

# faith in focus

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# Editorial

Among the masses of humanity, there seems to be a popular idea that man is the author of his own destiny. Or, there is the view that we are part of a random universe subject to chance or fate. It sounds rather haphazard – lacking any obvious principle of organisation. In the scheme of eternity, these views offer no purpose for existence nor comfort for the suffering – only the big question, why?

What a blessing it is for the Christian believer who accepts by faith what the Scriptures say about God's sovereignty and providence. At this point, I think of the biblical motto which is part of the logo of our churches – "Your word is a lamp to my feet – and the light shines in the darkness". I am sure you recognise where these verses come from. The first is Psalm 119:105 and the second, John 1:5. Significantly, God's word sheds light on the truth about us in relation to our Creator and further reveals that the light is none other than God incarnate – our LORD Jesus Christ ... "and the darkness did not comprehend it".

God's providence is the comprehensive, wonderful and mysterious way in which the universe and everything in it is governed, as it were, by the hand of God. There is no chance or fate, no randomness here. For the believer, there is purpose and comfort in life, because we are united to Jesus Christ and through Him, to our heavenly Father. This does not mean that God's people are immune from adversity. However, the LORD knows what is best for us, and will turn those unpleasant things in life to our profit. Lord's Day 10 (Q&A28) says it beautifully. *Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us? A. We can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from His love. All creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they can neither move nor be moved.*

Praise His Name.

Our contributors provide some insightful articles according to our theme of God's providence: wonderfully mysterious.

Mr Daniel Wilson contemplates comfort in God's providence.

Mr Andre Holtslag enquires about what is good.

Mr Paul Archbald defines God's providence.

Mrs Sally Davey looks at J. I. Packer on *Finishing Our Course With Joy*.

Mrs Jenny Waldron writes on honouring our parents.

Mr David Waldron scrutinises at evolution and the biblical origin of mankind.

Mr Peter Barnes from AP (Australian Presbyterian) laments the scandal of conceding to secular morality.

OP pastor Daniel F. Patterson reviews *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change*, by Denny Burk and Heath Lambert; OP pastor Stephen Tracey reviews 'From the Mouth of God', Banner of Truth

Mr John Haverland and Michael Willemse report on our students for the ministry.

Mr John van Dyk communicates about the one-day synod in Pukekohe.

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 Dordt, 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.

**NB:** In line with common publishing practice *Faith in Focus* reserves the right to publish the names of all contributors with their articles, unless compelling reasons are given to the editor for not doing so. This applies to both print and online versions.

# How do you take comfort in God's Providence?

### Daniel Wilson

Did you know that a single nail could make or break entire kingdoms? Perhaps you have heard of the old poem *For want of a nail...*

*For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.  
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.  
For want of a horse, the rider was lost.  
For want of a rider, the message was lost.  
For want of a message, the battle was lost.  
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.*

You could easily enter into the logic of the story: A man in the Napoleonic era is hurrying along carrying a box of horseshoe nails and one nail falls to the ground. It was only 1, surely that isn't worth stopping to pick up! And yet later on during the heat of battle, a horse needed a new horseshoe, but they had run out of nails. They only needed one more, yet none was found. The messenger rides his horse anyway, but without that final nail the shoe comes loose and the message isn't delivered. Without that crucial message a battle is lost and with it the entire kingdom as well! The whole point of the poem is to point to how the smallest, seemingly most insignificant things could start a chain reaction which could dramatically change nations or the whole world!

Now, if you were to fully enter into this concept and evaluate your life based on it – you might end up crippled and unable to move or act because anything you do could cause the end of the world. And yet, that shouldn't ever be a problem for Christians, for the Bible explains to us the reality of God's Providence! God is sovereign over all things, which means He rules every aspect of every action of every creature and object that has/does/will exist. Lord's Day 10 of the Heidel-

berg Catechism summarizes the Bible's teaching in this way: "How do we define Providence? Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God... by which He upholds, (as with His hand) Heaven and Earth, and all creatures... and He rules them so that leaf and every blade of grass, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty – ALL THINGS... in fact come to us not by chance, but from His Fatherly hand."

One of the most comforting passages that detail this overarching control of God is Matthew 10:29-31 (ESV): "<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." God controls which birds die and which ones live – He even has complete control over our specific hair count! As I grow older and continue to lose my hair, I marvel to consider that while that number may change dramatically from year to year – God is even in control of that! If God is in control of my hair, then no single "horseshoe nail" will ever escape His notice or power. The Bible actually tells us much more about the extent of God's power and the extent of His perfect providential will (and the Rev. Paul Archbald will be developing those themes in his article in this issue). Therefore, you and I as Christians need not fear the events of life. God is in control!

If you believe that, then it will change the way you look at life! If God is using all things for the good of His People (Romans 8:28), then it is vital for us as believers to be looking for HOW God is doing that great work. We should be looking at our lives for all the ways circumstances are working out. If you look only at the bruises and problems in your

*"Cowper's God  
moves in a  
Mysterious Way".*

life, you will miss out on much joy and comfort in Christ. However, if you look for the blessings and the special providential gifts of the Lord, then you will have open eyes to see the silver linings that are in every stormy cloud. One of my favorite hymns is *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*, by William Cowper. It contains a wealth of comfort in the way God works. We often face hard situations/storms in life, but those storms often bring showers of blessings which we would never have had on a sunny day. There is no rain without clouds! *The bud may have a bitter taste* refers to how life may be hard for the moment... *but sweet will be the flower*, which means the results of that hardship will be worth it in the end!

Now, I know what some of you might be thinking... Yes, God is in control, but what about our sin? I have made mistakes in my life that have caused heartache and pain that I can't seem to escape. God is always in control... even your mistakes are perfectly within His masterful hand. As Joseph so powerfully explained to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 (ESV) "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today." What we intend for evil, God in His infinite wisdom and power equally intends for good. Now, that is an awesome thought, isn't it? I have seen this in my own life, where God decreed that I would have certain struggles with sin which were painful and difficult to endure. However, God

has used those particular struggles to equip me to minister comfort and wise counsel to many others who struggled with similar sins. The bud was bitter, but the flower is sweet!

It is amazing to look back at my life and note all the ways that God has provided for me and my family and friends. I believe that much of our anxiety, fear, and insecurity in trials come from NOT doing this nearly enough! Recounting God's faithfulness and providential care in the past gives you confidence for the future. If a child knows that his father has caught him every single time he has jumped from the playground over the years, then he has strong confidence for the future that he will be caught, and jumps willingly and joyfully based on that assurance! Likewise, you need to trust your Heavenly Father.

But how do you cultivate this confidence in God's power and plan? Prac-

tically, you have to look for it in your own life, and write it down! Look to Psalm 105... Yes, go open your Bible and look at that Psalm for a moment: read the first 8 verses and then quickly skim through the rest of the Psalm.

There the psalmist is demonstrating how to look to the Lord and rest in His strength. And he does that by remembering all the wonders that God has done. The whole Psalm is a recitation of God's work with His people. The Lord did this and that and the other thing so as to provide for His people! And if you want to be confident in God's providence and to live fearlessly and confidently day in and day out – then you need to write your own Psalm 105! Remembering God's faithfulness in the past promotes praise, confidence and joy in the present and future!

Sit down and write down the ways God has provided for you in the past.

My mother taught me this over many years. Whenever I would have an answer to prayer or a special provision of God, she would say, "Go write that down..." I often asked her, "Why?" and her recurring answer was this, "Because it is important for you to remember those answers to prayer for the dark times." And it is true! Remembering God's providential provision promotes praise and confidence in His power!

I often ignored my mother's advice, but eventually I began to write down those stories of God's provision. And when I am weak or low I go back and read them and find renewed confidence in my God! One such story is this: When I first went to seminary, the job that I had lined up fell through just before I moved. I had enough money for one month's rent and tuition, and I was nervous about moving. My father told me to take the leap of faith and leave it to the Lord to provide. If God didn't provide, then it was clear that it wasn't time to go to seminary, but if God wanted me there He would provide. So, we prayed, and I went. Within three weeks, God had provided all of my tuition, a free place to live, and a part-time job which more than paid my remaining bills! God is good! If God wants something to happen, He will make it happen! Do you believe that? Have you seen God's provision over the years? Would you even remember it very well if you had? THAT is why you need to write these things down. We are so quick to forget the good and remember the bad – it is part of our sin nature. Therefore, you need to make an effort to remember God's providence, and when you have those amazing moments where you recognize how God used a bad experience for a good purpose – WRITE IT DOWN! For in such ways, you are equipping and arming yourself against fear, anxiety and doubt.

Take some time each week (perhaps Sunday afternoons) and write down the blessings, gifts and answers to prayer that you see in your life. Or get a notebook and write down the blessings and provision of each day. And when life gets hard, turn to God's Psalm 105, and then turn to your own – and as you remember God's faithfulness and power from the past, you will be equipped to continue trusting Him well into the future ... to the glory of God!

