

FREE December 2013 – February 2014

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**Good Shepherds are
Helping Kids Live Life Well**

with Melissa Mitchell

Master Chef Now Savours
the Sweet Life

with Kate Bracks

Evidence of God: the Science and Faith Debate by Dr Nick Hawkes

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Cover: German Shepherds are often stereo-typed as security dogs. Melissa Mitchell is working to change this perception.

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special features

- 1** **MasterChef now Savours the Sweet Life**
with Kate Bracks
- 3** **Good Shepherds are Helping Kids Live Life Well**
with Melissa Mitchell
- 7** **With Friends Like These...**
by Geoff Adams and Simone Daniells
- 9** **Evidence of God: the Science and Faith Debate**
by Dr Nick Hawkes

regular features

- 11** **RiseVibes: Eating Heaven**
by Wendy Rush
- 12** **RiseWise: Christmas - an orgy of sentimentality
or something else?**
by Dr Nick Hawkes

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RISE editor Wendy Rush met 2011 MasterChef winner Kate Bracks at a City Bible Forum event in Adelaide recently where Kate shared something of her faith, her passion for food and her Australian reality television experience.

Master Chef Now Savours

The Sweet Life

Everyone with a television has heard of MasterChef and if we are all honest we have watched an episode or two, maybe more, over the five years it has been airing on Australian TV. The show has been a major success with those aspiring to be chefs, those who just want to be really good cooks and those, like me, who are neither but are very curious to understand what makes some people deeply passionate about food and cooking.

Where do these people come from? What makes them leave their families and set aside their lives for months on end to perform under intense scrutiny, in a pressure cooker of an environment and in front of an audience of millions. And where do they go when their time on the show comes to an end? Every contestant has a different story to tell. Kate Bracks, winner of MasterChef Australia 2011, is always happy to tell hers.

Unlike many MasterChef contestants, Kate had never been driven to become a chef. In fact as a child she says she didn't display a love of food at all. On the contrary she was a very fussy eater. "I was one of those children who hated vegetables, ate only one type of fruit and one type of meat and refused to try anything new."

Like many children (and I admit to my own guilt here!), no matter what we struggled to eat for mains and no matter what tactics we employed to avoid eating the likes of peas, carrots and spinach, we always managed to find room for 'sweets'. Kate was a great lover of sweets, recalling how she used to gather up crumbs from plates, lick bowls clean and ferret out anything sweet that was hidden away in her Mum's pantry.

When Kate was eight years old, one day during the school holidays her mother suggested she go into the kitchen and cook something to relieve her boredom. Having grown up with TV cooks like Peter (G'Day) Russell (G'Day) Clark, she set about making her own TV cooking show, measuring out the ingredients and demonstrating how to make a coffee cake. It was her family's response that had her hooked – they loved her cake and their appreciation motivated her to continue to cook.

Originally a primary school teacher, Kate and her husband moved from Sydney to Orange, NSW then, as a full time stay at home Mum with 3 children, she became aware of a new cooking show coming to our small screens. By the time she got around to applying online she did not seriously think she would be selected. But she was and the rest, as they say, is history.

Kate was concerned that appearing on MasterChef might kill her love of cooking, but she says the experience actually deepened it. "The more you learn, the more you realise you need to learn."

When she talks about her passion for food, Kate views it as a tool to be creative and bring people together. "When I sit down to a meal it is less about the food you eat and more about the time you spend together." But as much as her relationships with family and friends are important to her, she says "my relationship with God is far more important than anything else."

Kate grew up in a Christian family and as a child she attended Sunday School and was read Bible stories. When she was in her twenties she began travelling overseas and, she says, she stopped living with any reference to God. She felt she didn't really need him. But on coming home she started to feel that her life was empty, that there was more to life than simply going out and having fun.

As she contemplated the purpose of life, she didn't want to presume that the God she had grown up with was the only way, so she explored a lot of other religions and philosophies over a couple of years. "What I ended up finding was that the God of the Bible was the one who seemed to have all the answers to questions like: Who am I, why am I here, what is my purpose in life?"

As an adult, Kate started to understand the true meaning of those Bible stories she had heard as a child. She emphasises that the most important thing about her Christian faith is her relationship with God. It is not, she says, about a list of things to do or not do. "So often we think sin is murder, cheating, stealing. I see those as the side effects of sin. Sin itself is actually the rejection of who God is. It's not about going to church, it's about being in a relationship with God."

