

faith in
focus

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The battle for the

Bible:

The Creation battlefront



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Editorial

You may be thinking that the theme for this month seems overly dramatic. Yet within the Reformed and Presbyterian world and even beyond, the Scriptures are under attack. There is a trend among leading theologians and churchmen towards blending Scripture with science. There seems to be the view that the Holy Scriptures are not scientific and therefore have nothing to say about our origins.

Some very notable individuals in Reformed circles claim that the first two chapters of Genesis are poetical-type literature and not historical narrative, so should be read metaphorically. The implications of this view are huge. Why the shift in this view of the biblical historical narrative?

Some are saying that Genesis Chapters 1 and 2 are a stumbling block to people accepting the Gospel. Because science is king in our secular society, some avoid being dogmatic about the origins of life and everything that it entails. It seems many would rather make the Scriptures more palatable to those who are openly hostile to the Word of God. It also seems that if the God of the Bible, the God of creation, can fit within the framework of King Science, then and only then could some possibly believe in Him, or, only then would Christianity seem more acceptable.

And so the litany of errors continues. Some want to put our Creator in a box, so that He is only capable of creating everything in six long periods of time, rather than in the literal and biblical period of six twenty-four-hour days. Both ideas are quite absurd. He is either the Creator, or He is not. Theologians and churchmen are resorting to syncretism (amalgamation of schools of thought) and wickedly leading people astray.

I would suggest that the church needs to be faithful to the Word as it has been handed down, and needs once again to preach an uncompromising gospel and proclaim our God and Saviour as LORD of Lords and King of kings over all that has been created in six days.

Our contributors, Messrs David Waldron and Paul Archbald, who have degrees in science – physics, geophysics and geology (respectively), open up the Bible on this topic and reveal what it has to say to us.

Mr David Waldron investigates what the Scripture reveals about the six, twenty-four hour days in Genesis.

Mr Paul Archbald refutes the Framework Hypothesis.

Mr Joel Beeke looks through corrective lenses.

Mrs Sally Davey reflects on the discussion surrounding the "Trump phenomenon".

Mrs Jenny Waldron considers what it is to be courageous.

Mr Hans Vaatstra reports on his guest lectureship at the Reformed Bible College, PNG.

Mr Albert Mohler analyses our cultural crisis in his second instalment.

Mr Reuben Posthum reviews *Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books*, by Tony Reinke.

Mr David Waldron provides a photographic progress report of the Cornwall Street rebuild.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

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Six Day Creation

I was a scientist before I became a pastor/preacher; my physics and geophysics degrees being conferred on me prior to my theology degree. As a scientist I am excited by the intricacy and orderliness of the universe, as a Christian I am in awe of the might, intelligence and creativity of the God whose eternal power and divine nature are clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

As a theologian I am convinced that the Bible is what Francis Schaeffer termed 'true truth'. This means that when God speaks in the Scripture, from Genesis 1:1 through to Revelation 22:21, his words (which have been conveyed through human authors, who were 'carried along by the Holy Spirit'¹) are absolutely trustworthy and reliable.

As a user of 21st century technology, I know that carefully conducted and wisely applied empirical science² has resulted in many insightful, useful discoveries which have hugely changed the way we think about the universe and altered

how we live on planet earth. However, I also understand that the empirical scientific method is limited to the analysis of observable, repeatable and measurable processes and natural phenomena.

The supernatural excluded

Therefore, any theory of the origin of the universe derived from this scientific method will be, necessarily, based on assumptions of formation by natural causes and ongoing change through regular mechanisms which are observable today. The scope of the scientific method excludes any supernatural intervention in the physical world.

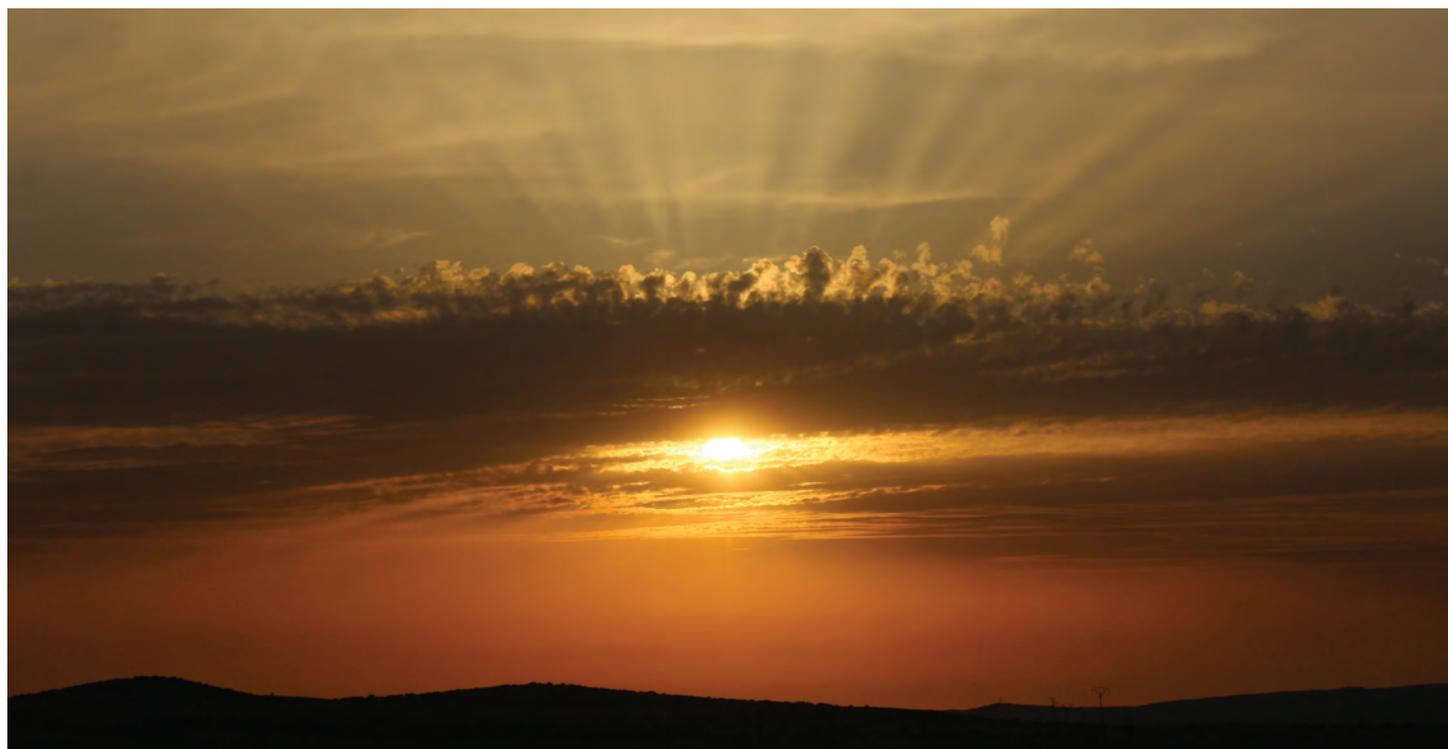
It follows logically, then, that if the creation of the universe did take place by supernatural means (with initial changes occurring through extraordinary, non-regular, intervention by a personal Creator) then the empirical scientific method will, if applied to this topic, result in highly misleading results. Accurate reconstruction of a past event

is dependent upon reliable testimony of someone who was there at the time to see what took place. An authentic, corroborated, eyewitness account is foundational for confidently determining the truth of what has taken place in past history³. Therefore, as God was the only sentient witness to the events preceding the creation of the first man, his testimony must be the only basis upon which we can confidently know the origin of all things.

Not scientific

As a pastor, one of the phrases which I hear from time to time in our Reformed churches is the statement that "The Bible is not a scientific textbook". This phrase may sound satisfyingly succinct, but is it correct?

The answer depends, as is so often the case, on what exactly is meant! It is certainly true that the Scriptures do not contain diagrams, mathematical formulae and references to academic



“The strongest evidence, from the original language in which the Scriptures were written, points to solar days of 24 hours...”

literature; features which we would expect to find in a modern-day scientific textbook or research paper. Some have suggested that the purposes of the book of Genesis and science are fundamentally different. Eminent Bible scholar Bruce Waltke, for example, sees a clear distinction, arguing that Genesis is ‘prescriptive’, answering the ‘who?’, ‘why?’ and ‘what ought to be?’ questions, whereas the purpose of science is to be ‘descriptive’, answering the ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ questions⁴.

However, surely such an absolute distinction goes too far because Scripture, including the book of Genesis, provides us with answers to all five questions to the degree that God, has chosen to reveal them to us. For example, in response to the question: ‘What was there in existence before Genesis 1:1?’, the Scriptures inform us that only God existed⁵ and that there was no created universe⁶. We may also ask, ‘How did God create the first man Adam?’ and know that the answer is “by forming the man of dust from the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life, so that the man became a living creature”⁷. These two examples demonstrate that the Bible is descriptive.

The statements I have made above depend on the understanding, and firm conviction, that the Bible contains a reliable historical account of past events. Sometimes Christians speak about the interpretation of creation account in the early chapters of Genesis and state

that this is ‘not a salvation issue’; but is this correct?

As a preacher, I know that the Christian faith is based upon a foundation of historical fact. Regarding the resurrection of Christ, the Apostle Paul writes “*if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith*”⁸. The historical reality of the resurrection is absolutely essential to the gospel message. The Bible explains the reason why this created world, which God Himself described as being ‘very good’⁹, has become so troubled. At one time in history there were only two human beings on the earth and they both rebelled against God. The historical reality of the fall of our first parents is essential to the gospel message. Adam and Eve had both been perfectly created by God as described in Genesis 1 and 2. The historical reality of the creation of the universe and of our first parents Adam and Eve is essential to the gospel message, explaining our need for a saviour.

The creation, the fall of mankind, and the redemption of a people chosen by God in Christ are all historical events which form the integrated story of salvation in Scripture. Therefore the historical reliability of the accounts of the creation, the fall, and the redemptive work of God is critical. In this sense, the historical interpretation of the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 is a ‘salvation’ or ‘gospel’ issue.

The Bible begins at the beginning of space and time with the opening verse setting the scene for all that follows: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*”. In the first chapter of the Bible we learn that the initial creative work of God took place over six time periods called the ‘first’ through to the ‘sixth’ day. The second chapter of Genesis reveals that on the seventh day, God rested from all his work.

Salvation issue

The Bible is very clear that God’s creative activity was completed in six days. However, down through history, some have asked: ‘what exactly were these days?’, ‘how long were they?’ These are worthwhile questions to pose because the doctrine of creation, as we have seen, is a ‘gospel/salvation issue’.