*Mr Daniel Wilson is the minister in the Reformed Church of Nelson.*



Portrait of William Cowper (1731-1800), oil on canvas 1792, National Portrait Gallery

# Providence – what is Good?

### Andre Holtslag

We were driving home from church, having just heard a sermon about the power of prayer, when this question came from the rear of the car: Dad, if we are at a youth camp and someone prays after lunch that we might all be kept safe as we play sports, but someone gets injured, why didn't God do what we asked Him to do?

Well, a part of the answer to that question has to do with prayer but the larger part has to do with the doctrine of providence. Romans 8:28, as we have already been reminded, is a very important verse in the Bible when it comes to understanding and trusting in the God of providence: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good." But the interpretation of Romans 8:28 that stands behind the question above is that good is limited to *not* getting injured. What we shall see as we consider a number of examples of God's providence at work, however, is that we need to have a much broader understanding of what is good, and that even those things that we would typically view as 'bad' can still result in good.

So let us begin with a fictional story that you may have heard before: There was a wise old man who lived with his only son near the border between China and Mongolia. They owned one horse – a mare. One day the mare jumped the fence and ran away and was seized by the enemy. So the man's friends came to comfort him. "We are so sorry about your horse, they said. That's bad news." But the old man replied, "How do you know it's bad news? It might be good news." A week later the man looked out of his window to see his mare returning at breakneck speed, and alongside her was a beautiful stallion. He put both horses into the enclosure and his friends

came to admire the new addition. "What a beautiful horse, they said. That's good news." But the old man replied, "How do you know it's good news? It might be bad news." The next day his only son decided to try riding the stallion. It threw him and he landed painfully, breaking his leg. The friends made another visit, all of them sympathetic, saying, "We are so sorry about this. It's such bad news." But the old man replied, "How do you know it's bad news? It might be good news." Within a month, a terrible war broke out between China and Mongolia. Chinese recruiters came through the area, pressing all the young men into the army. All of them died – except for the man's son, who couldn't go to war because of the broken leg. "You see," said the gentleman, "things you considered good were actually bad, and things that seemed to be bad news were actually for our good."

And we see this truth demonstrated in the Bible in the life of Joseph, as has already been explored and explained in more detail elsewhere in this issue. Much of what happened to Joseph we would typically describe as bad. And just to be plain, it was bad! What Joseph's brothers and Potiphar's wife did was wicked. However, as Joseph said to his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive (Gen. 50:20)." God brought good out of all the bad circumstances in Joseph's life.

Another more contemporary illustration of this can be seen in the lives of Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand. These two were imprisoned and tortured for many years by the communist Romanian government because of their faith in Christ. Was this good? Of course not. What was done to them was wicked and evil. But did God bring good out

*"Those who trust in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, death ends our exposure to everything that is bad and brings us to that place where we only experience good – the place in heaven that Jesus has prepared for God's children."*

of this? In 1990 the Wurmbrands were able to open a Christian bookstore right below the palace of the now dead President who had been in charge when the Wurmbrands were being tortured! The Wurmbrands also founded the organization *Voice of the Martyrs*, which keeps the plight of persecuted believers before the wider church. His book, *Tortured for Christ*, has been a great blessing and encouragement to many. And all this good would not have happened

if he had not experienced the bad of a prison cell and torture.

Richard Wurmbbrand had to learn these things himself. One of the things he did while in prison was to compose and memorize sermons. One of these prison sermons was about God's providence. In it he tells this story:

*"A legend says that Moses once sat near a well in meditation. A traveller stopped to drink from the well and when he did so his wallet fell from his pocket into the sand. The man departed. Shortly afterwards another man passed near the well, saw the wallet and picked it up. Later a third man stopped to assuage his thirst and went to sleep in the shadow of the well. Meanwhile, the first man had discovered that his wallet was missing, and assuming that he must have lost it at the well, returned, awoke the sleeper (who of course knew nothing) and demanded his money back. An argument followed, and irate, the first man killed the latter. So Moses said to God, "You see, therefore, men do not believe you. There is too much evil and injustice in the world. Why should the first man have lost his wallet and then become a murderer? Why should the second have gotten a wallet full of money without having worked for it? And the third was completely innocent. Why was he murdered?" God answered, "For once and only once, I will give you an explanation. I cannot do*

*it at every step. The first man was a thief's son. The wallet contained money stolen by his father from the father of the second man, who finding the wallet only found what was due him. The third was a murderer whose crime had never been revealed but who there received from the first the punishment he deserved. In the future believe that there is sense and righteousness in what transpires even when you do not understand."*

One person who had to learn to trust God in this way was Joni Eareckson-Tada. In 1967, as a teenager, Joni dived into shallow water and broke her neck, rendering her a quadriplegic. Was this a good thing? Well, in a very obvious sense, it was not. Quadriplegia and every other illness and injury are a part of life in a fallen, sinful world. It is quite right for us to pray for health and strength and well-being and safety. It is quite right for us to pray for healing. But could quadriplegia still be considered good in any way at all? Could God use quadriplegia for the good of Joni or others? Joni, for a long time, was convinced that this was not the case. And so, she prayed earnestly for healing and attended many healing meetings. She went to each one convinced that God would raise her up from her wheelchair so that she could serve God as one healed of quadriplegia. But the much sought-for healing never came. What came instead, after many tears and much frustration and agony, was a recognition that God can use even quadriplegia for good. Joni has since

then spoken to hundreds of thousands at schools and public gatherings and through her website and books has encouraged many who struggle with illness or injury to trust in the God of providence and know that He works ALL things together for the good of those who love Him. You can listen to Joni speak about this here <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/TM13-2/a-deeper-healing-joni-eareckson-tada> .

With all the examples we have cited thus far, however, triumph has risen out of tragedy *in this life*. What we also need to consider, though is – can any good come from the diagnosis of a terminal disease? Can any good follow on from a phone call informing us that a loved one has died in a car crash? How can it be that God is causing all things to work together for the good of those who love Him in circumstances like these? Well, for those who trust in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins, death ends our exposure to everything that is bad and brings us to that place where we only experience good – the place in heaven that Jesus has prepared for God's children (John 14:1-4). So those who die in Christ enjoy the fullest good that Romans 8:28 encompasses. But how can God cause even the death of a loved one to accomplish good in the lives of those who remain behind? Don Carson helps us answer this question with these wonderful insights:

*In any suffering, or in any other event for that matter, God is doubtless doing many things, perhaps thousands of things, millions of things, even if we can only detect two or three or a handful. A godly woman in her middle years is diagnosed with stage-four breast cancer. What is God doing? My little brain can imagine several possibilities.*

- At one level, he may be providentially allowing the effluents of the Fall to take their course, a constant reminder that it is appointed to all of us to die, and then face judgment (Heb 9).
- He may be preparing her for eternity: it is a great grace to know when you are going to die, and prepare for it.
- He may be shocking her 20-something son, who is living his life indifferent to the gospel, to prod him into self-examination and repentance.
- He may use her testimony about the joy of the Lord even in the midst of suffering to call another of her children into vocational ministry.



Joni Eareckson-Tada <http://hopethroughthestorm.org/>

- He may be using her as a way to teach people in her church what it looks like to “die well,” anticipating several other deaths in the next two years.
- He may be teaching her minister-husband to slow down and care about his family, and in principle other people, instead of being endlessly busy with “the ministry.”
- He may be sparing her from living long enough to witness the moral destruction of her daughter.
- Her funeral may be the means by which several of her unconverted relatives, for whom she has been praying, will come to faith — conversions for which she would happily give her life.
- Perhaps one of those converts will become a Christian pastor of rare gift whose ministry of proclamation will

touch thousands. Perhaps she is hiding some deep bitterness and hate in her life, and God is using this means to confront her.

*I've barely started a list of possible things God may be doing, and I have a small brain. What does the omniscient God think He is doing? In other words, sometimes we have to cover our mouths and confess, in faith, that we cannot possibly grasp all that God is doing when someone suffers ... But He is trustworthy; we know that, for He sent His Son to suffer on our behalf.<sup>1</sup>*

Romans 8:28 says, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.” What we have tried to demonstrate with these examples is that we need a much broader under-

standing of what is good! The reality is that behind ALL the circumstances of the believer’s life is the hand of his or her Father in heaven who is working for his or her good. And knowing this means “we can be patient when things go against us, thankful when things go well, and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from His love. All creatures are so completely in His hand that without His will they can neither move nor be moved (Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 28).”

<sup>1</sup> This quote comes from a longer answer that Don Carson provided to the question: *How do we know if God is Disciplining us?* On the Gospel Coalition Website.

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## God’s providence: wonderfully mysterious (3)

# The Providence of God

### P N Archbald

I often tell our “Catechism students” that if they forget the definition of God’s providence, they can find the word “provide” in it. God provides for all the creatures that He has made. That’s a mighty big task! If any of you have ever cooked for scores of people at a camp, you will know how much you have to organize and control and time, in order to make it all work. Imagine how much more is needed to organize everything that every aspect of creation needs, every day, and all timed perfectly! The Kiwis need to get their grubs at the right time (the birds, not the people), the koalas need their gum-leaves, the lions their raw meat and the Rev. Archbald needs his fish and chips.