Kate recounts a particular episode of MasterChef where the contestants were challenged to cook for the Dalai Lama. They were called to a meeting to discuss the protocols involved and were told that the correct way to address the Dalai Lama was 'Your Holiness'.

"As a Christian" said Kate "I have a bit of a problem with this because my understanding from the Bible is that 'holiness' means 'perfectly right with God'. The only person to ever walk the earth that was holy was Jesus because he is the only one that is perfectly right with God. I couldn't in good conscience call this lovely man 'Your Holiness'. So I asked his representative if there was something else I could call him that would be just as respectful."

The response was a very immediate and very off-the-cuff, "you can call him Dalai Lama, he wouldn't mind that at all."

A reporter who was on set to interview the contestants about their backgrounds became aware of Kate's decision not to call the Dalai Lama 'Your Holiness', and all of sudden that became the story. The contestants were cut off from all media during their time in the MasterChef house, so Kate was unaware until some weeks later that the story had grown into something quite controversial – even making it onto the TV talk show 'Can of Worms'.

"I have no regrets because my loyalty lies with God ahead of other people. I still feel I was respectful to the Dalai Lama. We had some lovely interchanges that day and he didn't appear to have a problem with it."

Kate admits that she wasn't aiming to win the competition, in fact she harboured a little bit of fear at the thought of winning. She explains her experience as like being on a big emotional roller coaster which was made more difficult by being away from her family, friends and church for months on end. God was the one constant in the

whole uncertain experience which kept her grounded and put the reality television experience in perspective. The producers were a little taken aback when Kate told the other contestants that life is bigger than MasterChef! She says, though, that her journey through MasterChef has been incredible and it has taught her to keep trusting in God because he keeps providing for her. This knowledge gives her an amazing comfort through all circumstances.

Post MasterChef, Kate's life has been exceptionally busy, with cooking demonstrations, public speaking engagements, media appearances and the challenge of writing her first cookbook *The Sweet Life: desserts from Australia's MasterChef*, published by RandomHouse. The book starts with some basic recipes for sauces and syrups, and then moves beyond the basics into tantalising dishes such as strawberries in dessert wine syrup with crushed amaretti, or peanut and salted caramel sundae. Kate laughs when she points out that she has never been known for so called 'nutritional' cooking, but she is a strong believer in using local produce, which is plentiful around her home on the outskirts of Orange. Kate draws inspiration from other chefs, but her ambition doesn't lie so much in the commercial kitchen, but rather in the humble country B&B.

As she explains on her website, one of Kate's lasting memories is her experience of welcoming hospitality at bed and breakfast accommodation while travelling through Ireland as a teenager which has sparked in her a desire to show similar hospitality to others. "The warmth of fresh food from the oven; a refuge for weary souls; perhaps even strangers becoming friends - this is what I have been dreaming of for many years."

Information on City Bible Forum and videos of Kate's interview with Brenton Ragless, including cooking demonstrations, can be found at www.citybibleforum.org/city/adelaide.



To find out more about Kate Bracks and her book *The Sweet Life*, and to check the progress of her plans to establish a B&B go to www.katebracks.com





RISE editor Wendy Rush met Melissa Mitchell and her dogs Yoni and Yango at Kids BootCamp during LifeWell Conference 2013. This is Melissa's story – about her life, her German Shepherds and her desire to help heal people's lives by introducing them to her dogs.

Melissa's dogs have always been an important part of her life – in fact they are her life. When she talks about them she admits that no words can really explain the position they hold in her heart. Growing up as a child, she says, was 'like living in the fifth dimension of hell'. Her school life and home life were full of violence, beatings, neglect and abuse. Melissa credits these dogs with being her saviours and protectors.

"My biological family were breeders of the amazing, beautiful German Shepherd Dog, which were my responsibility to look after - around fifty at one time. As I have grown from child, teenager into adulthood they have continually been my support, love and protection. Owning and loving this incredible breed has given me the opportunity to travel Australia and the world exhibiting in the show ring. My dogs are my life. They are my family. They are a part of the community. My dogs remind me of the Shepherd looking after his flock of sheep.



