, Spiegel's own Calvinistic paradigm shows through when he suggests the direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon a person is needed to enlighten them to the truth of God's existence. Spiegel also speaks dismissively of 'relatively peripheral doctrinal matters such as...baptism... [and] the question as to exactly who is saved'. His own argumentation is a demonstration of how we are all prone to view things in terms of our own paradigm, and this is what every truth seeker must overcome in seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

His claim that a broken relationship with one's father is a significant factor in atheistic beliefs lacks extensive supporting evidence. But he does cite enough cases to make us wonder. His statement elsewhere that 'the question of evolution is actually irrelevant to the debate about God's existence' probably overstates his point, but his point is a good one: 'Life cannot have started at all without a creator.'

Within the book, Spiegel's five chapters cover:

- Atheistic arguments, errors and insights
- The irrationality of atheism
- The causes of atheism
- The obstinacy of atheism
- The blessings of theism

This book does highlight the grim reality that evidences are rarely going to make atheists see the light and change. Nevertheless, evidences do serve an important role in assuring Christians that faith in our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ is reasonable and rational. This is why the book will do more good for believers in God, than for those who are in denial. □

'I am no postmodernist, and frankly consider the postmodern denial of objective truth to be incoherent.'
James Spiegel

Interview

with Ian Campbell



Ian Campbell grew up in Western Australia and completed his post-doctorate in the United Kingdom. Ian and Catherine and their four children returned to Australia in 1999. An associate professor with the University of Melbourne, Ian heads the Cancer Genetics Laboratory at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, a leading cancer research centre and hospital in Australia. He's also an elder with the Belmore Road Church of Christ in Melbourne.

Tell us about your work as director of the Cancer Genomics Program at Peter Mac.

My job is to orchestrate the research program as well as obtain research grants to fund the laboratory work. Much of my day involves writing research grants, communicating with other scientists or analysing research data. In recent years research has become very international and it's vital to keep up with what is happening in every part of the world. This often involves presenting our work at conferences and each year I'll attend around five international conferences.

I set the priorities of the research team so that we're as productive as possible and not duplicating other research elsewhere. When some of the experiments don't work or lead to a dead end, it's my job to help the team stay motivated and get back on track. In essence my job is to employ smart people and provide them with the facilities where they can excel.

Could you describe a recent noteworthy research finding in the Cancer Genomics Program?

There are lots of exciting things happening in the field of cancer genetics currently. Much of my research involves looking for genes that cause cancer to run in families. My particular interest is families affected by breast and ovarian cancer. Until recently the task of finding which one of the approximately 22,000 genes in the human genome that was the cause of a family cancer was largely hit or miss. Scientists would have an educated guess at which gene might be responsible and then would sequence that gene in one of the family members to see if it had an error in the DNA sequence.

However, in the last three years there's been a revolution in DNA sequencing technology. The new technology (Massively Parallel Sequencing) enables us to sequence all 22,000 genes in one individual in about two weeks at the same cost as sequencing one gene using the old technology. This means that we can now take the guesswork out of which genes to sequence in each family. We just sequence them all! In the past six months this technology has enabled us to discover the mutation causing cancer in many families. In the process we've discovered some new genes which weren't previously thought to cause breast cancer. It's an unusual situation now where each day I come to work there's a real possibility that we'll make a significant discovery into the causes of familial cancer.

Are there any conclusions from research findings that have strengthened your conviction in the existence of an almighty God?

Yes, this happens all the time. Even though we're making great progress in understanding how cells control their growth, it always amazes me that the story keeps getting more complicated. Every time we think we (scientists) understand something fully,

we make discoveries that reveal a new layer of complexity. Each time new discoveries are made, it reinforces to me the necessity of a designer. The constant assertion by most scientists that the complexities of life are just the result of chance seems more and more fanciful with every new discovery.

How has a personal faith in God impacted your thinking both as a scientist and a person pondering human existence?

Being a Christian and a scientist has given me an opportunity to understand God's creation from a perspective which others may not have (although I don't believe that you have to be a scientist to appreciate how magnificent and mysterious it is). Overall, I think my faith in God has assisted me to keep my research in perspective. Many people in my line are very dedicated to the good work that they do, but for some it becomes their whole life.

Also, because medical research is seen by the community to be a very noble profession it's perhaps easy to become prideful. The Bible teaches us that God is 'no respecter of persons' and no matter what our profession, we are all equal in his sight. I wish I can say that being a Christian helps me to be more dedicated to finding cures for cancer compared to my non-believing colleagues, but in fact I find that, in general, the medical research community is very dedicated to making a difference in people's lives.

Regarding faith and my understanding of the reasons for a human's existence, I don't profess to have any profound insights into the mysteries of life. Like many of us, I still struggle to reconcile a God who'll have final victory over evil with a world that seems to stagger from bad to worse and with personal tragedies that seem unjust. When God seems remote from my personal struggles, I try to imagine what words of comfort, rebuke or advice Jesus would say to me. God can sometimes seem alien and abstract but Jesus was one of us.

On a personal level, what influences in your childhood helped develop a faith in God?

My parents were always involved in the church, so I grew up with Sunday School. Church was part of my life. My father (Ron) in particular often talked about how wonderful creation was and how it was God and not chance that was behind it all. My older brother (Max) was also very influential in getting me (and my brother and father) more involved in the church. Much of my recreation as a child revolved around camping and fishing and exploring nature, and I think this has been the biggest influence on my belief that there's a God who created and controls everything.

As a husband to Catherine and father of four children, what particular aspects of family life do you highly value?

Because my own childhood was deeply influenced by family camping holidays and outdoor activities, Catherine and I have tried to do the same thing for our family. We have very fond memories of numerous caravan holidays to NSW, Queensland, Tasmania and particularly Wilsons Promontory in Victoria. When the children were younger it was not unusual for us to go camping at the Prom four or five times a year. The children, who are all in various grades in high school, still love camping and often say that our caravan holidays were the most loved part of their childhood. Catherine and I hope these family holidays will have formed a lasting bond between the children and an appreciation of God's hand in all creation.

In your work as a church elder thus far, what experiences, wisdom or personal strengths have assisted you in this challenging role?

Without a doubt my experiences as a father have been the greatest assistance in my role as an elder. In many ways there is not much difference between the joys and challenges of the church family and one's immediate family. □

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