In order for God to provide all this, and preserve all things, He must be able to rule all things as well. Similarly, He must be able to rule all things in order to answer the prayers of His people. God’s providence therefore includes the ideas of His rule, His provision and His

preservation of all Creation.

The providence of God is related to two other important truths about God. His predestination and His Creation. Regarding His predestination, the Bible teaches that the Lord governs all things according to His eternal purpose. This is made clear in Is. 46:9-11: “I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure...Truly I have spoken, truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.’” The Lord ensures that everything unfolds as He has planned from before the world began. His Word foretells many future things that must come to pass. He can promise that it will be so, because He knows He controls all events. His Word cannot fail. His providence ensures that it does not. Because of this connection to predestination, providence is often defined as God’s preservation and government *according to His eternal purposes.*

There is also a connection to the doctrine of creation. We can build this into our definition as well: providence is God’s preservation and government of *all He has created*, according to His eternal purposes. Sometimes people have trouble seeing the difference between creation and providence. If they play down the miracle of a literal, 6-day creation, in favour of more regular, ongoing processes (such as evolution), creation is swallowed up by providence. Then there would be little difference between the creation of plants on the third day, and the synthesis of plastic by Leo Baekeland in 1907. However, we see “creation” as referring to the new “kinds” of things God made from nothing in the creation-week of Gen. 1. Ever since then, man – using the gifts God has given him – re-arranges and combines the materials God made from nothing, to fashion many “variations on the theme.” This re-arranging and combining is carried out under God’s providence, but it is not a creation of a new “kind” from nothing. In His providence, the Lord

preserves and governs what He made from nothing, bringing out, over time, that which is potential.

Already in this article on providence I have referred to “all things” a few times. When we talk about God preserving and ruling “all things,” some people are bound to get their hackles up. Many do not like the idea that God rules everything, down to the smallest detail. They feel that this takes away from man’s freedom and dignity. Moreover, if “all things” includes evil, they feel that God is being made the “Author of evil” – as they do with the teaching that God has predestined all things. The problems of man’s freedom and of evil have vexed philosophers down through the ages. We may never have all the answers in this life. But we can go a certain way in addressing these issues.

First, we need to see if the Bible does actually teach that providence extends to all things, including evil. As to the all-inclusive nature of providence, consider Prov. 16:33: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” If we, as Christians, talk about games of “luck” or “chance,” we have to remember that what people call “chance” is under the control of the Lord – the world

is not *ultimately* governed by chance, fate etc. Mt. 10:29-30 takes this down to a very fine level. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from our Father. The very hairs on your head are governed by His providence as well. God “causes *all things* to work together for good to those who love God” (Rom. 8:28).

The Scripture is also clear that this includes things that are considered disasters by man, also things that are evil as they come from man and from Satan. The Psalmist writes that God has put him in the lowest pit and afflicted him with all His waves. See also Ps. 90:15. Because man is sinful, and lives in a fallen world, even believers suffer affliction that comes to us in God’s providence. Think of all the evils Joseph suffered at the hands of sinful men – from his brothers, from Potiphar’s wife. Yet God turned it all to good, his time in jail bringing him to Pharaoh’s attention, with the result that he would eventually help preserve God’s people from famine. Joseph could say to his brothers at the end, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...” (Gen. 50:20). We have no right to complain when the Lord “afflicts” us in His providence – our sin deserves far more! But we can be confident that the

Lord turns such things to our good in due course.

That is the point of Rom. 8:28. Note the further application of this truth in 8:38-39. There we find a summary of things at the mercy of which man may find himself in this life. The list includes death, as well as powers and principalities – whether human rulers or demonic forces. But none of these things can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Why not? Because God governs all these forces in His providence and ensures that any harm they do is ultimately turned to our good. If God’s providence did not govern evil, this would be an empty promise.

In answering objections about the “problem of evil,” I have often found it helpful to make the following points: first, an unbeliever cannot consistently speak of “evil” – he has no solid basis for saying what is right and wrong; second, if we define “evil” as opposition to God, both God’s predestination and providence are not evil – for they both serve the purpose of God’s glory; and third, if there is no God, or only a god who cannot control evil, then evil is unchecked in the universe and there is no guarantee it will not triumph. What a



Christchurch Anglican cathedral as it appears today, after the February, 2011 earthquake.

*“As Reformed believers, it is precisely the strong, biblical view of God that gives us so much comfort. For His infinite sovereignty and power is directed to helping especially His own children.”*

miserable world-view results from trying to take God’s hands off the reins!

Arminians have tried to remove this problem by seeing God’s providence as playing out according to His foreknowledge – defined in terms of simply seeing the future – rather than His foreordination. They also appeal to the idea of

man’s free will. This is to deny God’s aseity, His “Self-existence.” God is independent of His creation. The Arminian view of God’s foreknowledge makes the Lord dependent upon the future, upon fate. The future is sitting there, independently of God, for Him simply to read it and make His plans accordingly. Augustine correctly replied to this view, that when God looks into the future, He sees only what He has predestined. The future is dependent on God’s will, not the other way round!

This does not, as some suppose, make man a robot, puppet or mere pawn on a cosmic chess-board. Reformed theology often speaks of *concurrence* as an aspect of God’s providence. The idea is that God, according to His nature and purpose, directs man in every detail, to act according to his nature and will, *without compulsion to act contrary to his nature*. This is not a 50/50 deal. God is 100% involved in directing, and man is 100% involved in acting according to his nature and will. Man does what he wants to do. But the result is always what God wants. We can see that from Joseph’s explanation to his brothers in Gen. 50:20: “You meant evil...but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result.

A similar situation is found with “second causes.” Neither predestination nor providence remove the reality of secondary factors in achieving the results

that God purposes. Why is there an earthquake in a certain place? Because of slippage along a fault line? Because of continental drift and the subduction of plates? Yes, but behind that lies the will and the providence of God. Because His purposes included the existence of these factors in creation, and His providence maintained and directed them, the earthquake occurred as it did, when it did, with the results it did. Both predestination and providence actually uphold the existence of second causes. They would not exist without Him.

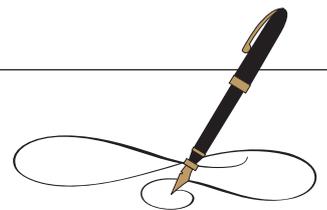
This is obviously a very strong view of God. It is the strong view of God that upsets so many people. People object far less to an impotent god who hangs around in the background. You hardly notice a god like that. That is just the kind of god many want: one who is hardly noticed. As Reformed believers, however, it is precisely the strong, biblical view of God that gives us so much comfort. For His infinite sovereignty and power is directed to helping especially His own children: “All things... work together for good to those who love God...” See also Pss. 5:12, 121:3. All things are upheld, governed and maintained by God in His providence, for His glory and for the good of those who love God.

*Mr P N Archbald is the minister in the Reformed Church of Silverstream.*

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## Outward focus

Sally Davey



# J.I. Packer on *Finishing Our Course With Joy*

There’s nothing particularly surprising about suggesting there ought to be a great difference between the way the followers of Christ age and the way those who reject him grow old. The word “hope” has a great deal to do with it, of course. But sadly, even those of us who claim

to love the Lord Jesus need reminding that our older selves should be every bit as useful to him as our younger, more energetic versions were. The very fact that an older person working hard into her 80s and 90s amazes us all just proves my point.

One such person, Queen Elizabeth II, born in 1926, still works almost full time. The recent Diamond Jubilee of her accession to the throne was what set British-Canadian writer J.I. Packer thinking about the whole business of aging. Packer, a mere three months younger

than Her Majesty, had this to say:

*"The Queen is a very remarkable person. Tirelessly, it seems, she goes on doing what she has been doing for six decades and more: waving in shy friendliness to the crowds past whom she is transported, and greeting with a smile one and another, children particularly, whom she meets in her walkabouts. It is more than sixty years since she publicly committed herself before God to serve Commonwealth citizens all her life. She has done it devotedly up to now, and will undoubtedly continue doing it as long as she physically can... She is a Christian lady resolved to live out her vow till she drops. She merits unbounded admiration from us all."*

Packer expands the point in the rest of his short book. In exploring the necessity of aging and, without denying the waning of strength and attendant physical troubles associated with aging, he explores the many possibilities Christians have for active service in their older years.

One thing Packer notes, in particular, is that elderly Christians are "veterans of the war between the forces of Christ and those of Satan." That is, they have learned a great deal about the long, drawn-out fight we all face with the world, the flesh and the Devil. They have much to teach younger Christians who may be more naïve about what we're up against in our walk with Christ.

Furthermore, older Christians have learned much about fellowship with the Lord in prayer and Bible-reading; about

journalling with self-examination; about corporate worship and fellowship; and about the value of extended periods of silence and solitude. These lessons are a precious resource for God's people in the church. If only older members were willing to share them, and younger members would ask to hear about them, we would all benefit.