An accurate understanding of Scripture requires what is termed by Bible scholars ‘grammatico-historical exegesis’. The term ‘exegesis’ has been described as ‘a fancy way of referring to interpretation’¹⁰. ‘Grammatico-historical’ points to the truth

that any analysis of Scripture must include both the language in which the original text was written, the type of literature (genre) and the cultural and historical context that gave rise to the text.

This article focuses on the Hebrew language in which the text of most of the Old Testament (OT) was first written. The following six points summarise the grammatical support in Scripture for the 6x24-hour-literal-day interpretation of the creation account in the book of Genesis.

1. The primary meaning of the Hebrew word day, ‘yom’, in the OT is of a normal day as experienced regularly by mankind. Of its 1704 occurrences in the OT, the overwhelming majority relate to daily earth time. Whilst the word ‘day’ (in both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures) can mean epoch or season, the general principle of Biblical exegesis is to take the plain, literal meaning unless the context demands otherwise.
2. Each of the six creative days is qualified with the phrase ‘evening and morning’. Outside of Genesis 1 the words ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ occur together in 37 verses. In each instance of this construction, the Bible speaks of a normal day¹¹.
3. In the 119 cases where the Hebrew word ‘yom’ stands in conjunction with a numerical adjective (first, second, third, etc.) in the first five books of the Bible (the ‘Pentateuch’), ‘yom’ never means anything other than a literal day. The same is true of the 357 instances outside the Pentateuch, where numerical adjectives occur¹².
4. The fourth commandment in Exodus 20:9-11¹³ is based upon the stated timeframe for God’s creative activity being six days. There is absolutely no indication in the commandment that the work of God in creation should be understood in any other way than as six ordinary days.
5. In Exodus 20:11, God’s creation week is spoken of as involving ‘six days’ (*yammim*), using the plural form of the word ‘yom’. In the 608 instances of the plural “days” in the OT, we never find any meaning other than normal days. Extended periods of time are never expressed as *yammim*.
6. The Hebrew language used in the OT has a limited vocabulary. Therefore some words are used which have different meanings, depending on context. For example, the word ‘seed’ (*zera*), refers to a plant seed, but also

to the offspring of people. However, whilst Hebrew vocabulary is limited, there is a word ('olam') meaning 'era' or 'long period of time'. God could have caused the word 'olam', to be enscripturated, but chose to use 'yom' instead. The first hearers/readers of Genesis 1 could have been told that God had created in long periods of time, but instead God said that He had taken just six days.

The 6x24-hour-literal-day interpretation of the biblical creation account maintains that Genesis chapter 1 has a plain meaning which the initial audience would have clearly understood. This view best reflects the 'perspicuity' (clarity) of Scripture¹⁴.

Both Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures consistently view creation as occurring by the power of God's command out of no pre-existing material¹⁵. Genesis 1-2:3 and Exodus 20:11 affirm in God's own Word that he created the entire universe in the space of six days and then rested on

the seventh. This truth is reflected in the Westminster Confession: *"It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good"*¹⁶.

As a pastor, I know and respect that Bible-believing Christians do hold different interpretations of the nature and length of the six days of creation. However, the strongest evidence, from the original language in which the Scriptures were written, points to solar days of 24 hours; the same length of day that you and I experience seven times each week of our lives on this earth. The burden of proof therefore firmly lies with those who suggest that the six days of creation were anything other than 24 hours in length. To have credibility as 'true truth', any such proof must be derived from the Creator's account of what took place, because He was

the absolutely reliable witness who was there at the time.

Notes

- 1 1 Peter 1:21
- 2 The word 'empirical' refers to the use of a working hypothesis that can be tested by measuring observable and repeatable processes
- 3 Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28
- 4 *Genesis, a Commentary*, Bruce K. Waltke (Zondervan, 2001), p75
- 5 e.g. Psalm 90:2
- 6 Hebrews 11:3
- 7 Genesis 2:7
- 8 1 Corinthians 15:14
- 9 **Genesis 1.31**
- 10 *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, by Walter Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva (Zondervan, 2007), p21
- 11 e.g. Exodus 18:13, also Exodus 27:21; Ezra 3:3,4
- 12 e.g. Lev 12:3; Exo 12:15; 26:14
- 13 This is also referenced in Exodus 31:15-17
- 14 e.g. Psalm 119:130
- 15 e.g. Hebrews 11:3
- 16 WCF 4.1; also WLC#15 and WSC #9

Mr David Waldron is the minister in the Reformed Church of Christchurch.

Battle for the Bible: The Creation battlefield (2)

Looking for loopholes: the attempt to reinterpret Genesis 1 in the "Framework Hypothesis"

Paul Archbald

Introduction

I have often been amazed at how small a hole a mouse can squeeze into, when it is being chased. But I am even more amazed at the ability of Christians to find loopholes (at least in their own imagination) when they feel under pressure from the world. Teachings that were formerly considered unassailable suddenly seem to have these loopholes, and come up for debate. Academic articles are written

by prominent theologians, telling us "It is really not so simple. There is another way of reading the text – one that does justice to the authority of Scripture, without destroying Christian credibility in the eyes of the world."

We are seeing this kind of thing happen, also in the "Reformed" world, in a number of areas: women in office; homosexuality; and the doctrine of creation. It is no coincidence that these are all areas where there is great pressure from the world.

There are some common threads

in the manner of finding loopholes regarding these issues. Often, speculation about the broader historical context of a passage is made determinative for its interpretation. Another popular method is to assume an uncommon meaning for a key word. In this way, just about any doctrine, no matter how clearly it may be taught in the Bible, can be opened up for debate.

Definitions

In this article, I wish to show how such an approach has opened up for debate

“There is plenty of evidence that [Genesis 1] it is essentially historical, sequential narrative.”

the historic Christian doctrine of creation. According to the Framework Hypothesis, Genesis 1 is not giving us a literal, chronological account of God’s successive creative acts. It is not “straightforward history.” It is more like poetry, a kind of metaphor, a literary device, providing a framework that tells us the truth about God’s sovereign control of all aspects of Creation, and His orderly, logical way of doing things. But we should not think in terms of 6 literal, 24-hour days, in which God successively made, from nothing, each of the kinds described in the “days” of Genesis 1. What God actually did – the “how” and the “when” – are not addressed. Genesis 1 is arranging things for *theological reasons*, to tell us merely about the “who” and the “why” – it is about God and salvation, not science.

The Framework Hypothesis is often credited to A. Noordzij, who wrote in the 1920’s – though there may be earlier foreshadowings. Other proponents include N.H. Ridderbos, Henri Blocher, Meredith Kline, Gordon Wenham, Bruce Waltke, Michael Horton and Tim Keller. There are also many other well-known theologians who seem reluctant to be drawn on the matter.

Many of these have made it clear that they are driven by the belief that a straightforward interpretation of Genesis 1 is incompatible with the great weight of scientific evidence for an old age of the earth. They feel that the historic view makes Christianity less credible. They want to solve this problem by having science and the Bible operate in two different spheres that complement one another, rather than competing against one another. In this connection, Bruce Waltke cites the Belgic Confession, Article 2, which tells us that God has made Himself known by two books: on the one hand, creation and providence; and on the other, His Word – what we sometimes call general revelation and special revelation.

The big mistake in this argument is the failure to recognize that the view of *scientists* is NOT general revelation. For that matter, the view of theologians is not special revelation either! But the only infallible interpreter we have of general revelation is special revelation, the Bible. True, the Bible is not given as an exhaustive text-book of every science. But it is wrong to assume that it does

not address questions that also interest science- such as some details of the “how” of our origins. In fact, the Bible gives us sufficient information about the Who, the Why, the How, and the How Then Shall We Live, that we can develop a true science based on Biblical presuppositions. That is the true “framework” provided by Genesis 1.

The main arguments

We look next at the main arguments used by proponents of the Framework Hypothesis – along with some counter-arguments.

Purpose, genre and style

In the ancient world, a number of different kinds of literature have been identified. Applying this to the Bible can be helpful. For there are differences between the various kinds (genres) of writing in the various books of the Bible. How you interpret things in a vision or a parable, for example, may differ from historical narrative, poetry etc.

The problem is that sometimes theologians make *assumptions* about genre, then make that determinative for the interpretation of a passage in the Bible. In the case of Genesis 1, it is sometimes assumed that its purpose is to refute the pagan mythologies of the ancient world. God therefore arranged the “days” so that all these false deities (heavenly bodies, nature gods etc) were knocked off their perches, one-by-one. That purpose then replaces the purpose of giving us an historical sequence of events, involving



literal days of creation. However, there is not any evidence that that was a purpose, let alone that it was *the* only purpose! It seems that many theologians today are going through a genre identity crisis!

The other main way that genre is used to reinterpret Genesis 1 is by the claim that it is more like poetry than literal history. Evidence for this is found in the presence of alleged parallelism – a common feature in Hebrew poetry, such as the Psalms – in unusually poetic or figurative language (the sun as the “greater light” and the moon as the “lesser”) and repeated refrains (“evening and morning” etc). The parallelism allegedly ties together Day 1 with Day 4, Day 2 with Day 5, and Day 3 with Day 6:

Day 1 light	light-bearers
Day 2 sky and water	birds and fish
Day 3 land and vegetation	beasts and man

It is argued that the first 3 days tell of the environments or “kingdoms,” and the last 3 fill those environments with their appropriate dwellers – or “kings.” Each pair deals with the same “creative” event, but from a different perspective.

At first sight, this looks plausible. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it is true. Does it then *prove* that Genesis 1 has little or no bearing on the “how” of creation? No, even if we assume that Genesis 1 is highly poetic, we still need to ascertain what reality it is teaching. Let us say I write a poem, a limerick:

*There once was a man of good faith,
Who worried about what God saith
In Genesis One –
By science undone –
“Let it pass as a poem,” he prayeth.*

There is a point to my poem. I am poking fun at the Framework Hypothesis. But perhaps someone will retort that I am not actually making fun of this view, because it is *poetry*. It might therefore have a completely different meaning (you know what poetry is like!). My point, however, is that one cannot escape the force of a statement simply by claiming that it is poetry.

Consider some genuine Hebrew poetry about creation: Job 38:8-11, Psalms 33:6-9 and 104:5-9. There are metaphors here: the sea doesn’t literally

have doors, bolts, and storehouses, and the earth does not literally have foundations. But that does not mean that these poems are not speaking of God’s creative acts as per the straightforward-history understanding of Genesis 1.

For that matter, most Biblical narrative contains some poetic elements. Similarly, some narratives place information into parallel groups, perhaps to help memorization. For instance, Matthew 1 arranges the genealogy of Jesus into 3 groups of around the same size. That does not make the genealogy less literally true.