Melissa's daughter Laura with Yango

Good Shepherds

“When I think of how important they are to me, I think of all the times when I have been in states of unhappiness and all it takes is a lick on the face, a paw on the arm, a cuddle into the neck as tears have been flooding down my face and they stand strong, loyal, never giving up on me. My dogs are not just dogs, they are my family, and they are amazing, beautiful animals with massive hearts and souls.”

She describes her two dogs Yango and Yoni, their personalities and the special way they interact with children and adults which sees them have such an impact on people’s lives.

“Yango is fourteen years old. He reminds me of an old soul. Yango is a once in a life time dog. I first remember him at six weeks old, running around my legs and I knew instantly that we were going to be friends forever. He had that special something about him. Yango and I exhibited in the show ring winning the top prizes all around Australia. You would always hear people commenting on how handsome he is, a true specimen of his breed.

“Yango has a gift. His gift is to help people and other dogs that are in pain or suffering. His handsome head and furry coat remind me of a lion in the jungle watching over his

family. He is very proud, full of unconditional love, calm, loyal, always alert and ready to help.

“Yango’s special abilities have enabled him to work with many children to overcome their fear of dogs. At one of our training sessions I remember a little girl sitting on her carer’s lap who was trembling with fear. Yango was lying beside me watching the group of kids. He looked up at the little girl and saw her look back. I asked her if she wanted to sit by me and help hold Yango’s lead while I talked to the group. In the space of five minutes this scared trembling little girl had gone from the other side of my body to the front of Yango and then to lying on his belly. This was a magical moment as Yango stayed still and calm and slowly put his paw in this little girl’s lap to calm her down.

“When we rolled up to Kids BootCamp this little girl was the first with her hand up ready to take Yango for some special cuddles and a nice groom. At the BootCamp Yango had four or five children around him getting cuddles and love. He helped these kids by showing them how to be calm, how to succeed, what love looks like, how to have control, how your emotions can inflict on others, because he too can feel what you’re going through. Yango has had so many

beautiful moments in his life. He is a very special dog and has touched so many people on his journey.

“Yoni is eighteen months old. From the moment Yoni was in her mum’s belly I knew that she would be special. Yoni is a young girl, will do anything for a treat, full of life, very intelligent, loves learning, is energetic and wants to become your best friend through her playfulness. Yoni’s special abilities are that she can adapt to any situation that she comes across. One special moment with her was when she was working with a young boy that was so shy, scared and lacked control of his emotions that he openly expressed his feelings. Yoni dropped to the ground and decided not to move. She thought ‘well if this lad is not sure of himself I will lay here until he is ready’. Yoni became a dead weight on the end of the lead not moving until this young boy had talked about what was going on in his world. It was breath-takingly beautiful. He lay alongside Yoni, talked to her about his problems, hugged and kissed her and fed her some treats. Once he had unloaded his ‘baggage’ Yoni and he worked together as an amazing team.

“Until then Yoni had not come across a Tunnel Run - a small hole that the dogs run



“Yango has a gift. His gift is to help people and other dogs that are in pain or suffering.”

Charlotte and another of Melissa’s dogs Luna at BootCamp

are Helping Kids Live Life Well

through that is closed off around them. It can be very scary. This young boy put Yoni in the lay-down position, climbed three quarters of the way through the tunnel and talked to Yoni, telling her everything will be okay, to trust him, to love him and that he promises that she won't be hurt. Absolutely magical. Especially when, on the second time round, they both flew through the tunnel like it was nothing.

"Yoni is an incredible ambassador to the breed. She has already touched the hearts of so many young children. Another amazing moment was when, surrounded by twenty or more children at BootCamp, she lay in the middle of the group with her legs in the air waiting for a tummy rub. Then to see two young children step out from the group and embrace her with cuddles was absolutely breath taking. Yoni provides these kids with confidence, self-assurance, love and the ability to succeed."

The program Melissa has designed introduces children to the German Shepherd and teaches them how to carry out basic obedience training, enabling them to gain self-control, self-assurance, resilience, love and support. Her dogs have worked with children from three to seventeen years and over. She says the dogs work well with people of any age because they connect on a level that others can't relate to. She has taken her program into the Juvenile Justice System, into outreach work, the public school system and community pre-school kindergarten. It has been remarkably successful, reaching young children, teenagers and adults that are otherwise 'untouchable'. Melissa's inspiration to develop the program stems from her own life experiences.