However, Packer is also realistic and has some other wise words about this sharing. He knows that younger people can feel pushed around by the unwanted "advice" of their elders. Here's how he put this when talking about family interactions:

*"For seniors to invade family circles unasked – dictatorial in-laws, for instance, who have not grasped that in life, as in Scripture, loyalty to one's spouse should trump the claims of parents – is undoubtedly unhealthy. But it is also bad for families to ignore mature wisdom that is available to them in the persons of older relatives and friends. Christian seniors should make a point of being available to give as much help of this kind as families are willing to receive, and of showing themselves affectionate, equable, and (if I may coin a word) unshubbable as they do so. And they should remember that, in any case, the larger need and the wider sphere of ministry to which they should be attending is in the church."* (pp. 97-8)

In fact, Packer makes the good of the church the strongest focus of his plea for older Christians to make the remainder of their lives useful to Christ. Addressing them directly, he suggests they ask God, and the leaders in our churches, as to how "you might do the best you can with what you have got and model in your own person the mobilizing of over-sixty-fives to continue giving all they can for as long as they can to contribute to the mutual ministry that goes on within God's flock." (p. 98)

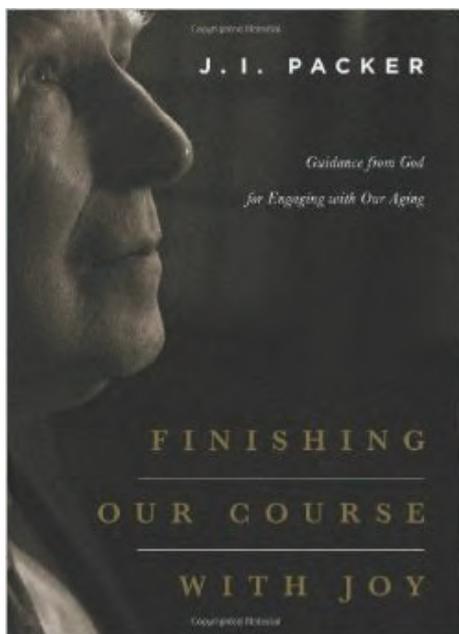
He is aware of the temptations in our culture to spend our older years winding down, caring for ourselves and generally enjoying ourselves. He notes that "taking their cue from the world around, modern Western churches organize occupations, trips, parties, and so forth for their seniors and make pastoral provision for the shut-ins, but they no longer look to these folks as they do to the rest of the congregation to find,

feed and use their spiritual gifts. In this they behave as though spiritual gifts and ministry skills wither with age. But they don't; what happens, rather, is that they atrophy with disuse." (pp. 64-5) I found this observation very telling. How often do we expect – or even ask – a person in his or her seventies to lead a Bible study group, disciple a young person in need of help or speak at a youth camp? It is obvious that people in their seventies are often in quite good health and have sufficient energy and clarity of mind for such activities. Why are they not doing such things?

This is a most stimulating and interesting little book. It would make for useful discussion around the whole church. I'm persuaded we could all benefit from Packer's wisdom. He's thought about the subject a great deal, and has insights well worth considering. As an older man himself – he is 90 now – and one who has recently lost his eyesight through macular degeneration, he has had to adjust his own service to Christ accordingly. I'm reminded of Milton's famous line in the "Sonnet on His Blindness" which reads, "They also serve who only stand and wait." I do pray that Packer finds joy as he runs the rest of his course in the Saviour's service.

I thought I would end this brief summary of Packer's book by noting a few real-life examples of the kinds of contributions that God's people have made in older age. One could start with Moses, who led the people of Israel until they reached the border of the Promised Land when he was 120 years old. Joshua was leading Israel in battle well beyond our contemporary retirement age. The apostle John was leading the church at Ephesus with sufficient vigour to earn himself imprisonment on the island of Patmos around the age of 90. Polycarp the early church martyr and leader of the church at Smyrna met his death at the age of 86. If God gives the strength, why not use it with zeal for his honour and glory?

One last example, from nearer our own time. I have just begun reading a biography of Dwight L. Moody, the famous late-nineteenth-century evangelist. Moody's father died when he had only just started school His mother was left with seven young children and she was about to give birth to twins. Creditors took many of the household possessions. It was a dire situation, and she only survived with the help of a



kind brother. But encouragement also came from another quarter. Moody's biographer, Kevin Belmonte, tells the story well:

"Betsy Moody might have despaired, but an unlooked-for mercy arrived in the person of the Reverend Oliver Everett, the aging minister of the First Congregational Church.

His kindness was a sunshine of hope. Materially, he brought the Moody family food and other staples from his own home. He offered to help with the children's schooling and urged Betsy to keep the family together. Aging though he was, he wasn't daunted by the prospect of spending hours in a home filled with active, energetic children. Some clergymen, as they grow older, become more quiet and retiring. Everett had a rare gift for expressing genuine, if modestly expressed, affection. Betsy Moody's children warmed to him. Young Dwight never forgot Everett's habit of placing an affectionate hand on his head, or saying a kind word."<sup>2</sup>

*The righteous flourish like the palm tree  
And grow like a cedar in Lebanon.  
They are planted in the house of the Lord;  
They flourish in the courts of our God.  
They still bear fruit in old age;  
They are ever full of sap and green.*  
(Psalm 92:12-14)

#### Notes)

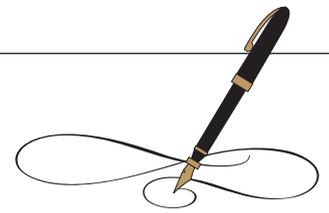
- 1 J.I. Packer, *Finishing Our Course With Joy* (Crossway, Wheaton, 2014), p. 12
- 2 Kevin Belmonte, *D. L. Moody: A Life* (Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2014), p. 23

"Active performance of God's will is easier than patient endurance of his will - to do well not so hard as to bear well."

**Robert Johnstone**

## Feminine focus

Jenny Waldron



# Honour Your Parents

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments,<sup>1</sup> He gave them as commandments that we are to obey throughout our lives. Somehow though, "Honour your mother and your father" has often been interpreted, or practiced, as "honour your mother and your father, while you are still living at home, and when you are young!" The root of kabod [the Hebrew word translated as "honour"] literally means "heavy or weighty". The figurative meaning, is: "to give weight to someone."

While honour is an internal attitude of respect, courtesy, and reverence, it should be accompanied by appropriate attention or even obedience. Honour without such action is incomplete; it is lip service. How can we, then, fulfil the fifth commandment and honour our parents?

**Children:** As children we are to obey our parents for this pleases the Lord.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, parents won't ask their children to do ungodly things. Sometimes, as parents, we may ask our children to do some things that seem to them stupid, or aggravating or time-wasteful but they are to honour us with their obedience. For example, your child is running across the road to get to school, when you shout, "STOP!" Your child may think, "I need to get to school because I am late" but you can see the bus that is about to hit him! Sometimes you can see a bigger picture than the child can. However, at other times, as parents, we may be distracted by our own problems, which the child does not know about, and we are not thinking clearly and equitably about what we ask them to do, even so, we are to expect obedience because this is right<sup>3</sup>. It is a wonderful blessing for a parent to have a child who cheerfully obeys and does it straight away. There is a saying that sums this up well, "Obedience is; cheerfully doing what I'm asked to do and doing it quickly because I love

you!" Obedience honours the parents and gives glory to God. Children are showing that they love God, and their parents, by willingly obeying them. This is also the training ground for obeying God as His children.<sup>4</sup> In His humanity, Jesus obeyed His Father totally, only doing what His Father asked Him to do,<sup>5</sup> even dying on the cross. Jesus trusted that God had the Big Picture in view, His great plan of salvation for His chosen people, so Jesus obeyed.

We need to teach our children that if a parent asks them to do something that is sinful, like steal or a parent wants to touch them in private places, (or vice versa) then they are not to obey their parent(s). The child is to run away, either to the other parent or to someone they trust, and talk to them. It is not honouring to parents to allow them to sin.

**Young Adults:** As we grow older, and are making the transition from child to adult, although obedience is still required, respecting your parents comes more to the fore. Respect their opinions and listen to their advice and experience. Young adults, your parents have seen a thing or two in their lives, they have learnt many valuable lessons, learn from them. You may think you know what's best for you, but listen to your parent's counsel. Ask them what they think about a university course, a job you are thinking about applying for and particularly when a girl/boy who has caught your eye.<sup>6</sup> They know you better than anyone else on earth, listen to them. Sometimes, you may not take their advice, so show them honour by explaining to them why you want to do something different. Be respectful and patient when you disagree with them. Act in a godly manner in your interactions with your parents. As you begin to form your own opinions and views on the world, talk things through with your parents. Keep that relationship close and dear. You may not see

*“Honour, obey and respect the parents that God has given us, following the example of Christ while He was here on earth”.*

eye to eye on everything but you can still honour them and show your love and respect for them.