When we look at Genesis 1 itself, there is plenty of evidence that it is essentially historical, sequential narrative. It employs the normal elements of a narrative style, with some poetic elements that suit the epic event, the great miracle being described. You can see the difference between it and poetic accounts of Creation by comparing with the creation-poems cited above. Genesis 1 uses a form of the Hebrew verb that is normally used in such narrative. It numbers the days in the usual way that sequences are indicated. It is also linked to a repeated term that tells us this is *genealogical history*: “*This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created*” (2:4). The same terminology is found throughout Genesis (5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 27, 25:12, 19, 36:1, 9 and 37:2). In these passages, the genealogy tells what or who came forth from the person or event already introduced. Genesis 1 introduces the event of creation, including that of Adam and Eve, in overview. Genesis 2 begins to show what came forth from them as man was placed in the Garden of Eden. If there were clear evidence that this was a genre that uses symbols extensively – such as the Lord provides with John’s visions in the Book of Revelation, things might be different. But the Lord places indicators in Genesis 1 that we are dealing with genealogical history.

In any case, the alleged parallelism of the creation days is not as strong as might first appear. Strictly speaking, water is not made on Day 2, but on Day 1 (Genesis 1:2). Day 1 would then be parallel to Day 5 at that point. In fact, water comes up in Days 1, 2 and 3 – meaning that you can squeeze so-called parallels pretty well any which way you want, where water and its inhabitants are involved! Similarly, the light-bearers of Day 4 are placed in the “expanse” created on Day 2, weakening the parallel to Day 1. For this reason, other

schemes – equally plausible and equally speculative – could be, and have been drawn up.

Alleged contradictions

Proponents of the Framework Hypothesis insist that the traditional understanding of Genesis 1 is untenable because it leads to contradictions. This, they maintain, proves that the passage is a literary device, rather than straightforward history. The main allegation of contradiction presumes the impossibility of having light created (Day 1) before light-bearers (Day 4). Some also object to the difficulty of having vegetation made on Day 3, before the sun was created on Day 4.

In answer to this, it is often pointed out that the Lord is surely able to create some kind of ambient light, or temporary source, or otherwise provide light in some supernatural manner – before the creation of the sun, moon and stars. Rev. 21:5 is cited, to show that God is able to provide sufficient light in Himself. Meredith Kline replies that God could not do so in the beginning, because His glory has to be seen even more in the New Jerusalem. However, there is no Biblical ground for Kline’s objection. The real “contradiction” here is between the claims of the unbelieving scientific world and the Bible. The former voice appears to be exercising far too much influence on many who favour the Framework Hypothesis.

The eternal Sabbath

It is often argued that the 6 “days” of creation all lead up to, and serve, the establishing of the 7th day, the eternal Sabbath. This is thought to prove that the other 6 days must also, then, be non-literal days. The lack of the refrain, “evening and morning,” in the case of the 7th day, is seen to support this view. Hebrews 4 is also cited to back it up.

However, as has been pointed out by many, the eternal Sabbath is not quite the same thing as the day on which God ceased creating new kinds of things. They are related, but distinct. The “rest” is ongoing, but the 7th Day, as such, is not. That day needs no “evening and morning” marker, simply because it does not need to be distinguished from a further day of creation.

If anything, the pattern of 6 days work and 1 day rest shows the opposite of what the Framework proponents want it to. For if they are correct, the weekly pattern of work and rest is based upon a metaphor, not upon a real pattern in

“The creationist allows for both supernatural acts of creation, and the operation of providence in the creation week.”

God’s acts. Kline may argue that the week of Genesis 1 *reflects* in a figurative way, a set of heavenly creative acts by God, but we never learn what they are, how many there are, or in what order they actually occurred. Were there any acts beyond the one that created a Big Bang, after which ordinary providence took over, with a gradual evolutionary process? Or is there *no* creative act, just a theological truth behind the week of Genesis 1 – the truth that God rules everything? The Framework Hypothesis removes any solid ground from beneath the pattern of 6 days work, one day rest.

The second creation account

It has become common among Framework proponents to utilize Meredith Kline’s argument from Genesis 2:4ff. Kline has argued that Genesis 2 assumes that ordinary providence (rather than

special, supernatural intervention), is in operation in the creation week. God could not yet put in the shrubs and plants, because there was not enough water to sustain them, and no man to irrigate them. If the days were literal, says Kline, why would God worry about a short delay before these things were in place? Surely the plants could survive for a few hours by themselves! According to Kline, if we take the standard view of Genesis 1, this would create a contradiction between supernatural creation (Genesis 1) and ordinary providence (Genesis 2). Genesis 1 must therefore be figurative.

This view misunderstands what is going on in Genesis 2. It is not a “second creation account.” It focuses in on a certain aspect of creation, the preparation of Eden and the placement of man in that Garden Paradise. The Garden was a place for Adam to *cultivate*. The words used for “shrub” and “plant” in verse 5 suggest cultivated plants. That is why extra water and the presence of man were needed.

Interestingly, Kline admits that acts of supernatural origin did occur – though he does not tell us what they are or how many, or when, or in what order. Yet he insists that ordinary providence disallows the view that Genesis 1 is about supernatural creation. In effect, he swallows up creation in providence. That is essentially what liberalism does when it swallows up the other miracles of the Bible in ordinary providence.

The creationist allows for both supernatural acts of creation, and the operation of providence in the creation week. The best proof of the supernatural acts of creation is Hebrews 11:3, which tells us that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible, but by the Word of God. The word for “word” here means specifically the *spoken* Word. It is referring to God’s spoken, creative

utterances in the creation week, “Let there be...” Genesis 2 in no way undermines this view.

A dangerous approach

How serious, then, is this error? On the one hand, it is possible to hold to the Framework Hypothesis, but still accept an otherwise orthodox view of creation. It depends on how it is used. Some want to use it simply to allow a longer age for the universe. The problem is that it tends to be driven by a fear of losing credibility in the eyes of the world. But unbelieving scientists will not be satisfied until Christians accept a full-blown view of evolution. The Framework Hypothesis, as such, really isn’t going to return credibility to Christians who aren’t prepared to accept the whole hog with evolution.

Worse, this approach removes some of the barriers to that full-blown view of evolution. If Genesis 1 is not about a literal sequence of supernatural, creative acts, in 6 literal days, then how *did* God make the world? The question becomes open, and easy enough to fill in with all the theories of modern science.

This approach also teaches Christians a faulty hermeneutic: speculation about genre, used to remove supernatural elements from the Bible. E.J. Young comments, “If the fundamental hypothesis were applied to the narratives of the Virgin birth, or the resurrection, or Romans 5:12, it could as effectively serve to minimize the importance of the content of those passages as it now does the content of the first chapter of Genesis.” That makes it a very dangerous mouse-hole to try to squeeze into.

Mr Paul Archbald is the minister in the Reformed Church of Silverstream. He also has a B.Sc. (Hons) from Flinders Uni SA; and M.Sc. from ANU, both in geology.

While putting this issue together, I came across a brilliant website, which I think would be a good resource for the members and office-bearers of our federation.

About Creation Without Compromise:

They are Reformed Christians concerned about the issue of origins in our midst. Through this resource site and blog, they aim to provide support to those who share their concerns. They are committed to the historic Reformed understanding of Genesis



and believe that a failure to maintain the orthodox position not only attacks biblical truth in general, but the gospel of Jesus Christ in particular.

Check it out!

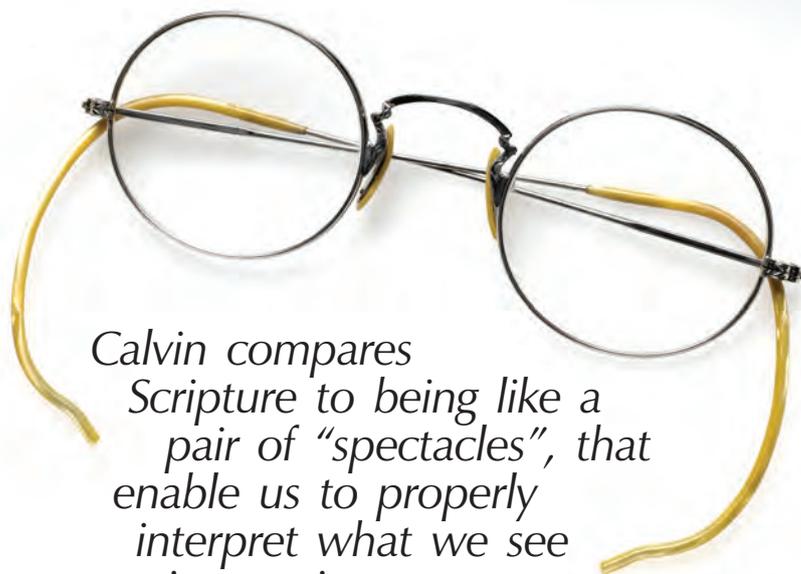
creationwithoutcompromise.com

Through which glasses?

Joel Beeke

John Calvin said that the Scriptures are given to us as eyeglasses by which we can properly see and understand God's general revelation of himself and his ways. Without these corrective lenses, our sin-clouded eyes distort what we see in the world. It appears that those who deny Adam have reversed this order. They deny that the Bible says anything authoritative about scientific matters. On the contrary, they treat modern science as the eyeglasses by which we should read the Scriptures, so that through our scientific knowledge we can sift out God's message from the erroneous beliefs of the ancient community of faith. The result is a view of Scripture that says that God did not breathe his truth into the details of the text, but only inspired its core theological message. Thus they say, 'The sacred author was not as concerned about factual details as he was about clearly presenting theological concepts understandable by his intended audience.' This is a far cry from the position taken by the Lord Jesus: 'The scripture cannot be broken' (John 10:35).

Those who deny the existence of Adam may affirm that 'the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God.' However, they do not mean what evangelical and Reformed Christians have meant by this statement. They do not hold to the Bible's inerrancy, but instead believe that it contains many errors and false teachings derived from the culture and time in which it was written. They also do not affirm the Bible's supreme authority in resolving religious controversies. Instead, the Bible must bow to the changing theories of human science. Ironically, they reject some teachings of the Bible as simply the notions of ancient culture, while they impose other ideas upon the Bible from modern culture. Instead of absolute divine authority governing our faith, we have only the relative authority of human culture and opinion.



Calvin compares Scripture to being like a pair of "spectacles", that enable us to properly interpret what we see in creation.

Those who take this route perhaps may not realize that they are departing from the path of biblical orthodoxy and following the same road as unbiblical neo-orthodoxy.... It is not necessary for us to go in this direction. Why couldn't the ancient Hebrews have understood it if God had told them that he created by a long, slow process of evolutionary change? Every day, as they planted and harvested crops or worked with sheep and cattle, they could see change and improvement in the various seeds they planted or the animals they bred.