"Through every cycle of life that I have faced my dogs have supported me and provided me with a loving gift that I can take out to the community. This love started from childhood as they were my protectors and I vowed that I would do everything in my power to promote my best friends and break the chains that surrounded their

stigmatisation. I am inspired every time a young child takes a German Shepherd Dog and cuddles, kisses and trains it, knowing that this dog will protect them with his or her life."

Melissa brings up to fifteen dogs to her sessions and each of them works with broken hearts, helping to mend them with a lick on the hand or face.

A very close friend of Melissa's who organises the LifeWell Kids BootCamp program saw the potential that she and the dogs had to offer the community.

"This man has supported, loved and nurtured my ability to grow with LifeWell and believe in the goodness of people. I have met amazing, loving, supportive people at LifeWell. This was a completely new avenue of my life. I have gone through counselling and programs that LifeWell have offered, which have changed my life for the better. These relationships that have been built encompass lifelong loving memories and ambitions. LifeWell is about living holistically and I am forever grateful and in awe of these amazing people."

LifeWell has given Melissa the opportunity to pursue her passion. To be able to engage, empower, inspire and motivate young people to keep moving forward. It enables her program to reach young children through Enfield Baptist's kid's church and LifeWell Conference programs. She gains a great deal of support and encouragement from the children's and volunteers' faces when smiles are 'from ear to ear' she says.

Melissa offers the program to LifeWell on a voluntary basis and although she has worked with other organisations, at the moment she is focussing on her studies to become a qualified Social Worker. Already a qualified Youth Worker and experienced in childhood intervention, Melissa's dream is to pursue her passion to give children longevity for the future and she would love to have sustainable employment in this area.

"I believe this is where I belong. My passion and dream is to engage as many children as possible with the German Shepherd Dog, to bring back companionship. With my own life circumstances the dogs have saved and enhanced my life. My dream and motivation is to let children know that they are not alone. No matter what issues or problems they are going through, I or my dogs will be there for them, supporting and encouraging them through this crazy cycle of life."

Melissa tells the story of one remarkable day when she was at the local oval giving her dogs a run. She came across a young girl curled up in a ball, crying.

"My old boy Yango and I became curious as to what was happening so we approached her. We asked what was wrong. Her comment back was a scramble of tears and mutterings on how horrible her home life was and that she was going to take her life with a knife that was sitting beside her. Before I could say my next words Yango had laid down right beside her. He knew that this girl was in trouble. I then instantly sat down on the other side of Yango so the girl wouldn't become intimidated and slowly started talking about Yango and Yango's father, Image.

"I told her that when I was her age Yango's father had saved my life from similar circumstances and Yango has these magical powers like his father. The young girl was staring at Yango with tears running down her face. Yango then turned to her and softly licked some of her tears off of her hand. The next minute the girl had both her arms wrapped around his neck and was heaving into him. I gave her the lead and asked if she wouldn't mind taking Yango for a walk around the oval and if she felt like it she could have a chat with him. The girl made it about half way around the oval, dropped to her knees and burst out crying. Yango dropped right in front of her and lay there until the girl had finished crying and talking to him. She returned Yango to me, gave him a big kiss and cuddle and handed over the knife.

Yoni and Yango



“My dogs save lives. This is one story. There are so many more stories about what they have done for my family and others.”

Now as Melissa’s dogs continue to represent their breed, they are helping children become confident, assertive, self-aware and building positive relationships between man and dog. All it takes is a lick and two ears to listen, says Melissa, to possibly save a child or adult from their pain and suffering.

Her aim is to achieve harmony between the German Shepherds and the community. She believes the breed is unfairly heavily stereo typed as a security dog. She wants to break this stigma and develop a bond between children and the German Shepherd Dog in a way that enables them to live together safely and securely.

“I want to emphasize that the German Shepherd Dog is a friend and a loving companion and they walk with you and support you through every unfolding chapter of your life. To awaken the public to the realisation that this breed is a family companion and a guidance dog and assistance dog to our community. Worldwide this breed is used to assist people with many disabilities, health issues and traumas, enabling them to become functioning human beings. I want to achieve the same result here in Australia.

“Wherever I go I have Yango and Yoni always at my side, helping the community to awaken to the benefits of the German Shepherd. My dogs engage, inspire, empower and motivate people in the community to succeed in life. Through their listening skills and trainability they are always loyal and supportive.

“The program aims to help kids with their emotional tangles and to equip them with confidence, resilience, self-esteem and boundaries, using the German Shepherd Dog to enhance these qualities in the youth that will sustain our future.”