**Adults** – As adults, we are no longer required to obey our parents, as we did when we were children, but we are still required to honour them. Many of us are facing the fact that our parents are in their 70’s, 80’s and 90’s and are getting frail, both physically and mentally. Some have failing health or finances or are having to make difficult housing choices. We can honour them by helping them through these difficulties, and by being an advocate for them. Sometimes, they may not welcome such help, and they would rather just rely on whatever the “professionals” tell them. Be gentle

and kind and at the end of the day, unless they have become mentally incapacitated, remember that they have to make their own decisions. Some time ago, my father had been very ill and as he recovered he wasn’t his normal cheerful self, he lost his enjoyment of life. Our oldest son was about to get married, and after much encouragement (“you just need to get into a wheelchair, and the airline will look after you”) my father and my sister flew to the wedding. The sense of independence and seeing the extended family on such a joyous occasion gave him a new lease of life. Although physically he suffers, he has since travelled to Christchurch and holidayed with us. Help your parents to continue to enjoy the time that is left here on earth for them. Loneliness is one of the biggest sufferings of older people. If it is possible, invite your elderly parent(s) for a meal on a regular basis. Ring them frequently, and visit them. Take the young grandchildren. Encourage your young adult children to visit them on their own and establish their own relationship with their grandparents. One of our daughters was studying in the same city as my father and she would try and see him regularly and would often take her friends. They all loved “Grandad” and his stories and he, in turn, was cheered by the youthful company. One of the reasons God

commanded us to honour our parents is so that faith and love for God is passed down, from one generation to another, for generations to come. Christian grandparents have precious pearls of wisdom and stories of God’s goodness and deliverance that they experienced over a lifetime and can pass onto the next generations. Many older folk spend extensive hours in prayer for the younger generations, especially unsaved ones. We, too, can encourage older parents in the faith, reading to them from the Bible and Christian literature when their eyesight is poor and praying with, and for, them. Attending church with them is also very honouring and encouraging. Honouring our parents builds one of the foundational building blocks of society, drawing generations together by loving and caring for one another. When talking about your parents, present them in a good light. Tell about the good things they have done and/or quote helpful advice they have given you.

#### **Sinful parents**

Let us all recognise that none of our parents are/were perfect, yet God commands us to honour our parents. Sadly, all of us have had sinful parents. However, for some people, honouring their parents is particularly difficult. Some have been abused (emotionally, sexually and/or physically), abandoned, or suffered in



other ways because of their parents. Do we still have to “honour” them? How can we “honour” sinful parents?

**1. Be Christlike** by, first and foremost, praying for them. Show them the same respect that we give to others we know who need God and His forgiveness. Sure, it may be hard to see past the abuse and suffering, but we are all given a choice about how we will live our lives in Christ and how we will show that Christ is the Lord of our life. God promised his Helper and Comforter to be with us, to help and comfort us. We can see that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives when we look at the fruit of His help; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.<sup>7</sup> This is how the Lord desires us to be with our parents, not bitter, throwing fits of anger, or hating!<sup>8</sup> Be ready to forgive your parents from your heart. If they should repent of their sin(s) be quick to forgive them. However, they may well still be very sinful in their ways, words and actions, but you can show that God is a Redeemer who has redeemed you, and who, through Christ, has made you into a new and different person who is being transformed to become more like Christ. Allow God to use your past experiences, hurt and pain for His good purposes.<sup>9</sup> You may be able to help another who has had similar struggles and can point them to a loving and caring Heavenly Father.

**2. Be thankful.** The will of God in Christ Jesus is for us to give thanks in ALL circumstances.<sup>10</sup> Your parents, hopefully, provided for you, materially, they fed you and kept you alive, they clothed you and saw that you received education. There are no perfect parents but there is always something to be thankful for. As a child of God, whatever your past, God has forgiven you and has called you to be His own.

**3. Care for your parents.** Although they may continue in their sinful ways, you can show care for them, maybe by making sure they are in suitable housing or you might pay for someone to come and mow their lawns, or you can make sure that they are receiving good medical care. Visit them. Phone them. Allow God to do his sanctifying work in you as you show the fruit of the Spirit to your parents. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you and help you.

**4. Trust the Lord** for He is your Heavenly Father. Although your parents may make you feel angry, unloved, can-never-be-good-enough, you can take

those feelings and emotions to the One who never fails you nor leaves you and who loves you deeply and wholly.

### **Honouring your parents after their death**

Even after they have died, we can still honour their lives and name by speaking well of them to others, especially to our children and grandchildren. Even though there may have been things that were not positive and good, there are other things that you can share that were good. My mother, although not very good at showing her emotions, was an avid Bible student and taught me the value of studying the Word, praying for your children, how to prepare a Bible study (which she did faithfully, weekly, for over 30

years), and how to make perfect gravy!

So, let us honour, obey and respect the parents that God has given us, following the example of Christ while He was here on earth. Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to work in your life, emotions and deeds to become more and more like Jesus, who obeyed and honoured His heavenly Father perfectly.

1 Exodus 20:1-17

2 Col 3:20

3 Eph 6:1

4 1 Peter 1:14

5 John 6:38

6 p174-175 The Ten Commandments by J Douma translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman: P and R Publishing 1996

7 Gal 5:23

8 Col 3:7-10, Gal 5:19-21

9 Rom 8:29

10 1 Thess 5:18

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## **Letter to the editor**

*Dear Sir,*

With great respect to the editor, I offer a number of corrections to the recent retraction. With limited space, I can only amend the most important elements, rather than address the entire retraction.

Pastor Keller only withdrew one of his answers in the hour-long trapdoor interview. He leaves his other statements on record: “A number of my responses were less than skilful. One in particular ... was misleading and unhelpful.” For instance, Keller does not retract the following:

*Interviewer: ... people who don't have access to the gospels, ... it is fair to say they're going to hell?*

*Keller: The people who don't have access to it, I try to say I don't know*

The interviewer is questioning if God is just. Kellers response is at odds with the Belgic and Westminster confessions, both of which are founded on a creation without evolution. Keller undermines the doctrine of predestination and does not defend Gods character. Keller does not know if those without the gospel will end up in heaven or hell undermining the exclusivity of Christ.

Pastor Keller's espousal of theistic evolution also counters the *Faith in Focus* statement: “We are not aware that Keller denies the inerrancy of Scrip-

ture.” An evolutionary timeline dictates a gap of 200,000 years between Adam and Moses, which converts the book of Genesis into a tale of myths and legends.

Al Mohler unequivocally outlines what is at stake:

*If evolution is true, then the entire narrative of the Bible has to be revised and reinterpreted.*

*Bible's account of the Fall and its consequences is utterly incompatible with evolutionary theory.*

*theistic evolution ... public rejection of biblical inerrancy*

*authority of the Bible ... truthfulness of the Gospel ... at stake.*

*no historical Adam and no historical Fall, the Gospel is no longer understood in biblical terms.*

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The retraction/clarification that Mr Brian O'Neill is referring to is in the July issue (vol 43/6, p.15), which was a response to his letter (May, vol 43/4, p.10).

I would like to make it clear to the readers, that the article on that page entitled “Let's be careful”, was in fact a letter to the editor, and was changed without the author's permission. I do unreservedly apologise to the author for this.

I trust this will bring a close to this matter. **Ed.**

# The origin of mankind

## David Waldron

As human beings we are able to think about our own existence and ask foundational questions like: How did we get to be here? Where did we come from? The subject of the origin of mankind is a foundational one for Christians who are called to contend for the faith in a fallen world where acceptance of the authority of the Bible is constantly under threat.

This article considers two options for the origin of mankind; evolution through natural processes and creation by a personal God, as described in the Bible. The key aim is to succinctly answer the question: Is the theory of the evolution of mankind consistent with Scripture?

This article does not attempt to provide a detailed discussion of the

scientific evidence for Biblical creation or for evolution. Nor is what you are about to read an in-depth defense of the reliability of Scripture as a source of accurate historical information.

To give an balanced view of evolution, we need a clear definition of what this term means. This is particularly challenging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the field of evolutionary biology is constantly changing with new theories being added and older ones amended. The perceived need for an in-depth understanding of terms including 'allele', 'epigenetics', 'frameshift mutation', 'genetic drift' and 'punctuated equilibrium' (to name just a few), can prevent those who are not specialists in these fields from even entering into a discussion about the origin of mankind.

### Evolution defined

The word 'evolution' can be used in many ways. However, in the field of biology, it means 'descent with modification'. In other words, small modifications occur at the genetic level (i.e. in DNA) when a new generation descends from its parents. Over many generations these modifications can result in significant differences from the ancestral population. When those differences are beneficial for survival, they can work their way

through a whole population of organisms.

'**Microevolution**' can be used to describe relatively small scale changes within a species. For example, these changes are evident as a result of the selective breeding of domestic dogs which has resulted in the development of a wide range of types of dogs, from the Chihuahua to the Great Dane. We observe that living organisms have an astounding ability to adapt to their environment. For example, a single genetic mutation in mosquitos has been shown to cause resistance to the chemical dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) enabling mutated mosquitos to survive an application of insecticide intended to eradicate them.