Why couldn't God effectively communicate to them that he had conferred a human soul upon an existing animal rather than breathed life into a body formed directly out of the earth? Why not reveal in Genesis that God made many human beings at first, instead of just one? Why would these things have been harder for them to accept than the idea that there is only one true and living God, given that all their neighbours worshipped many gods? And why must we separate the way in which God created from the fact that he is the Creator?

Does it not glorify God as Lord to

know that He created man, not through any natural process, but by a supernatural act of creation? Yes, the account of the historical Adam's creation greatly honours God as Creator and Lord.

Furthermore, this is a dangerous direction to go. If the Bible is a mixture of cultural dressing wrapped around divine truth, then how can we be sure which part is the husk and which is the kernel? What one generation embraces as the kernel of divine truth could very well be rejected by another generation as merely more human culture and tradition. We see this happening around us even now with respect to the definition of marriage and homosexuality.

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Let's be careful ...

**Brian O'Neill
Dunedin**

I was greatly encouraged by the recent article (February 2016) and follow-up letter (April 2016) published in *Faith in Focus* warning of the dangers of Pastor Tim Keller. I discovered Tim Keller last year and was immediately taken in by his persuasive style, and standing within the evangelical community, so I recommended him to others. However, on becoming aware of some of Keller's core beliefs a quick change of heart followed. I now warn people, most of which falls on deaf ears, to put Keller's teachings

“Once Genesis 1-3 is dismissed as historic narrative, then the whole Bible collapses in on itself, taking creation, the fall, sin, the need for salvation, and the Saviour with it.”

under the microscope and examine the implications of his teachings.

Tim Keller has gained great popularity within sectors of the New Zealand Reformed churches. His teachings, are finding their way into sermons preached from the pulpit, and his books are used in church Bible studies. This effectively gives Keller the Reformed Church seal of approval, lulling church attendees into a false sense of security in regard to his teachings. There appears to be little or no concern among Keller's followers regarding the unscriptural nature of many of his core beliefs.

To those unfamiliar with Tim Keller, one can taste the flavour of his beliefs by searching on *Google*, “Do you believe there's only one way to God? Tim Keller at Veritas [3 of 11]”. In this video, Keller equivocates on whether Christ is the only way to heaven, and raises the possibility that God may have a secret trapdoor for the unsaved millions. Ultimately, Keller does not know what will happen to those millions who die without knowing Christ.

In the same interview, Keller in an effort to save Jesus from Himself, refutes the idea that Hell is a place that Jesus throws sinners into, as plainly stated in verses such as:-

Matt 13:41-42 “The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace”.

Keller has given the Jesus of Matthew 13 a makeover, so that He is less offensive to an inclusivist audience. Keller's hipster-friendly gospel relieves Jesus of the odious task of consigning sinners to hell, and has the sinner put themselves into the fiery furnace. The fiery furnace has also been remodelled, and now the unsaved soul will ‘eternally shrivel’ and be ‘miserable’, from having to endure their own self-centred nature for billions of years. The problem is that

Keller's description of hell sounds like heaven to our narcissistic culture – an eternity separated from the presence of the Christian God they hate, punished with enjoying their own company, which they love. There will be no offended angry mobs when that message is preached.

On the subject of the sufficiency of Scripture, search via *Google* “What Role Should the Bible Have in Society?” to see Keller at a panel discussion alongside emergent, Anglican and Roman Catholic church leaders. When asked about inerrancy, the panellists, including Keller, all say they find the Bible reliable, trustworthy and authoritative, but not inerrant.

To quote Keller:

“Just for the record: I have no problem at all talking about inerrancy. As a pastor if I actually say to someone, or any layperson – if I believe in the authority of the Bible but not the inerrancy of the Bible, they're going to say, “what's the difference?” And as soon as I begin to explain it, their eyes glaze over.”

This should raise an eyebrow when uttered by someone who calls themselves Reformed, and whose teachings have been given admission to the pulpit. If the Bible is not inerrant, then this would falsify the statement “All Scripture is God-breathed”. If it is claimed that a document contains errors, but the location of the errors cannot be determined, then by logical deduction, it means the whole document is untrustworthy. This position is highlighted in the previous interview when Keller repeats over and over ‘If Jesus is who he says he is’. If the Bible is not inerrant, then it raises the very real possibility that Jesus is not who the Bible says he is. Such a position breeds doubt, not faith.

A key to Pastor Keller's world-view is his beliefs about creation. To Keller,

Genesis 1 is Gods poem about the Big Bang.

"To account for evolution we must see at least Genesis 1 as non-literal."

"I personally take the view that Genesis 1 and 2 relate to each other the way Judges 4 and 5 and Exodus 14 and 15. In each couple one chapter describes a historical event and the other is a song or poem about the theological meaning of the event ... I think Genesis 1 has the earmarks of poetry and is therefore a "song" about the wonder and meaning of God's creation. Genesis 2 is an account of how it happened ... For the record I think God guided some kind of process of natural selection"

If Genesis 1 is not historical narrative, then Moses deceptively uses it as a basis for the 4th commandment in Exodus 20:11. There is at least one recorded case in the Bible (if the Bible is to be trusted as a source of truth) of someone being stoned to death, at God's behest, for breaking the Sabbath. If the basis of the sabbath law is a fabrication, and in reality is nothing more than a poem about the Big Bang, then it means this execution was performed without any moral foundation. Also, if Keller's Moses is not to be trusted, then neither is Keller's Jesus, for Jesus in John 5:46 links His own trustworthiness with that of Moses.

As to Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man, Keller says he believes they were literal, but what he means by 'literal' is completely divorced from how literal was defined by historic Christianity. Again I will let Keller speak for himself:

"Belief in evolution can be compatible with a belief in a historical fall and a literal Adam and Eve."

"You've got some problems with the theistic evolution, because then you have to ask yourself, 'Was there no Adam and Eve? Was there no Fall?' So here's what I like – the messy approach, which is I think there was an Adam and Eve. I think there was a real Fall. I think that happened. I also think that there also was a very long process probably, you know, that the earth probably is

very old, and there was some kind of process of natural selection that God guided and used, and maybe intervened in. And that's just the messy part. I'm not a scientist. I'm not going to go beyond that."

So Keller's Adam and Eve would be the first naturally-selected, evolved creature away from an ape that can be described as human. I am not sure which genetic mutation would have had to occur for Keller to say that the ape had crossed the line and evolved into the human. I also cannot see how a mutated ape can be described as being made in the image of God. Whatever this mutation was, it was sufficient for the whole of the moral law of God to suddenly come thundering down on that first human's head, in a way that did not apply to his ape parents and siblings. While Adam's ape-dad could literally get away with murder (along with the ape equivalent of incest, adultery, cannibalism, and any other thing that instinctively took his fancy) poor old Adam was barred from following in his ape father's footsteps on pain of death.

As to Keller's view of how the Fall of Man pans out in Africa's Rift Valley, the evolutionary home of humans, that's anyone's guess. Suffice to say, in Keller's version of The Fall, death could not have been the punishment for sin, because death and disease and suffering would have been around for billions of years. I do not know how an evolved ape can be held accountable for an action such as committing adultery, when it's just a sexual 'thing' that evolved animals instinctively do. Today's culture has worked out the logical implications of evolution, but these implications appear to have escaped Keller's notice.

One of the reasons Keller cannot view Genesis 1 and 2 as historic narrative, as Christianity historically has done, is that this would make his Bible self-contradictory:

"The fact is, the one that most people consider the most conservative, which is the young-earth, six-day creation, has all kinds of problems with the text, as we know. If it's really true, then you have problems of contradictions between Genesis 1 and 2"

So in addition to saving Jesus from Himself, Keller is also saving the Bible from itself. In doing so Keller has made

Genesis 1-3 a chronologically confused poem about the Big Bang, alongside a story about how Adam Ape meets Eve Ape, and then they wander about some Jurassic garden encountering some evolving lizard-snake whose legs are lost by a genetic mutation.

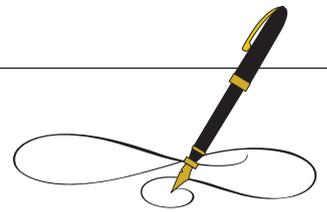
The reality is, that once Genesis 1-3 is dismissed as historic narrative, then the whole Bible collapses in on itself, taking creation, the fall, sin, the need for salvation, and the Saviour with it. Atheist's know this, hence it forms the target of their most virulent attacks. It's just the logically impaired that have trouble understanding this concept. Defenders of Keller will say, "that even if he has some doubtful doctrines, most of what he teaches is pure". One could take the same approach, with drinking a glass of mostly pure water, mixed with a little poison to experience a similar effect.

This has been but a brief introduction to some of Keller's dodgy doctrines. Teachers like Keller are trojan horses, introducing corrosive evolutionary, emergent and inclusivist doctrines to the Reformed Church. Unfortunately, Keller's teachings are currently being promoted, rather than being refuted by the application of sound doctrine.

Justification is "the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge of all kinds of doctrines."

"There are few of us who know and understand this article, and I treat it again and again because I greatly fear that after we have laid our head to rest, it will soon be forgotten and again disappear.... And indeed we cannot grasp or exhaust Christ, the Eternal Righteousness, with one sermon or thought; for to learn to appreciate him is an everlasting lesson which we shall not be able to finish either in this or in yonder life."

Martin Luther



www.scmp.com

Put not your trust in Princes

Years ago when I was at secondary school, we sang psalms every morning in chapel. Through the constant repetition, I got to memorise large parts of many psalms, and that has been a blessing to me ever since. One phrase that stuck particularly was Psalm 146:2, which goes (in the Coverdale version): “O put not your trust in princes, nor in any child of man: for there is no help in them.”

I was left musing on the fact that no one president, prime minister or statesman of any kind is big enough to bear the weight of human expectation. We are all going to be disappointed by the inability of the people at the top of the heap to change the world in the ways we hope for. Over the years on TV I’ve watched presidential motorcades complete with sirens and flashing lights; seen displays of military hardware in Red Square (the message being “don’t mess

with us”); and, with millions of others, been enthralled by the beauty and pomp of British royal ceremonies and been reminded of the weight of centuries behind the spectacle. Yet none of it ultimately satisfies, because we know it won’t fix our broken world.

Christians are usually aware of this, and look for a “better country”. We’re not like the people who treat politicians as the answer to the mess in the world – are we? We’re pretty sceptical about politicians and their ability to do things, given their moral qualities. And yet, these days we’re observing a very strange phenomenon in the United States, a country with many evangelical Christians. It is not unusual for American evangelical Christians to take an interest in politics: in fact, they are considered an important component of the electorate, so much so that most presidential can-

didates claim Christian faith lest they alienate evangelical voters. What is strange this presidential election, though, is the man many Christians are clearly supporting: Donald S. Trump. Because this is so unexpected, it has prompted considerable online comment; and I thought it would be interesting to review some of the points made. There is relevance in the discussion for us, too.