Melissa says her Christian faith is a new aspect of her life that she doesn’t shy away from and she is continually learning. “God has taught me peace. GOD=DOG man’s best friend.”

And her connection with LifeWell has given her the chance to succeed and the belief that a future is possible. “I recommend anyone who is seeking help or someone to talk to, to approach the people at LifeWell as they have turned my life around.”

Melissa would love to be able to take her program into other ‘kid’s churches’ or run counselling based groups or individual counselling sessions using animal therapy. It will all hinge, of course, on funding. Her longer term dream is to become a family counsellor/therapist, child counsellor/therapist/behaviourist and sexologist. In the meantime she is looking forward to the coming year, as she and her German Shepherds and the LifeWell Kids BootCamp take on Challenge Hill.

Sadly, during the writing of this story Yango passed away. In Melissa’s words he has now moved on to his next life and will be forever watching over us all from the Rainbow Bridge. “He was my forever dog. My heart and love will always be with him” May Yango rest in peace.

Information and contact details for LifeWell are at www.lifewell.net.au Keep an eye out for information on the next LifeWell conference in August 2014 at www.lifewellconference.com.au.

Go to www.risemagazine.com.au or www.facebook.com/risemagazine to view video footage of Kids BootCamp.

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With Friends Like These...

Churches and other interest groups such as cultural clubs, social networks and sporting clubs are an integral part of our society. They bring people together to share spiritual faith, common interests, cultural identities, values and hobbies. They are a place where people often feel safe, form strong relationships and trust and respect one another. Unfortunately they can also be susceptible to a very dangerous and destructive form of scam, commonly referred to as "Affinity Fraud".

What is Affinity Fraud?

The Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) has defined 'Affinity Fraud' as follows:

Affinity fraud refers to investment scams that prey on a certain community, such as a religious or sporting group, an ethnic community or the elderly. The fraudsters are group members (or claim to be) or they enlist respected leaders to spread the word about the scam.¹

"Affinity Fraudsters" prey upon the trust that exists between members of Interest Groups. By professing to share the same faith, beliefs, interests, perspectives, aspirations or values of the Group, they convince people (that might otherwise view them with scepticism) of their trustworthiness. One of the most effective methods of perpetuating the fraud is through the fraudster strategically befriending a leader who holds a position of authority in the Group and borrowing from the leader's credibility and influence.

The 'fraud' might take the form of an illegitimate investment scheme, donations to a particular cause that are diverted elsewhere, or taking payment for services that might never be performed or goods that never arrive.

Why are Churches and other Interest Groups particularly vulnerable to Affinity Fraud?

- **Strong and dependent emotional bonds are formed.** Members are often reluctant to believe that 'one of their own' could be involved in a scam. Fraudsters often use emotional tactics to manipulate the Group's perception of what has occurred.

- **Members rely exclusively on other Members for support and advice.** Members are often reluctant to share their concerns or queries with those that are outside of the Group. It can mean that members rely on support and advice from others who are also caught in the scam, even if that advice is innocent and well-meaning. Investigations into scams can be hindered because members are reluctant to betray the trust of the fraudster and report the conduct to authorities; or the Group might think that it is equipped to deal with the problem alone.
- **Endorsements by the Leaders of the Group carry weight.** Leaders are often held in high regard and commonly relied upon to provide direction, guidance and support to members. If a leader endorses a certain product, investment, service or person, this can carry significant weight with the members. This means that leaders could unknowingly perpetuate the fraud.
- **A captive audience.** The close-knit social structure that provides the basis of a healthy functioning Group can also provide a solid platform from which a fraudster may spruik a particular scam. A broad range of trusting people can be reached through regular gatherings and associated events. Some of these events may have fewer controls or filters on what can be promoted or encouraged by those in attendance.

Minimising the Risk of Affinity Fraud for your Church or Interest Group

- **Endorser Beware** If you are in a position of leadership, be wary about who is promoted or endorsed through your Interest Group, especially if members are being encouraged to invest money or otherwise have financial dealings with a particular person. It is a good idea to develop an 'endorsement policy' with your fellow leaders. Likewise, if you are a member of an Interest Group, learn to treat endorsements/ recommendations with caution and seek the perspective of an independent professional advisor if necessary.