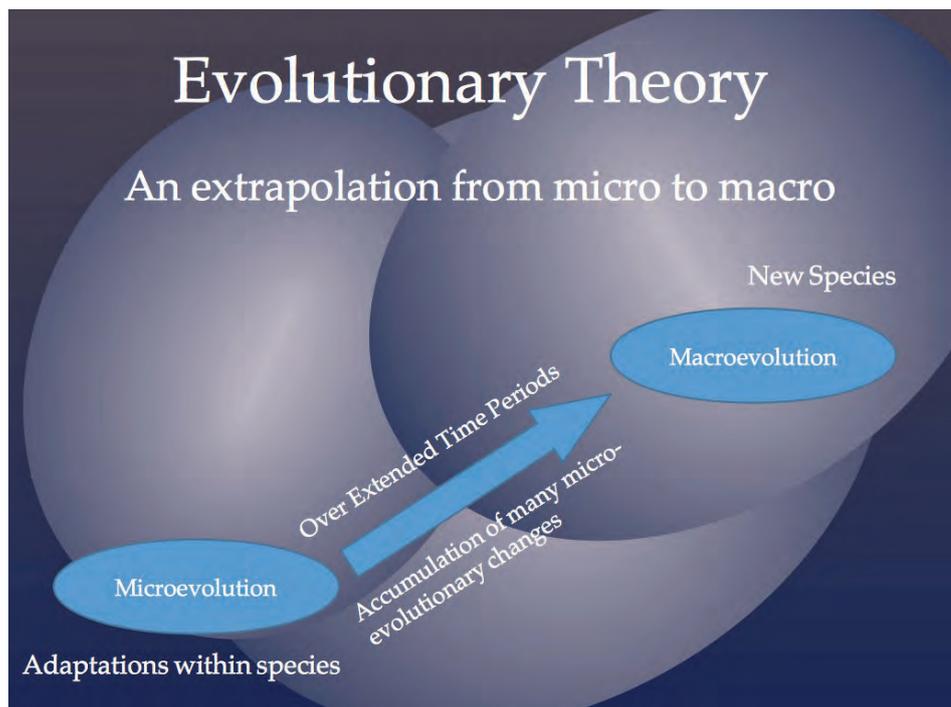
In these two examples of 'microevolution', there is no change of species. The dogs are still dogs and the mosquitos remain mosquitos. Microevolution is undoubtedly observed in the populations of living creatures.

'**Macroevolution**' can be used to refer to any evolutionary change from one species to another. Examples of macroevolution, if observed, could include the transition from invertebrate animals into fish, from a land creature into a whale, or from apes into people. The theory of the evolution of species postulates an extrapolation from observable microevolution to long timeframe macroevolution, through which new and more complex species are generated (see diagram).

The observed diversity of organisms and the anatomical similarities between both living and fossilised species are used as evidence to support this extrapolation. However, the same evidence strongly supports the work of a powerful and wise Creator. Proponents of the evolution of species interpret the data they observe as indicating macroevolution has taken place in the past and continues to do so at present. Those who reject this theory see a lack of conclusive evidence for macroevolution with many recognising the ability of living organisms to adapt as being indicative of complex and marvellous design.

### The Origin of Human Life

The theory of evolution makes no attempt to explain the origin of the first



life form(s) on this earth that, it is posulated, over long time periods evolved into the first humans; whereas the Bible is very clear about the beginning of all life and of the origin of mankind. The first man Adam was made from the dust of the ground: *'The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being'* {Gen 2:7}. The first woman Eve was formed from the man's body: *'So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man'* {Gen 2:21-22}.

### The teaching of the church

The Reformed Confessions reflect the clarity of Scripture with respect to the origin of mankind<sup>1</sup>. The Westminster Larger Catechism (17) asks: "How did God create man?" The answer which is given is: *"After God had made all other creatures, he created man male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground, and the woman of the rib of the man, endued them with living, reasonable and immortal souls; made them after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and dominion over the creatures; yet subject to fall"*.

However, just because the church has historically understood the Bible to teach that our first ancestors, Adam and Eve, were created by unique supernatural acts of God does not necessarily and automatically mean that the church has been correct in her interpretation.

Some will point to the medieval church having (supposedly) taught that the earth was flat before Christopher Columbus' voyages to the 'new world', although there is little or no evidence for this suggestion<sup>2</sup>. Others may highlight the observations of Galileo who, following the earlier helio-centric (sun-centered) theory of Copernicus, was opposed both by the scientific community of his day and by the church. We now know that the earth, like the other planets in this solar system, rotates around the sun and that the Bible presents a view of solar motion from the perspective of a person observing from the frame of reference of the earth e.g. Ps 19:5-6.

Some Christians today have sincerely questioned whether there really is a

dichotomy (a separation or chasm) between the theory of evolution of mankind and the origin of mankind as revealed in Scripture. Whilst it is true that many atheists are convinced that evolution and belief in a Divine Creator are irreconcilable<sup>3</sup>, scientific writers like Denis Alexander<sup>4</sup> and Darrel Falk<sup>5</sup> maintain that there is compatibility between evolutionary biology and Bible-believing Christianity. The deep concern of these men of integrity and conviction has been expressed by Biblical theologian Bruce Waltke in the following way: *"If the data is overwhelmingly in favour of evolution, to deny that reality will make us a cult ... some odd group that is not really interested in interacting with the world. And rightly so, because we are not using our gifts and trusting God's providence that brought us to this point in our awareness"*<sup>6</sup>.

No sincere Christian desires to bring the gospel, the church, and most importantly our Lord's name into disrepute or ridicule by maintaining as true something which has been clearly shown to be false. We should seek to avoid foolishness by becoming wise, knowing that true wisdom glorifies God. However we know from Scripture that the wisdom of God appears to fallen humanity as foolishness and weakness (1 Cor 1:25) because since the Fall, men naturally love darkness more than light (John 3:19).

### The scientific method and past events

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus Christ, being fully God, took on human flesh when He became a man, being conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary. Scripture reveals that Jesus died and was raised back to life and that those who have faith in Christ as their Lord and Saviour have eternal life now.

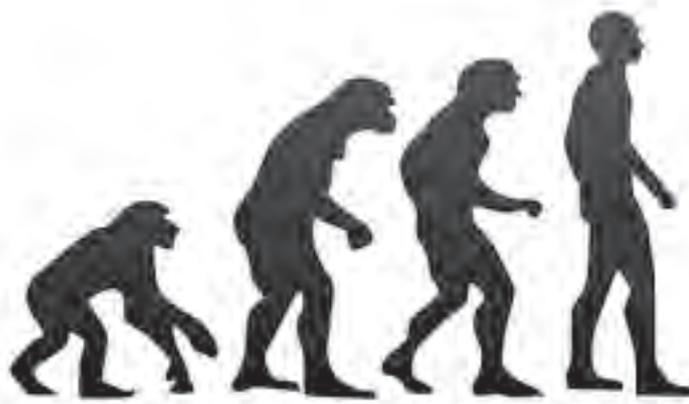
None of these truths are scientifically (i.e. empirically) testable; although we have multiple eyewitness testimonies recorded in the Bible. Neither is any theory of the origin of mankind scientifically testable, although we have God's witness of the past events of the creation of Adam and Eve. As human beings, we cannot go backwards in time and observe historical events.

The human mind has been irrevocably affected by the fall so that we can never be absolutely confident that our interpretation of the world around us is correct (e.g. Rom 1:21). This is especially the case with observations which are used to reconstruct models and theories of past processes and events. The only completely reliable witness we have for past events is the Bible. God has chosen, in His goodness, to give us accurate information about the origin of mankind in the first two chapters of Genesis. Even if in the future there seems to be 'clear' evidence for the macroevolution of species (including even mankind), this would not prove an evolutionary origin; merely give greater credibility to a theory.

### The testimony of Scripture

Both the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul (Matt 19:4-6; 1 Tim 3:24, 1 Cor 15:22,45,47) viewed the Genesis creation account as actual history, not myth, legend or parable. Christ and Paul could readily have made reference to evolution as it was a human idea which was known at that time. By the sixth century BC the philosopher Anaximander of Miletus had taken up already existing evolutionary ideas and had suggested that life first evolved from a pre-biotic soup with the aid of sunlight<sup>7</sup>.

However, in contrast to evolutionary theories, the Scriptures describe a 'de novo' (latin 'from new') creation of the



*“If the Word of God reveals truths to us that seem difficult or even impossible to reconcile, either with what we see today or with the interpretation of observable data, then we are wise if we believe what God has said rather than lean on our own understanding.”*

first two human beings. Adam and Eve are presented in the Bible as having no previous ancestors. They subsequently reproduce ‘after their kind’ (e.g. Gen 5:1-5; Luke 3:23-38), resulting in the propagation of the entire human race (Acts 17:26).