Peter Wehner, a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center who served in the last three Republican administrations, asked, in the Opinion Section in the *New York Times* on March 1, “What Wouldn’t Jesus Do?” He counts evangelicals’ support for Trump as “Among the most inexplicable developments in this bizarre political year”. Wehner notes the plurality of evangelical votes won by Trump in New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada, then goes

on to quote the glowing endorsements of prominent evangelical leaders Jerry Falwell Jr. (who called Trump “visionary”) and Pat Robertson (who used the adjective “inspiring”). [Trump has since, of course, been endorsed by Ben Carson as well.] Wehner then observes:

“If this embrace strikes you as discordant, it should. This visionary and inspiring man humiliated his first wife by conducting a very public affair, chronically bullies and demeans people, and says he has never asked God for forgiveness. His name is emblazoned on a casino that features a strip club ... he once supported partial-birth abortion and to this day praises Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest abortion provider. He is a narcissist appealing to people whose faith declares that pride goes before a fall.

Mr Trump’s character is antithetical to many of the qualities evangelicals should prize in a political leader: integrity, compassion and reasoned convictions, wisdom and prudence, trustworthiness, a commitment to the moral good.”

Wehner notes that evangelical Christians were strong on moral probity during the Clinton administration [the years of the Monica Lewinsky affair]. “Why a significant number of evangelicals are rallying round a man who exposes them as hypocrites is difficult to fathom,” he laments.

Looking for answers, Wehner concludes what others have as well: “many evangelicals feel increasingly powerless, beaten down, aggrieved and under attack. A sense of resentment, or a ‘narrative of injury,’ is leading them to look for scapegoats to explain their growing impotence. People filled with anger are easily exploited.... Enter Donald Trump, alpha male.

Mr Trump’s supporters don’t care about his agenda; they are captured by his persona. They view him as the strongest, most dominant, most assertive political figure they have ever seen. In an odd bow to Nietzschean ethics, they respect and applaud his Will to Power. And so the man who openly admires tyrants like Vladimir V. Putin and praised the Chinese crackdown in Tiananmen Square because it showed ‘strength’ has become the repository of their hopes.”

Wehner can only conclude that “For some evangelicals, Christianity is no longer shaping their politics; with Mr Trump in view, their faith lies subordinate.” And ultimately, “evangelical Chris-

tians are doing incalculable damage to their witness.”¹

Taking a different angle, Michael Horton, a well-known Reformed voice, makes some observations about Donald Trump’s theology – which are really observations about the theology of his supporters. According to Horton’s research, “the slender thread connecting Trump to the church is his occasional holiday appearances at Marble Collegiate Church”, known for its pastor of 52 years, Norman Vincent Peale [of *The Power of Positive Thinking* fame]. Horton suggests that Trump’s persona owes more to Peale and “a more recent exponent of a feel-good gospel, Joel Osteen”:

“Vague on doctrine, infiltrated by consumerism and a sentimental moralism intent on helping us all ‘become a better you,’ and sort of interested in ‘family values’ as long as they don’t interfere with our own family breakdowns, many cultural evangelicals are tired of losing the culture wars. They want a winner – ‘a strong leader.’ I’m hardly the first to point out that it’s the stuff of which demagogues are made.”

Horton goes on to demonstrate how Trump’s popularity among evangelicals reveals shifts concerning central Christian tenets: **Creation** [basic rights are accorded by the state rather than stemming from our dignity as image-bearers of God]; **sin** [“mistakes good people make that fail to contribute to ‘our best life now’”]; **our identity in Christ** [replaced by an “ultimate loyalty in preserving or regaining a lost socio-cultural and cultural, perhaps even racial, hegemony in an increasingly diverse society”]; **leadership** [revealed by Trump as “the celebration of narcissism, greed and deceitfulness in the pursuit of power”].

Above all, Horton observes, modern evangelicals have become pragmatists in addition to being the “moralistic, therapeutic deists” their theology suggests. Trump looks like the only hope of restoring what they feel they are losing, and so they admire and support him.²

Back in February Alistair Roberts, who writes on biblical theology and ethics, contributed a sympathetic and extended analysis of the reasons for evangelical support of Donald Trump on the “Mere Orthodoxy” website. While Roberts takes the same line as the two writers I’ve quoted above, he digs more deeply into the reasons Christians back Trump, and asks a few questions of their critics.

First, Trump has all kinds of appeal to those fed up with politicians because

“We need to help those Christians demoralised by the hostility of the culture, and encourage them that Jesus knows it all; that he’s told us it would be like that.”

he does not communicate like them: rather, he communicates as a businessman in simple, emotionally-powerful language – but with a calculated vagueness. He aggressively turns questions against askers, and avoids looking weak or slippery. He practices “dominance politics”, using insults like “low-energy” (against Jeb Bush) and “nice” (to put down Ben Carson) and makes himself look like the kind of president who would deal more strongly [than Obama] with, say, China, Iran or Russia.

Many people claim Trump is “honest” – by which they mean that he says what he thinks – and not necessarily that he is accurate or truthful. He isn’t “limited by political correctness” – and many like that.

Roberts gets to the heart of the matter in the following comments:

“The American white working class – to which a disproportionate number of evangelicals belong – are well aware that they are hated and pathologized by upper middle class coastal liberals, who dominate key institutions in American life. They are branded with the stigma of racism, xenophobia, backwardness, and unprogressive attitudes. Liberals and progressives try to enforce enlightened

thought upon them in a patronizing, officious, or censorious manner, and often despise, ridicule, and want to freeze their voices out of public life. For such people, Trump represents resistance to their pathologization and marginalization. Trump is prepared to stand with them in being despised, hated and pathologized by the establishment, speaking on their behalf. As people rush to write think-pieces demonizing Trump and his supporters ... it only makes the scapegoat status of the American white working class more apparent.”³

And there are many Christians, of course, who are horrified by Trump – Roberts included. What Roberts wants us to ask, though, is whether we too are some of the (well, let’s say it how it is) snobs who despise uneducated white working class Christians. Do we look down our noses at people who feel beaten down and want some kind of leader who will stick up for them and their interests? Do we regard them as “those people” who are nothing like us, and maybe we even roll our eyes and groan that this kind of thing would happen “only in America”?

The thing is, all of us have times when we feel beaten down by the world; perhaps today more so than for

quite a long time. We have a tendency to look for a leader who will speak for us; someone who will fight back at those who despise and exclude us. What really matters, though, is how we respond when we’re in that situation. Do we fight back with the weapons of the world, become pragmatists and choose politicians who are completely of the world? Or do we accept that the world is regularly going to be against the church, and soldier cheerfully on, knowing full well that Jesus has overcome the world? It seems to me we need to help those Christians demoralised by the hostility of the culture, and encourage them that Jesus knows it all; that he’s told us it would be like that. There is no need to fight back in the world’s way; and we should never put our trust in princes. Have we forgotten, like Asaph, who was troubled by the dominance of the arrogant and whose foot “had nearly slipped”, until he went into the sanctuary and “discerned their end”? (See Psalm 73).

It also seems to me that we should also try to avoid a roll-your-eyes, a groaning “only in America” sort of response to the Donald Trump phenomenon. It is self-righteous; and we Christians in New Zealand are not immune from the

tendency to trust strong voices who will put down the “enemy”. I’m old enough to remember the way many seized on a certain Robert Muldoon in the late 1970s. His famous put-downs of political opponents appealed to many of us who disliked “trendy lefties”, union troublemakers and their like. I also recall the relish with which some Christians quoted Douglas Wilson’s harsh words and sarcastic remarks about feminists in *Credenda Agenda* 15 or 20 years ago. Here was someone who would have a slash at them – good for him, etc.

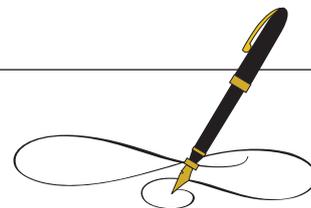
I think we should be careful about who we hitch our wagons to: only men and women of good character are worthy of honour, and of our trust. Perhaps we should focus our efforts on praying that God would provide us with more of them.

Notes

- 1 Peter Wehner, “What Wouldn’t Jesus Do?” *New York Times*, March 1 2016.
- 2 Michael Horton, “The Theology of Donald Trump”, *Christianity Today*, March 2016 (web only).
- 3 Alistair Roberts, “Trumped Up? Is the Donald’s Support Really Driven by Racist Xenophobia?” <http://mereorthodoxy.com/donald-trump-evangelicals-working-class/>

Feminine focus

Jenny Waldron



Being courageous

What makes you fearful? Snakes? Spiders? Flying in a plane? Speaking publicly? Let’s get this straight from the beginning: we all get scared. We all fear “stuff”. We worry about trivial things like “is my hair going grey?” to more weighty matters like “how would I cope if my husband died?”

The world we live is changing rapidly in so many ways. Who doesn’t worry about the world our children and grandchildren are growing up in?

Middle Eastern refugees are pouring into Europe at unprecedented rates, completely changing the face of Europe. Islamic State is sweeping across the world, terrorising people whilst endeavouring to further their religion of hatred, control and violence. Islam is spreading across Asia, Africa and Europe.

Closer to home, here in New Zealand, our way of life is changing too. We now have beggars on the street, militant Maori are wanting sovereignty over

New Zealand and murders and assaults are happening daily. The occurrence of sexual and violent abuse is rising exponentially and affecting many in our society.¹

Another aspect of our changing world is the proliferation of electronic means of communication which is very difficult for parents to monitor. With this comes an unprecedented access to pornography, many undesirable games, websites, chatrooms and videos. Are we

anxious about finances, jobs, an unfaithful spouse, death of a loved one, injustice, our children's future, or cancer?

If we are honest with ourselves, there are many circumstances and matters that can, and do, make us fearful.

But what does God say?

Psalm 31:24 "Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the LORD."

Bethany Hamilton is an example of a Christian woman who shows courage. She was an up-and-coming professional surfer when her left arm was bitten off by a shark. Bethany continues to trust the Lord and still surfs, but also now shares her faith and experiences with people around the world. She says, "Courage doesn't mean you don't get afraid. Courage means you don't let fear stop you."

Nayara Goncalves,² 20, was held at gunpoint by a robber demanding money. She doesn't know why she started talking to him about Jesus but felt prompted to do so and eventually the man left without taking any money.