- **Background Check** If someone is asking you to have financial dealings with them, it is critical that you conduct certain background checks on that person, even if they are a member of your Group. If they are offering you an investment, at the very least check that the person has a current Australian Financial Services licence. If you are being asked to invest in a business venture, check that the business is actually registered, trading and viable. There are discreet ways of doing this and your legal and financial advisors should know how to help.
- **Put Pen to Paper** Before accepting any offer or handing over any money, make sure that you get the proposal set out to you in writing but do not sign anything until you have had the opportunity to obtain independent advice. Never accept excuses such as "I don't have time to put it in writing" or "this is for a limited time only" or "just trust me".
- **Protect your Friendships** It is natural to drop your defences in the context of an Interest Group, but it's important to recognise times when objectivity and healthy scepticism are needed. If you value your Group and the friendships within it then you need to put certain safeguards in place to ensure that the friendships are not torn apart by poor investment/ business decisions or scams.
- **Say 'No' to Peer Pressure** Saying 'No' can be difficult, particularly when you are placed under pressure by those that you know and trust. If you feel that you can't say 'No' then at least say 'Not Yet'. This can allow you the time to reflect properly on the request and seek independent professional advice.
- **Seek independent professional advice** It is the role of an independent professional advisor to identify risks and help you to develop strategies to avoid them. Don't wait until after you have agreed to invest or parted with your savings. Always get independent professional advice before you invest.

Churches and Interest Groups should be a place for constructive, transparent relationships in a supportive community and

1. [http://www.asic.gov.au/asic/pdflib.nsf/LookupByFileName/Helping_Consumers_Investors_Dec06.pdf/\\$file/Helping_Consumers_Investors_Dec06.pdf](http://www.asic.gov.au/asic/pdflib.nsf/LookupByFileName/Helping_Consumers_Investors_Dec06.pdf/$file/Helping_Consumers_Investors_Dec06.pdf)

Solicitors Geoff Adams and Simone Daniells warn against the dangers of doing business with 'friends' through sporting clubs, church and other social networks.

so it is crucial to make sure that the risks of 'affinity fraud' are identified and addressed to help prevent your Group from the devastating and far-reaching ripple effects that such frauds can inflict.

Geoff Adams is Principal Solicitor and Simone Daniells is Associate Solicitor with Tri-meridian Corporate & Commercial Law
www.tri-meridian.com

How to Spot a Scam

(www.asic.gov.au)

- It looks like the real thing but isn't. It can be hard to tell what is the real deal and what isn't. Scammers often use glossy brochures or logos from legitimate banks.
- The reward seems too good to be true. Scammers target people who might be struggling a bit with their money by telling them the scam will change their life forever. These 'get rich quick' schemes might look good but in reality only the scammer makes money.
- You need to sign up right away. The scammer will pressure you by saying you have to decide on the spot. Never agree to this. Always ask for documents and read them thoroughly before you make a decision.

Always seek independent, professional advice before you invest.

Evidence of God: the science and faith debate

Dr Nick Hawkes challenges us to make room for scientific truth alongside theological truth.

Truth is so terribly important. It is certainly important to God. He doesn't condone today's postmodern relativism which says that truth is whatever you want it to be. Truth is embodied by God and has its origin in God. God expects us to learn something about the truth of his existence by looking at creation (Romans 1:20); and expects us to learn something of the truth of his character by looking at Jesus. Truth matters.

But how should science and faith relate? Where does truth sit there?

The 9th ISCAST (Christians in Science and Technology) conference was hosted at TABOR College this July. It was entitled: *"Faith, Hope and Quarks: Scientific and Theological Perspectives on the Future."* The keynote speaker was Dr David Wilkinson, Master of St John's College, Durham University, UK. He is both a theologian and an astrophysicist. He is very clever, and also one of the nicest people you could meet – a lovely combination.

This reminds me that South Australia actually has some of the world's leading thinkers in the science/faith debate – people like Dr Mark Worthing; Dr Denis Edwards and Dr Graham Buxton. It can be easy to forget this with the steady stream of people visiting Adelaide to promote extreme fundamentalist views which are

theologically and scientifically questionable. This extremism has fuelled a subculture which believes that evolution, as a theory, has now been thoroughly disgraced—a view that no one, other than themselves, actually believes. Sadly, their books are found in large numbers in our evangelical bookshops.