Men and woman are both made in the image of God and are therefore distinct from the animals (e.g. Gen 1:27, Ps 8:4-8, 1 Cor 11:7, James 3:9-10). Mankind has been given a spirit nature which enables us, but not other creatures, to worship God (e.g. John 4:24). Mankind alone was created with rational intelligence and we have been given the ability to reason and to invent in ways far beyond the capability of animals. For example God says to man “come let us reason together” (Isa 1:18). The ability to think and to communicate conceptually enables us to understand our own origin, our nature and God’s purpose for mankind’s existence. We have also been created as ‘free moral agents’ who are held accountable by our Creator for the decisions we make. In Genesis 2:17

God says to Adam “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

The Bible reveals that there was no death until after man sinned. However the theory of evolution of mankind requires death over thousands of generations of creatures who were the supposed ancestors of the human race. The process leading to death generally involves some or all of the following: pain, suffering, shedding of blood, disease, accidents and violence. The Bible presents death as an enemy, a curse, the power of the devil (Gen 2:16,17; 3:17-19; 1 Cor 15:26,51-57; Heb 2:14,15; Rev 21:4;22:3). Death and dying are not compatible with God’s description of his completed creation as being ‘very good’ (Gen 1:31).

In light of the above Scriptural evidence, the theory of the evolution of mankind is therefore not compatible with the Bible. There is a true dichotomy between the Biblical revelation of God’s supernatural ‘de novo’ creative work and the idea that we have evolved from some pre-human creatures to become what we are today.

#### **Wisdom, foolishness and the reliability of Scripture**

If the Word of God reveals truths that seem to be, in our view, difficult or even impossible to reconcile, either with what we see today or with mankind’s interpretation of observable data, then we are wise if we believe what God has said rather than lean on our own understanding (Prov 3:5). In proclaiming the historical accuracy of the Scriptures we may seem like fools to the unbelieving world. However whilst we should not be foolish, we also should not fear looking so, because this may be, at times, the necessary consequence of upholding the truth (1 Cor 4:10).

The authority of Scripture as the inerrant Word of God and as reliable history is the underlying issue in the creation/evolution debate because the Bible plainly and clearly reveals the origin of mankind. The historical accuracy of the Bible underpins the gospel of the redemptive work of Christ (creation, fall, substitutionary atonement, resurrection, ascension, glorification). The gospel message of creation appears as foolishness to a world which prefers the darkness of a natural evolved origin for mankind to the light of God’s supernatural ‘de novo’ creative work. May our Creator and Redeemer continue to

grant courage to His church so that she is willing to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints

#### **Notes**

- 1 e.g. *Belgic Confession Article 14, Heidelberg Catechism Q&A6, Westminster Confession of Faith IV*
- 2 e.g. <http://www.strangenotions.com/did-the-church-teach-the-earth-was-flat/>
- 3 e.g. Aldous Huxley “It is clear that the doctrine of Evolution is directly antagonistic to that of creation, ... Evolution if consistently applied, makes it impossible to believe the Bible”. Charles Smith, former president of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism who said: “Evolution is atheism.” (*Evolution: Science False So-Called*, 16th Ed., p. 87).
- 4 Author of the book “*Creation or Evolution – do we have to choose?*”
- 5 Author of the book “*Coming to peace with science*”
- 6 [BioLogos interview](#) with Bruce Waltke in 2009, released 24/03/10
- 7 Other Greek philosophers including Aristotle, Democritus and Epicurus were also evolutionary thinkers.

*Mr David Waldron is the minister in the Reformed Church of Christchurch (Cornwall St). He has degrees in physics and geophysics and theology.*

### **The Drift ...**

There is a drift away from God,  
a being at loose ends:  
The enemy’s awake and well,  
alert his bow he bends.

Oh Lord, what should your  
people do,  
but open eyes and ears?  
For they who live alert to God  
shall have no laming fears!

The Lord foretold of wars and  
‘quakes,  
of terror strikes galore.  
The love of many will grow cold,  
and time will be no more....

So stir us, Lord, to be alert,  
our lamps a-burning bright:  
The heav’nly Groom is on his  
way,  
and, “Have we seen our plight?”

*John Goris  
Wellington, January 2016*

# A PUBLIC SCANDAL

## *Christians concede far too much to secular morality*

**Peter Barnes**

As Western society becomes more bullying in its attitude towards Christians, there has been an increasing tendency on the part of many believers to be content with arguing for our space in the public square. There has been a reluctance to call on unbelievers to repent, and even an assumption that unbelievers cannot be expected to hold the same moral views as Christians.

It is true that without the Holy Spirit, the Christian message will simply seem to be foolishness to those who hear it (1 Cor. 2:14). However, God has written His moral law on the hearts of all human beings (Rom. 2:12-16), which means all have a responsibility to adhere to it.

Every human being is made in God's image, and has His law written on his or her heart, and testified to by conscience. If someone is guilty of murder or stealing, we expect to agree that such a person needs to be called to account. If someone is obnoxious, and pushes in ahead of others in a queue, we all dislike such behaviour for moral reasons.

No Christian argues: "We do not wish to impose Christian standards on unbelievers. There is a separation between church and state, and we do not want a theocracy." It is a universal given that murder and stealing are crimes to be punished, and that being pushy is somehow wrong.

A secular ethic is not neutral. If we say something is morally neutral, we are saying that it is allowable, and that will be heard as saying it is therefore moral. It will be put in the category of subjective likes and dislikes, along with what

one thinks of beetroot and what is one's favourite colour.

God calls the nations to account in the Old Testament (e.g. Amos 1:1-2:3). Yahweh used the idolatrous and brutal Assyrians to chastise His own people of Israel (Isa. 10:5-7), but then judged the Assyrians for their pride (Isa. 10:15-19). In fact, Abimelech chastises Abraham (Gen. 20:9-11) and the pagan sailors were shocked that Jonah could flee his own God (Jonah 1:10). David committed adultery, tried to hide it with a murder, and then sought to deceive Israel, himself, and God until Nathan confronted him (2 Sam. 11-12). Calvin comments rightly: "If David had been a poor pagan, he would still have been inexcusable." C. S. Lewis pointed out that "there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football". All world views – whether theistic or atheistic – use the language of right and wrong, even when they are trying to deny that there is a right or wrong.

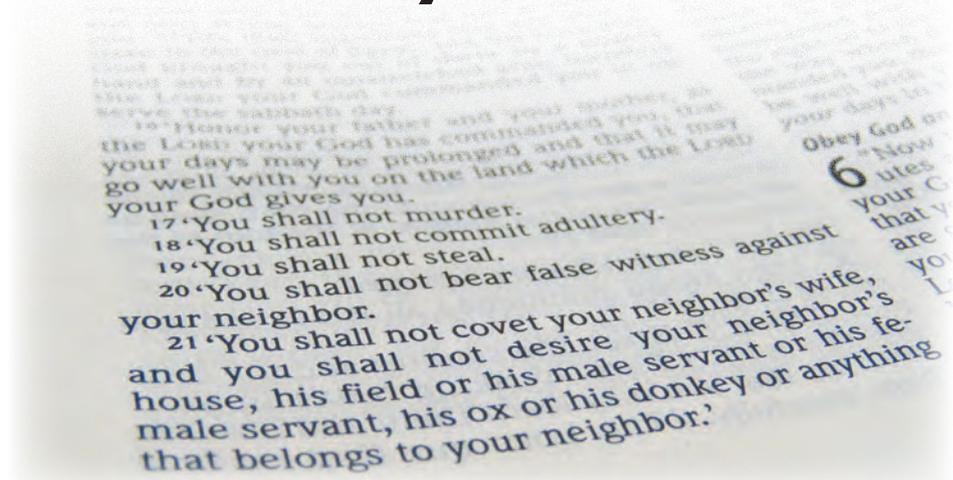
What this means is that Christians should have more confidence that in op-

posing same-sex marriage, for example, we are actually resonating with unbelievers to some considerable degree. We should pursue this line, and not be concessive. This is not for our good so much as for the good of society. Just as drug addicts is not helped when they are given more ice, so homosexuals are not helped when they get their own way regarding their sexuality.

Christian social policy ought to consist of rather more than demanding that we have the freedom to say some things in our own little corner of the public space. On the issue of same-sex marriage, we are saying: "This is wrong, and even unbelievers know it deep down, and society ought not to pander to the homosexual lobby but oppose them – for the good of society and for the good of sinners too." 'Repent' is not just a message of law; it is part of the proclamation of grace.

*Peter Barnes is editor of AP.*

*Faith in Focus has a reciprocal arrangement with AP (Australian Presbyterian)*



### ***Ecclesiastes***

by Douglas Sean O'Donnell.  
P&R, 2014.