The ultimate example of courage for us is Jesus as He resisted the Devil and stood firm in the faith many times throughout His ministry here on earth. In the Garden of Gethsemane, just before He was about to be betrayed, He was praying to His Father: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; NEVERTHELESS, not as I will, but as you will!" (Matt 26:39) Jesus is the perfect

model for us because He was determined to do His Father's will in the face of seemingly insurmountable anguish. He showed tremendous courage because He trusted His Father, implicitly and obeyed him fully. It is only through Him, our risen Saviour Jesus Christ, and because of what he suffered on the cross for us, that we too can have the courage and strength to follow Christ's pattern.

So, what can we do to be equipped to be courageous as Jesus' disciples?

Read God's Word: Get into God's Word! So often we rely on preaching and weekly Bible studies for our "fix" of God's Word. However, we need to dive into his Word so that we really know the Bible. God speaks to us through His Word, and the Scriptures are full of encouragement and comfort, especially in periods of our lives when we are fearful, discouraged and scared. The Psalms are particularly helpful during these times. Not only that, but in Eph 6:17 the Apostle Paul calls the Word of God, the Sword of the Spirit! This is THE weapon we are given to fight the adversary of this age. We will be able to use this sword, as Jesus did when He was being tempted by Satan. One of the devil's arrows he fires at us, to defeat us, is fear. However, we will have courage and strength to counter the enemy's attacks on us, when we are grounded in God's Word.

Listen to God's Word preached: Listen what God has to say to us by attending church and actively listening

“Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the LORD.”

to the sermons preached. Use times that you are on your own to listen to sermons. Sermon Audio (sermonaudio.com) is an excellent resource and many of our own ministers have their sermons uploaded onto their serving church's web page, that can be downloaded.

Meditate on God's Word: In the middle of God telling Joshua to be strong and (very) courageous, (Josh 1:5-9), He commands him to "meditate on the Book of the Law ... that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it... then you will have good success." We, too, need to meditate deeply on God's living Word, so that it dwells richly within us. It is very helpful to memorise passages about courage, and "do not fear!" Meditate on a passage of the Bible, and dwell on each phrase, praying that God would open up His Word to your heart and mind.



Pray: God sent His Son to do all the work to bring sinners like you and me into relationship with Him. We are commanded not to be anxious about anything (Phil 4:6) but to bring everything to Him in prayer. God desires an intimate and close relationship with us that goes beyond a shallow, repetitive kind of prayer life. We need to spend time before our loving God and make our deepest thoughts, fears and desires known to Him. Sometimes, in times of deep distress and trouble, we do not always know how to express ourselves adequately. We can apply the Psalms and other Scriptures as prayers, using them to help express our reliance on our heavenly Father as well as airing our fear, anger, and frustration. Pray for wisdom (James 1:5) and for love for your enemies. (Rom 12:20-21)

Trust God

Trust God! (Ps 56:3-4) This is the simple answer to all fear and anxiety, but sometimes our trust waivers. What if our worst fears are realised? Our child dies, our husband is unfaithful and/or leaves us, our child is molested, ISIS takes over New Zealand, the church splits, our child or spouse shows no saving faith etc... God is there in the midst of all the trouble, working His good purposes! John Piper said "Occasionally weep deeply over the life you hoped would be. Grieve the losses. Then wash your face. Trust God. And embrace the life you have." There is a place for grieving over

"To know that nothing hurts the godly, is a matter of comfort; but to be assured that all things which fall out shall cooperate for their good, that their crosses shall be turned into blessings, that showers of affliction water the withering root of their grace and make it flourish more; this may fill their hearts with joy till they run over."

Thomas Watson

the "might-have-beens" but, we know, for those who love God, all things work together for good. (Rom 8:28)

Stand firm

1 Corinthians 16:13 says "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith. Be courageous, Be strong." Putting on the whole armour of God, (Eph 6:10-20) helps us to defend the faith, to stand up for what is right in the sight of the Lord. This may mean having the courage to protect a child from abuse, to confront a friend who is committing a sin, to work on saving our marriage, to defend the fatherless and the widows from wrongdoers or to stand up to someone belittling our faith and our Saviour.

Stand together

Carry each other's burdens and care for one another. If your burden is making you emotionally, physically or spiritually ill, seek help. God has given us the church family, to love and care for us. Maybe you are the one doing the carrying at this time. There are seasons in life where we are the carriers, and others where we are the ones being carried.

Choose to act godly at all times

We can pray for the Holy Spirit to change our sinful ways and attitudes and to fill us with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23) We are to capture every thought and not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of our minds. (Rom 12:2) Put off³ the old self and put on the new, walking in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

GOD is Sovereign

Do we forget this when we are in the dark trap of terror and fearfulness? Do we trust God in certain circumstances but not in others or doubt His ability to work His good purposes out in this particular situation? Although we may say God is in control of everything and that it is providential (from the hand of God) some situations seem so dark, we are overwhelmed by fear. However, we can take comfort in the God who created the heavens and the earth. (1 Peter 4:19)

GOD is OUR Lord and Saviour

We have been bought with a price to have a relationship with God so that we have the hope of eternal life. For

those who believe in Christ have been saved from eternal death and separation from God. Compared to eternity, our time here on earth is so short. We are sojourners on this earth - our mission: to become more and more like Jesus Christ, our Saviour. We are not to be like Peter walking on the water towards Jesus, who takes his eyes off Jesus and starts looking at the waves around him. We are to keep our eyes on Christ and on the eternal life He has promised us. He has done all the work so that we do not need to be fearful nor be anxious.

GOD will never leave us nor forsake us

He calls us to be strong and courageous and He will be with us⁴ wherever we go.

GOD will judge the world!

Keeping eternity in mind, there is coming a time when this world will end, and Jesus returns. He will judge everyone for what they have done. We do not have to worry, be anxious, be angry or fear that justice isn't/hasn't been done as yet. God will judge the living and the dead⁵, "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay." (Rom 12:19) We can trust Him to deal with all injustices fully, completely and justly.

In conclusion, God will protect our hearts and minds from all kinds of fear and terror with His peace that surpasses all understanding! We can follow Jesus' example because He determined to follow His Fathers' will and calls us to be sons (and daughters) of the Living God. We can trust our heavenly Father, even when it feels like the odds are stacked against us, and as we live in this ever-changing world, because Jesus showed us the way to be strong and courageous. Remember, this is what God says to us: Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in the LORD." Psalm 31:24

Recommended reading

Running Scared – Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest by Edward T. Welch (New Growth Press)

Calm My Anxious Heart by Linda Dillow, (Nav Press)

Notes

1 https://nzfvc.org.nz/sites/nzfvc.org.nz/files/data-summaries-snapshot-2015_0.pdf

2 <http://abcnews.go.com/US/faith-stops-florida-robbery/story?id=11288067>

3 Col 3, Gal 5, Eph 4

4 Deut 31:6, Josh 1:5, Ps 94:14, Heb 13:5

5 2 Cor 5:6-10, 2 Tim 4:1, 2 Peter 2:9

Missions in focus

Hans Vaatstra

Guest lectureship at Reformed Churches Bible College, Papua New Guinea

Hans Vaatstra

The Reformed Churches' Bible College in Papua New Guinea is in a good location on about 8 acres of gently undulating land in the 14 Mile district, some 18 km from the Port Moresby Town centre. The College is about 25 minutes' drive from Port Moresby city centre. The Nine Mile church is about half way towards the city, with the East Boroko church nearer the city centre at 4 Mile. The Beretete and Beregoro churches are further out into the Sogeri hills. The Reformed Church of Veifa'a lies about three hours' drive west along the coast from Moresby. The RCBC campus is ideal in that it provides students used to an agrarian lifestyle with a campus which has enough arable land for them to grow food (to supplement the College rations) for themselves and their families, as well as attend lectures during allotted times. A live chicken-raising project and areas to grow cash crops provide further income towards school rations and to provide for personal student needs. (Each student family is allotted a 20 metre by 20 metre plot for their personal use) Several large mango trees and banana palms provide fruit. There is also some unused land which may cater for future growth at the College. The entire property is enclosed in a 2.4 meter high perimeter fence topped with barbed wire, making the compound a relatively secure home for students and teachers alike. The RCBC campus is well laid out with student accommodation at one end, the class room blocks and library in the middle and teacher accommodation at the other end.

Who does what?

The Rev. Henry Versteeg is the college Principal and administrator, with more than two decades of mission experience amongst the West Papuan people on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. He and His wife Rita have worked at the RCBC since 2009. His tasks include preaching in the churches, lecturing, oversight of all aspects of the curriculum, the academic progress of the students and pastoral care. The Rev. Alan Douma, along with his share of teaching, preaching and marriage counselling work, is vice-principal at the college and takes care of the ongoing development and maintenance of the college compound. Alan also preaches

regularly, teaches Catechism; and leads fellowship evenings weekly in the East Boroko settlement, and Profession of Faith Classes in Veifa'a. Both Alan and Henry often have students, security personal and other people coming to their doors with practical, academic and pastoral concerns. Because of an extended drought this year a large tank and pump was installed to draw water out of the river for the gardens and bathrooms. Drinking water needed to be trucked in from a spring at 17 Mile every second day in order to reduce the demand on the bores as the water table had dropped. Both Rita Versteeg and Odette Douma teach health and English to certificate level students and assist



Alan Douma on his way to teach catechism at Boroko and transporting a student cash crop for market on the way.

students and their families with health-related matters. The Rev. Cornelius Kleyn has served three years as lecturer at the college. He also administers campus security and the stores and rations for the college student body and their families. Cornelius also preaches, teaches catechism, conducts market preaching and shares in fellowship evenings with Aisi Kosa at Nine Mile. Writing and reviewing courses is an ongoing task all the missionaries are involved in.

As guest lecturer I commenced my four week block of lectures on Tuesday 20th October with two Diploma students and 10 certificate-level students. This was during Cornelius Kleyn's furlough. My task was to teach Church History in North America and PNG and Old Testament history 800-400BC. This involved seven one-hour teaching sessions per week, plus preparation and assessment. I also took turns in leading devotions and helped out with the preaching roster on Sundays.

RCBC graduates and students

Currently the Reformed churches in the Port Moresby area are served by three men who have completed their studies at the RCBC. Joel Sine is elder/ evangelist at Beregoro, while Nawai and Aisi are candidate ministers at Beretete and Nine Mile. Two more RCBC graduates are serving churches in the Lae area. It is a great blessing to begin to see the fruit of Reformed Ministries in PNG. The vision is to train national pastors, and in time establish the Reformed Churches of PNG as a Melanesian sister church.