So let me share a basic truth: ALL truth, whether scientific or theological, has its origin in God. As such, we must not set scientific truth against theological truth. Both disciplines must make room for each other. Theology's role is to provide the context for science to operate in. Science says how, theology says why. The two truths have different but important functions.

The militant anti-scientific creationism that has come over from America in the last one-hundred years is a cuckoo in the church's nest. It shouldn't be there. The lack of integrity and credibility in the young earth creationist camp is simply appalling. To name just a few examples of it:

- They have claimed that dinosaur footprints were found next to human footprints in petrified mud. No, that's been shown to be a mistake.
- They claim to have found Noah's ark—about forty times! All such claims have been shown to be mistakes or frauds. One 'discovery' claimed to have found the ark, together with the remains of

animal pens, and metal nails. It was exposed as being completely false on prime time TV. Ouch!

- They claim huge gaps in the fossil records. Umm ... not really.
- They claim that the speed of light has changed. It has since been shown there is no evidence for this.
- They claim to have found the wagon wheels of Egyptian chariots which were overwhelmed with water while chasing the Hebrew people across the Red Sea. One of the wheels was said to have been given to an esteemed Egyptian archaeologist for verification. No evidence of this happening has yet come to light.

And so it goes on and on.

These errors appear on church websites, in church magazines and on Christian bookstalls. Some pastors even allow it to be preached in their pulpits. What makes it worse is that this abuse of scientific truth is being done in the name of preserving biblical integrity. It is deeply disturbing. May I gently suggest that if your biblical integrity requires you to lie about science and truth, then you need to get a better theology of Scripture.

If we Christians have any ambition to reach even vaguely educated people, then it is wrong to put unnecessary barriers to them



Sombrero Galaxy

coming to faith by requiring them to believe things which are demonstrably untrue. I certainly can't imagine God being pleased, for God is a God of truth (Psalm 31:5; 51:6).

But finding truth amongst the mess of it all can be difficult. I have a real sympathy for pastors and ministers who don't have much scientific knowledge for it can result in them falling into one of three traps.

The first temptation is to say lazily that we should respect all views that are sincerely held.

I'd want to say, why? Where do you find a mandate to be careless with truth? If you excuse it by saying it is a non core issue, you are mistaken. Eighty percent of tertiary trained non-church attenders believe Christianity is not scientifically credible. Therefore, it is a significant barrier to faith. You wouldn't say that it is theologically okay for people to do whatever they like morally if they felt it to be okay—so why do it with scientific truth? The fact is, we can be wrong both morally and scientifically, and when we are, we should be called on it.

Pastors particularly have the responsibility of protecting their sheep and keeping them from error. Ministry is not about maintaining peace at any cost—particularly if the cost is embracing untruth and imposing unnecessary barriers to people coming to faith.

The second temptation is to claim that you are holding non-credible scientific views because you want to be faithful to the first three chapters of Genesis. This is to impose a wooden literalism on Scripture that the original authors never intended. Theologians throughout history from St Augustine to John Calvin, right through to Nicky Gumbel (of Alpha fame) have all understood that the first three chapters of Genesis were never intended to be a scientific textbook. They were not written to teach how and when, but who and why.

The third and final temptation is to simply give up, throw your hands in the air and say it is all too hard. If this is you, then perhaps I can help. I have provided a FREE ONLINE COURSE that can be done quickly on your computer. It will teach you the basic truths about science's relationship with faith in a way that will empower your ministry. On the way, you'll discover that scientific truth is a wonderful and powerful tool you can use to get your non-Christian friends to ponder the possibility of God. So, it is a powerful mission tool!

I have many wonderful friends who would not describe themselves as having an active Christian faith. Many are searching for truth. If this sounds like you, I want to cheer you on. Finding out who you are, why you are... and why the universe bothers to exist, is the most exciting adventure you can undertake.

Just as scientific truth can be unraveled with a little bit of application, so can spiritual truth. I want to also offer this little on-line course to you to help you on your journey.

There is a brief introduction and 4 sessions, each of which takes only eight minutes to do. These are:

- 1) The dance between science and faith in history
- 2) How science and faith should relate. (This also explores how Genesis 1-3 should be understood).
- 3) The order of the cosmos as evidence of God
- 4) The disorder (pain and suffering) in the cosmos as evidence against God – and how to make sense of it all.