One student I spoke to during a visit



Certificate level students 2015 last semester.

to Veifa'a said there is a great need for the RCBC. In his home district the sects are predominant and exclusive. They say that salvation can only be found in their denomination. Another student said people in PNG are easily drawn into sects and cults because most have very little knowledge of the Bible and lack sound theology. He is convinced that what the RCBC is doing, training men over five years (two years certificate and three years diploma), is vital. Spiritualism of the demonic kind also lives in the land. Only the truth of God's Word and true faith in Christ can drive the demons away. Another student I spoke to during church history class said that there are many break-away churches set up by disgruntled members leaving their

old church and led by untrained, self-appointed pastors. The RCBC is meeting a great need in PNG for well-trained pastors and teachers.

Teaching programme

Presently candidates for ministry have 5 years' training at the RCBC, including a 2 year certificate course followed by the 3 year diploma course. Practicum courses are run for 2nd and 3rd year diploma students in the local churches – for example, a four to six week practicum was organised for final year student John Puke-Ame in Veifa'a for the Christmas period. This experience was very encouraging for both the sponsoring church and the student. Graduates are eligible to work as candidate pastors prior to ordination for a year or more under the supervision of the church consistory and one of the missionaries.

The missionaries do acknowledge that more in-village training for candidate ministers would be beneficial. However, at this stage, because the Reformed Churches in PNG are young and do not have their own experienced national ministers, more one-to-one discipleship of budding ministers will require extra missionary manpower for some time to come. Having a compound manager at RCBC to free up Alan from the maintenance and supervisory work and take on some of Henry's administrative work will help. But even then there is sufficient work for yet another ordained missionary to take over some of the church-related discipleship and church order work which the RCBC lecturers presently have to handle themselves.



Church Council meeting with Henry Versteeg and Alan present and Nawai chairing (Nawai is candidate pastor at Beretete Reformed Church).

The secularization of the West and the rise of a New Morality (Part 2)

Albert Mohler

The new sexual morality did not emerge from a vacuum. Massive intellectual changes at the worldview level over the last 200 years set the stage for the revolution in which we currently find ourselves. We are living in times rightly, if rather awkwardly, described as the *Late Modern Age*. Just a decade ago, we spoke of the *Postmodern Age*, as if modernity had given way to something fundamentally new. Like every new and self-declared epoch, the Postmodern Age was declared to be a form of liberation. Whereas the Modern Age announced itself as a secular liberation from a Christian authority that operated on claims of divine revelation, the Postmodern Age was proposed as a liberation from the great secular authorities of reason and rationality. The Postmodern Age, it was claimed, would liberate humanity by operating with an official “incredulity toward all metanarratives.” In other words, postmodernity denied all of the big narratives that had previously shaped the culture and specifically put an end to the Christian narrative.

And yet, postmodern thought eventuated, as all intellectual movements must, in its own metanarrative. Then it just passed away. We still speak of postmodern thinking, even as we speak rightly of postmodern architecture and postmodern art, but we are speaking, for the most part, of a movement that has given way and given up. In retrospect, the Postmodern Age was not a new age at all; it was only the alarm that announced the end of Modernity and the beginning of the Late Modern Age. Modernity has not disappeared. It has only grown stronger, if also more complex.

The claim that humanity can only come into its own and overcome various invidious forms of discrimination by secular liberation is not new, but it is now mainstream. It is now so common to the cultures of Western societies that

it need not be announced, and often is not noticed. Those born into the cultures of late modernity simply breathe these assumptions as they breathe the atmosphere, and their worldviews are radically realigned, even if their language retains elements of the old worldview.

The background to this great intellectual shift is the secularization of Western societies. Modernity has brought many cultural goods, but it has also, as predicted, brought a radical change in the way citizens of Western societies think, feel, relate, and reason. The Enlightenment’s liberation of reason at the expense of revelation was followed by a radical anti-supernaturalism that can scarcely be exaggerated. Looking at Europe and Great Britain, it is clear that the Modern Age has alienated an entire civilization from its Christian roots, along with Christian moral and intellectual commitments. This did not happen all at once, of course, though the change came very quickly in nations such as France and Germany. Scandinavian nations now register almost imperceptible levels of Christian belief. Increasingly, the same is also true of Great Britain. Sociologists now speak openly of the death of Christian Britain – and the evidence of Christian decline is abundant.

Some prophetic voices recognized the scale and scope of the intellectual changes taking place in the West. Just over thirty years ago, Francis Schaeffer wrote of a shift in worldview away from one that was at least vaguely Christian in the memory of society towards a completely different way of looking at the world. This new worldview was based on the idea that final reality was impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance. Significantly, Schaeffer observed that Christians in his time did not see this new worldview as taking the place of the Christian worldview that had previously dominated northern European and American cultures, either by personal conviction or

“The claim that humanity can only come into its own and overcome various invidious forms of discrimination by secular liberation is not new, but it is now mainstream.”

cultural impression. These two worldviews, one generally Christian and the other barely deistic stood in complete antithesis to each other in content and also in moral results. These contrary ways of seeing the world would lead to very different sociological and governmental results, including the conception and implementation of law.

In 1983, writing just a few years after Francis Schaeffer made that contribution, Carl F.H. Henry described the situation and future possibilities in terms of a strict dichotomy: “If modern culture is to escape the oblivion that has engulfed the earlier civilizations of man, the recovery of the will of the self-revealed God in the realm of justice and law is

crucially imperative. Return to pagan misconceptions of divinized rulers, or a divinized cosmos, or a quasi-Christian conception of natural law or natural justice will bring inevitable disillusionment. Not all pleas for transcendent authority will truly serve God or man. By aggrandizing law and human rights and welfare to their sovereignty, all manner of earthly leaders eagerly preempt the role of the divine and obscure the living God of Scriptural revelation. The alternatives are clear: we return to the God of the Bible or we perish in the pit of lawlessness.”¹

Writing even earlier, Carl Henry had already identified the single greatest intellectual obstacle to a cultural return to the God of the Bible. Released in 1976, Henry’s first volume of his six-volume magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, began with this first line: “No fact of contemporary Western life is more evident than the growing distrust of final truth and its implacable questioning of any sure word.”² This obstacle to the return to the authority of a Christian worldview is really part of a vicious circle that begins with the departure from at least a cultural impres-

sion of God’s revealed authority. Leaving a Christian worldview leads to a distrust of final truth and a rejection of universal authority, which then blockades the way back to the God of the Bible.

Article citations

- 1 Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 6, *God Who Stands and Says Part 2* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 454.
- 2 Carl F.H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 1, *God Who Speaks and Shows, Preliminary Considerations* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999), 1.

www.albertmohler.com

World in focus

China’s efforts to mold Christianity in its own image draw resistance

In the Chinese capital, it’s not uncommon for church services to be held in Soviet-era office buildings. But the poorly lit, cracked-concrete dankness of this particular location cannot dampen the enthusiasm of this evangelical congregation.

Several hundred Chinese Christians pack the cavernous, L-shaped suite, clapping their hands and stomping their feet while a quartet at the front of the room lustily belts out songs praising “Yesu” (“Jesus” in Mandarin).

The men and women in attendance at the government-sanctioned Yizhuang Church are young, under 40, though several elderly Chinese women with their grandchildren in tow pack the venue.

When the band is finished, the bespectacled pastor, Du Jian Jun, takes the podium to deliver his sermon and the crowd settles into row upon row of blue, folding chairs.

Du, who speaks in Mandarin only – the only English heard in the service is a smattering of worshippers’ “amens” – delivers his message with the soothing cadence of a polished orator.

His sermon is simple: The lives we lead can be difficult, but with the guidance of Yesu we have the tools to carry on.

The pastor’s message is concise and straightforward; the relationship between

Christianity and the Chinese government, however, is more complex.

A Chinese version of Christianity

In August 2014, a top-ranking official in the Chinese government informed the world that China was planning on nationalizing Christianity.

Wang Zuoan, director of the State Administration for Religious Affairs, told a forum in Shanghai that the “construction of Chinese Christian theology should adapt to China’s condition and integrate with Chinese culture.”

The announcement, unsurprisingly, triggered significant consternation among Christian groups in China and around the globe.

Religion News Service

At Morocco Summit, Muslim leaders stand up for religious freedom

Posted on February 3, 2016 by Charles C. Haynes

At an historic gathering in Marrakesh, Morocco on January 27, more than 300 Muslim leaders – including many of the world’s most eminent Islamic scholars and clerics – declared that the religious freedom of minority faiths must be protected in Muslim majority nations.

The Marrakesh Declaration comes at a time of unprecedented persecution of Christians and other minority groups by extremists acting in the name of Islam in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia.

Pushing back against false and danger-

ous narratives about Islam, the Muslim leaders called on the entire Muslim world to reaffirm the principles of the Charter of Medina, a constitutional contract between the Prophet Muhammad and the people of Medina, “which guaranteed the religious liberty of all, regardless of faith” 1,400 years ago.

To counter extremism and promote freedom, the declaration calls for a “broad movement for the just treatment of religious minorities in Muslim countries and to raise awareness as to their rights.”

Morocco, the host country for the conference, is often cited as an example of an Islamic state that protects the rights of Christians, Jews and other religious minorities. Some of the other Muslim majority nations, however, are badly in need of the reforms called for in the declaration: Citizenship that is “inclusive of diverse groups” and initiatives, including education, that promote understanding across religions.

By sending a message to government leaders who ignore the true teachings of Islam as well as to terrorist groups that pervert the meaning of the faith, the Marrakesh Declaration stakes out an authentically Muslim position in support of religious freedom.

“Enough bloodshed,” said Shaykh Abdallah bin Bayyah, a key organizer of the conference and president of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies. “There is a sickness right now in the world but we have treatments for it within Islam.”

In other words, Islam is not the cause of extremism; Islam offers an answer to it. Now the challenge facing Muslim scholars and religious leaders will be to translate the declaration into societal reforms and peace efforts that effectively counter extremist movements, especially among the young.

The Marrakesh Declaration has received scant media attention in the United States. Positive news about Islam – including the many earlier statements and actions of Islamic leaders to fight extremism – rarely makes headlines. But Americans should take heed of the message coming out of Morocco.

At a time when Islam is coopted by terrorists and demonized by anti-Muslim groups, Americans need to hear the true voice of Islam. To understand why this matters, consider that hate crimes against Muslim Americans and mosques across the U.S. have tripled since the terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California last fall, according to a study conducted by researchers at California State University.

Ignorance and fear of Islam breed anger, hate and violence. In recent months, a young girl wearing an hijab was attacked by classmates, a Muslim cab driver was shot by a passenger who was angry about ISIS, a Muslim woman at a carwash was threatened by a man at knifepoint – and the list goes on.

Just as the KKK and White Supremacist groups – which claim to be based on “Christian principles” – are not labeled “Christian extremists” by most Americans, so ISIS and other terrorist groups who act in the name of Islam should not be given the label “Islamic.”