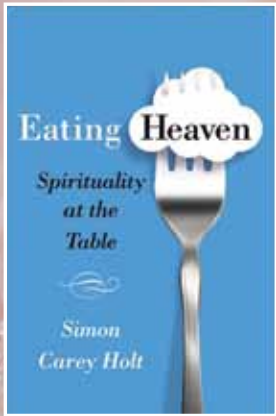
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For more on the Institute for the Study of Christianity in an Age of Science and Technology www.iscast.org



Eating Heaven: Spirituality at the Table

by Simon Carey Holt

This is an easy, revealing and thoroughly enjoyable read about our place at the table and the table's place at the heart of family, community and culture. It evoked memories of my childhood and other significant events in my life as I sat around a table alongside friends, family and acquaintances – some I still eat with while others are long gone. And at the same time I felt a twinge of guilt that I haven't made more of my and my family's time at the table, or indeed recognised earlier the complex rituals, relationships and situations within which we prepare and consume nourishment for our bodies. Because, as Holt points out, this is where we find nourishment for the soul.

What does the dining table represent? While Holt is a Minister of Religion, he doesn't come at the subject with the intention of convincing us of his Christian viewpoint. Rather, he places the subject within the context of culture, ritual, tradition and family – which has something

to say to each of us regardless of our religious perspective.

The book would easily engage a wide audience, including those interested in food and eating, the place of food in our lives, spirituality in everyday life, families and relationships, community and modern Australian culture.

Holt describes a variety of tables at which he interacts with friends and strangers, intentionally or accidentally, often bringing a level of intimacy not found in any other place.

Holt explores where we eat, why we eat and with whom. I found the book enlightening and it moved me to be more aware and indeed curious about my own personal experiences at the table. For this is where our identity is formed, where we make meaning, where the sharing of 'iconic' food feeds our conversation, laced with a

generous dose of meaning, identity and values.

For every table he explores and illuminates for us, he offers a recipe – from his mother's simple chocolate pudding to the more complex Baumkuchen or 'tree cake' that he learnt to cook as an apprentice chef. Holt underpins his stories with a rich history of Australian eating places such as the café, the restaurant, and the multi-cultural table.

Our bodies crave for food, says Holt, while our souls crave for belonging. He easily convinces us that, religious beliefs aside, we will – and do - experience spirituality at the table.

Eating Heaven: Spirituality at the Table is published by Acorn Press and can be purchased at www.acornpress.net.au. RRP \$24.95 (also available in eBook format).

Reviewer: Wendy Rush



Still Me

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This project is funded by the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education under the Productive Ageing through Community Education (PATCE) Program.



Enfield Baptist Church

"ON GOD'S MISSION"
 - to see our broken world restored under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Service times: 9am and 10:45am
Christmas Eve: 7pm Christmas Day: 9am
December 29th & January Service times: 10am only hour of power

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Essentially EBC is ON GOD'S MISSION - for more people to know Jesus, become His life apprentices, live life to the full, and actively participate in God's plan to restore all things under Jesus as Lord.

Christmas

- an orgy of sentimentality or something else?

Christmas has become a season in which we indulge in an orgy of sentimentality. Now I'm not against sentimentality, it's part of humanity. But I have reservations about sentimentality based on untruth.

This 'untruth' can be represented by Christmas adverts that promise 'your child will love you forever' if you buy them this toy. A great deal of 'untruth' also exists in children's Christmas films. I can think of one in which a manikin comes to life to become a mother to a motherless family. In another, Santa and his elves come in and save the day. It's a sentimental orgy.

At Christmas, rock stars stop singing song about unrestrained self-indulgence and sing community carols with dewy eyed sincerity. It's all gushy stuff.

However sentimentality is no substitute for spirituality. A temporary tug at emotive heart strings is no substitute for a continuing long term commitment to love God and other people. Jesus is not just another fairy story alongside Frosty the snowman, and Santa Claus. Jesus was born a suspected illegitimate son in a place where animals feed. Homeless, betrayed by friends, arrested on a trumped up charge and executed in one of the most excruciatingly painful ways invented by man.

The reason for this was that Jesus wanted to take the blame for all the bad stuff we do that would otherwise keep us from enjoying the love of a holy God. It is heroic stuff. Knowing it will change your life forever...and your Christmases.

For more see: 'The Bible on the Key Issues of Life', by Dr Nick Hawkes, available from bookshops. Nick has degrees in science and theology. He is a pastor, writer and broadcaster.

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