If we can tell the difference between authentic Christianity and perverted versions of the Gospel, so we should learn to tell the difference when it comes to Islam. Our ability to work with one another, defeat our common enemy, and uphold religious freedom hangs in the balance.

*Charles C. Haynes is vice president of the Newseum Institute and founding director of the Religious Freedom Center.
<http://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org>*

Not all evangelicals afraid of dialogue, Muslims and Christians say

A new study illustrates in numbers what many already know intuitively: evangelicals aren't big on dialoguing with anyone but themselves.

“Evangelicals seem to have a particu-

larly difficult time talking to those outside their group,” the Barna Group reported in a March 9 study titled “Americans Struggle to Talk Across Divides.”

But Imam Imad Enchassi, spiritual leader of the Islamic Society of Greater Oklahoma City, said he has found many evangelicals to be very open to talking.

“I have encountered them right outside our mosque – with signs,” Enchassi said.

Signs like “turn or burn” and “Muhammad is a pedophile” are common, he said.

One Christian wore a hot dog costume to a protest, implying that standing close to Muslims is like being cooked over an open fire.

“I said ‘this is your best pick-up line for Jesus, really?’”

Enchassi said he is optimistic, sometimes, during these encounters.

“I try to dialogue with them, but it's basically a one-way street,” he said.

Difficult friendships

But Enchassi and other Muslims needn't feel alone in that experience. The Barna data shows that while 87 percent of evangelicals avoid Muslims, the same percentage avoid members of the LGBT community and 85 percent won't speak with an atheist. Nearly 70 percent avoid conversations with Mormons.

Other groups – including American adults as a whole, Christians, atheists and agnostics – also struggle with conversing with others, though not to the degree that evangelicals do, the Barna study reported.

A consequence is that few people can healthily engage with others unless they are in total agreement, Barna President David Kinnaman said in the report.

“Try to talk about things like gay marriage – or anything remotely controversial – with someone you disagree with and the temperature rises a few degrees,” he said.

“But being friends across differences is hard, and cultivating good conversations is the rocky, up-hill climb that leads to peace in a conflict-ridden culture,” he said.

But that seems to be an extremely up-hill struggle for evangelicals, which Barna defines as those who, among other things: have made personal commitments to Jesus Christ; believe the Bible to be accurate in all its teachings; feel compelled to share their faith with non-Christians; and believe salvation is possible only through grace, not works.

‘Behold, I might be accused’

But it may be time to get a new term to define those Christians, others say.

“I just noticed a few weeks ago that I had stopped describing myself to people as an ‘evangelical,’” Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said in a Washington Post column titled “Why this election makes me hate the word ‘evangelical.’”

Moore laments the way the word is used by both Christians and non-Christians in the current election season, including reports that so-called evangelicals are supporting Donald Trump in large numbers.

Jeff Brumley | Baptist News

JP sacked for saying mum and dad best to adopt kids

A Christian magistrate has been sacked for opposing adoption by same-sex couples.

Richard Page was removed from his office by the Lord Chancellor following a media interview last year, during which he shared his conviction that children do best when they are brought up by a man and a woman.

Mr Page, who served as a magistrate for 15 years, described the move as “illiberal and intolerant”.

In March 2015 the magistrate was interviewed by BBC reporter Caroline Wyatt as part of a debate about the marginalisation of Christians in public life.

During the interview, he explained how he was disciplined the previous year after a court hearing where he could not agree with his colleagues that placing a child into the care of a same-sex couple would be in the child's “best interests”.

He told the BBC: “My responsibility as a magistrate, as I saw it, was to do what I considered best for the child, and my feeling was therefore that it would be better if it was a man and woman who were the adopted parents.”

The Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO) confirmed that Mr Page has been removed from the magistracy.

A statement from the JCIO said: “The Lord Chancellor and Lord Chief Justice found that Mr Page's comments on national television would have caused a reasonable person to conclude he was biased and prejudiced against single-sex adopters”.

It added that the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice “considered this to be serious misconduct which brought

the magistracy into disrepute”.

Reacting to the news, Mr Page said: “I am surprised that the Lord Chancellor should seemingly pander to the new political orthodoxy when what it amounts to is social experimentation on the lives of the most vulnerable children in our communities.

“To punish me and to seek to silence

me for expressing a dissenting view is deeply shocking.

“I shall challenge this decision as it is illiberal and intolerant. It is vital the family law courts always have in mind the best interests of the children.”

The magistrate is being represented by the Christian Legal Centre.

Responding to the decision, Chief

Executive Andrea Williams said: “This unmasks the face of the new political orthodoxy; it is unkind. It tries to silence opposing views and if it fails it crushes and punishes the person who holds those views.”

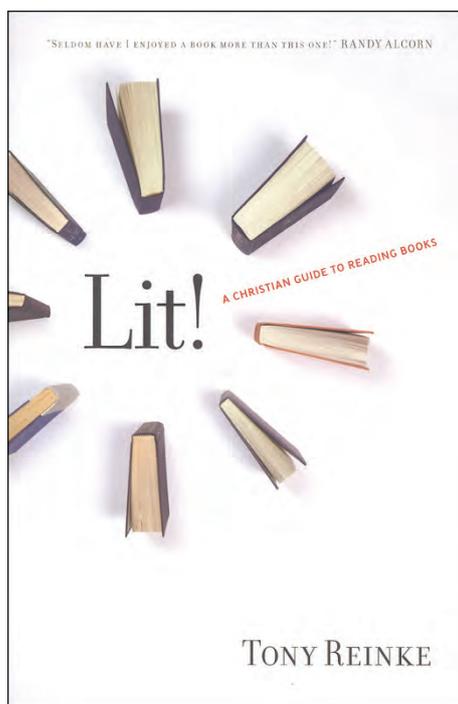
The Christian Institutes, March 2016

Books in focus

***Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books* Paperback – September 9, 2011**

by Tony Reinke

Reviewed by Reuben Posthuma



Books are important. As Tony Reinke, in *Lit: A Christian Guide to Reading Books*, puts it:

“I have seen wisely chosen books transform marriages, free sinners, and gladden grumblers. I have seen poorly chosen books feed a person’s doubt, entrench a soul in legalism, and ignite a heart with self-righteousness.”

Books – how to read them, which ones to read, and why we read them in the first place – are the subject of *Lit* (punnily enough, short for both “litera-

ture” and “lit up” (as in, “in your light we see light”))

Reinke starts off by outlining a theology of reading. ***God is a God of Words***. Since creation, the giving of the law at Sinai, and His continual promises to His saints, God has revealed himself, his will for his creation, and his way of salvation by words. This has two implications for Christian reading. First, reading is important. By reading God’s Word, and reading books which help us to understand God’s Word, we begin to see the spiritual realities that we wouldn’t see any other way: the truth of God as creator, the way of salvation, the new identity we have in Christ. Christians crave God’s words.

Secondly this has implications for “profane” literature – literature which doesn’t set out to tell us about God. Since God has revealed himself in His Word, and since His Word is authoritative and perfect, everything we read needs to be measured in the light of God’s revelation.

Reinke also rightly points out that reading in itself will not enlighten us – sin blinds us, so that until we are in Christ, our reading will not see the glories of God either in words about Him, or in the most beautiful profane literature that we read.

The second 2/3 of the book is practical advice on how to read a book. Since, even at a rate of a book a week, in our lifetime we’ll only get through a few books (in the low thousands) out of the millions to choose from, priorities for reading are crucial. Reinke offers some of these, gives strategies for tackling different types of books, gives advice for filling books with marginalia, and calls us to fight distractions and read deeply.

Reinke clearly loves books, and he wants us to love them too. He gives insightful chapters on different genres – like novels and fantasy – and why we should love and appreciate them, especially as Christians.

I have seen how fruitful loaning to friends that “just-right”* book at the “just-right” time can be, and Reinke addresses a whole chapter on leading those in our sphere of influence towards books and reading. The chapter is primarily aimed at parents and pastors, but it’s a good reminder for us all. In that same vein, he suggests that we start reading books with others by starting informal reading groups.

Finally, Reinke presents “5 marks of mature readers”. These are helpful, both as a diagnostic, and as a goal. Mature readers, he says, 1) Prize wisdom, 2) Cherish old books, 3) Keep literature in its place, 4) Avoid idolizing books, and 5) Cling to the Savior.

That last point (“cling to the Savior”) is a theme throughout the book. This is shown in two ways. First, he nudges us toward which books we should read. Are a significant portion of our books chosen explicitly so that we can know Christ and delight in Him more fully? Second, clinging to Jesus changes our perspective regardless of what kinds of books we read. Some books are easy. Some are challenging. Some challenge our sin by calling us to holiness, but some challenge our pride just by being too difficult for us to understand. As we cling to the Saviour, and remind ourselves of the old old story, we are freed to delight in Christ and in the glories He’s scattered around creation, knowing that our standing before God is not determined by what we know or can understand of

Him. It's not a novel observation, but I forget this quickly.

Reinke challenged me in my priorities and reasons for reading. It is easy to read for the sake of reading, or to read to feel knowledgeable, or to just

give up on reading entirely – I can see all those traits in my life even just in the past year. By presenting a wise model for a Christian reader through the theology of reading, handy tips, and exhorting us to cling to the Saviour, Reinke helps

me to read joyfully to the glory of God.

If you love books, this book is helpful for you. If you hate books, this book is probably still helpful for you. Let it challenge you in your reading, and let it help you to see the Saviour.

Time for a walkthrough

It was a 35 degree day in Christchurch on 27th February and the new building at Cornwall Street looked and felt a little like the church structures in PNG with supporting walls and a roof, but no cladding or windows. It was an ideal opportunity for people to come and see what the Lord has been doing in furthering the building plans.

The Christchurch congregation gathered for a walkthrough and a sausage

sizzle. Young and old could see the design taking shape; a spacious foyer with windows above, an octagonal auditorium, a sizeable fellowship area adjacent to a large kitchen, rooms for catechism teaching and Sunday school, a crèche area, offices and a meeting room.

The covenant community of the church were not alone, invitations to the walkthrough had been extended to the neighbours in the area of Cornwall

Street and a number came to check out the building progress and to talk with us. We pray that these types of interactions will help make it less intimidating for neighbours to come to some of our worship services once the new building is completed.

We don't have a firm completion date as yet, but rapid progress is being made. It looks like we are now only a few months away from being able to





move in. At the time of writing, closing in the walls has begun, some windows are in place and the majority of the wiring and plumbing has been completed. A PNG style structure worked well on an especially hot Christ-church summer day, but come winter we'll appreciate the walls, windows and a good heating system!

The Christchurch Session are very grateful for the financial generosity of congregational members, which, together with gifts from other churches, have enabled us to proceed towards completion. The Lord has blessed us incredibly. Praise His Holy Name.