**Reviewed by New Horizons editor  
Danny E. Olinger.**

Although the writing of commentaries on the book of Ecclesiastes has seemingly been without end in recent years, Douglas Sean O'Donnell's *Ecclesiastes* in the Reformed Expository Commentary series is to be commended. O'Donnell makes the case that the problem that the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes – called "Pastor Solomon" by O'Donnell – addresses is life in a fallen, sin-cursed world. Wisdom cannot change the reality that God has faithfully carried out his promised punishment upon Adam and his seed for Adam's transgression. O'Donnell writes, "Because of God's curse on creation (the consequences of the fall recorded in Genesis 3:14-15 are assumed throughout), in all our endeavors we cannot find much meaning or sustainable joy in this world or present age. It's vanity" (p. 9).

O'Donnell posits that the opening question of the Preacher, "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" (Eccl. 1:3), and its implied answer, "Nothing," provide an entrance into understanding the book as a whole. Death makes everything vain. But, if that is the case, how is one to live under the sun? All illusions of self-aggrandizement and all pretense of pride in this life must be abandoned. The answer is found in the Lord, in obediently trusting him (Eccl. 12:13).

O'Donnell helpfully adds that the goal of Ecclesiastes – trusting in the Lord and doing what he says – can only be reached by reading it through the lens of Jesus Christ. He writes that the way to read Ecclesiastes is to understand it as God's wisdom literature that contains a unified message that makes better (but

not perfect) sense in light of the crucified, risen, and returning Christ. In his death on the cross, Jesus redeemed us from the vanity that the Preacher wrestled with and suffered under. In his resurrection, Jesus restored meaning to our labor under the sun. In his return, Jesus will settle every injustice and elucidate all absurdity when he ushers those who fear the Lord into the glories of the living God.

God's perfected wisdom is found in Christ, the wonderful counselor. Jesus is the divine resolution. He is the righteous one who conquered all unrighteousness

through his death and resurrection, and, as such, he is the meaning of this life. As O'Donnell puts it, the lesson of Ecclesiastes is to turn from drinking out of broken cisterns that hold no water to drinking from the fount of living waters that is found in Christ. But, before one comes to the living waters that Christ offers, one must first walk through the waterless wilderness where the things of this creation, such as wisdom (Eccl. 1), pleasure and work (Eccl. 2), fame and power (Eccl. 4), wealth (Eccl. 5), and family and health (Eccl. 6) seek to satisfy. The only water that quenches one's thirst forever is to drink from the Savior, the one in whom a spring wells up to eternal life.

New Horizons, July 2016

### ***'From the Mouth of God'***

**A Review by Stephen Tracey  
Banner of Truth**

One old Scottish preacher on visiting members of his congregation would habitually ask, 'What portion of God's word did you read today?' It was a wise question for two reasons. First, it was an open question, it would lead to conversation either on the struggle to read the Bible, or on the fruit enjoyed in reading. There was no place for simply saying, 'Yes!' or 'No!' And secondly, the anticipation of

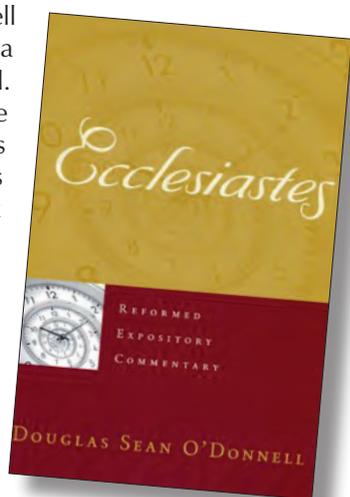
the pastoral question encouraged Bible reading. That pastor knew the place of Scripture in the Christian life.

One would not like to call the venerable Sinclair Ferguson an old Scottish preacher, but he is clearly cut from the same cloth. In the introduction to this wonderful book he states,

*The conviction that lay behind writing about the Bible in the first place was that God's word is itself the worker in the life of the individual Christian and in the fellowship and outreach of the church (xi).*

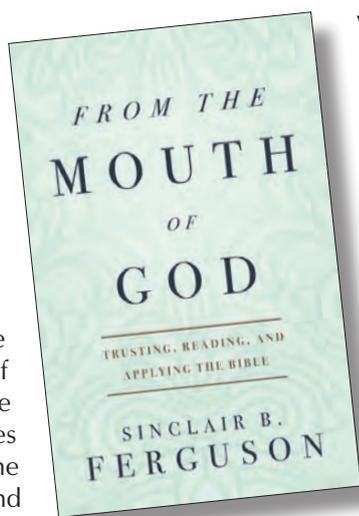
This book is a revised and enlarged edition of *Handle with Care!*, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1982. Ferguson sets out to answer three questions. First, 'Why is it that Christians throughout the ages have believed, with Jesus, that the Bible is God's mouth, from which his word is heard?' (x). The little qualification, 'with Jesus,' makes all the difference. In fact it is the essential strength of Ferguson's approach; he always turns our attention to Jesus. This section is no mere academic study of inspiration, accommodation, or concurrence. It is a study of these things, but always more. It stirs the affections for our Lord. This section clearly states a sound and orthodox doctrine of Scripture – but in it Ferguson exalts the Father and the Son and the Spirit. It is rich devotional theology.

The second question is 'How should we approach reading the Bible in order to gain a better understanding and appreciation of its message?' (x). This is the largest part of the book. It is a master class on how to interpret Scripture. Ferguson provides five keys, 1. Context; 2. Jesus; 3. The Unfolding Drama; 4. Biblical Logic; and 5. Literary Character. This fifth section, on literary character, is then expanded to explain all the major genres of Scripture: prose, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, epistles, and visions. It is like a refresher course on exegetical theology. And it is very refreshing. More than that, at times it provides a glimpse into Ferguson's approach to exegesis. The book is packed with preacher-style examples. While the book is not a homiletics book, incidentally it provides profound



homiletical help. There are nuggets of insight into parables and narratives and gospels, as well as extended examples of approaching the book of Ruth. Not that we think everyone should want to preach the way Sinclair Ferguson preaches. In the best preacher tradition, however, he is teaching the Bible-reader how to preach to self. You'll never have the accent, but you can apply the Bible just as pointedly.

Ferguson sees the dominant plot line of the whole Bible to be 'what God accomplishes through his Son, and in the power of the Spirit,' and consequently, 'from start to finish these sixty-six books tell a single, multifaceted story whose central character is Jesus Christ and what he does' (76). Of course, there are subplots within the plot. Ferguson calls these 'The Grand Narrative,' 'The Big Picture,'



and 'The Plot Line' (76). He looks at the various types of literature in Scripture and teaches us how to approach them. We are steered gently away from misguided and wrong interpretation, while all the while he picks up portions of Scripture and sweetly presses home his point. It is a kind of 'Look, do it this way, not that way.' And he always leads us to Jesus.

The third question is 'How can we do this (that is, read the Bible) in a way that is well-grounded in Scripture and that actually helps us get to know the message of the Bible better?' (x).

Using Scripture, Ferguson shows how to put all this to use. From 2 Timothy 3:16-17 he explains how Scripture is 'profitable.' From the Parable of the Sower he reminds us that the heart of the matter is the disposition of our heart. There must be ploughing, rooting, and weeding.

This is a timely reprint of a wonderful book. The doctrine of the word of God written (and in particular of the inerrancy of Scripture) seems to be always passing through heavy squalls. From the charge that Princeton men invented inerrancy, to the recent controversy over the views of Peter Enns, we seem to be buried under four feet of heavy snow. The publication of this book is like the arrival of a friendly plough guy. With a few sensible passes he clears your yard. Ferguson's pastoral sense makes this an eminently readable book. His theological skill makes this a profoundly helpful book.

This is a great book. It is systematic theology, New Testament theology, Old Testament theology, hermeneutics, homiletics, all wrapped up in faithful, godly, pastoral expression. This is pastoral practice at its very best.

*This review is from Ordained Servant, the online magazine of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, May 2015. Stephen J. Tracey is Pastor of Lakeview OPC in Rockport, Maine.*

## Students for the Ministry

**John Haverland and Michael Willemse**

### **RTC Visit**

In May of this year we made our annual visit to the Reformed Theological College as Deputies for Students to the Ministry. The College is working hard to make more of their courses available by distance education as students are reluctant to relocate to pursue four years of theological education. Three units have been changed to intensives. These are often taught with four weeks of distance education comprising of online lectures, readings and forums followed by a concentrated week of lectures at the college. This format makes these courses more accessible to certain students and some of our students in New Zealand have already taken advantage of these. Another three or four courses

will move to this mode of delivery over the next 18 months or so. We have a number of men in the RCNZ who have not yet formally begun ministry training but who have already been doing ministry courses at the RTC. This is helpful to them as they consider whether God is calling them to ministry and to the churches in their evaluation of the suitability of these men.

The changes at the RTC mean that theological studies have never been more accessible for the average church member. We encourage you to take advantage of one or more of the courses on offer. It can only be positive for our churches when our members dig deeper into God's Word!

Rev. Michael Flinn has been teaching the Old Testament Foundations (online) course in the first semester of 2016 and will do so again in the second semester. The faculty spoke very appreciatively of

his work and are thankful for this. Janice Reid, while she was on furlough in NZ, began some work in further developing one of John de Hoog's online courses and has almost completed this work. The RTC were also very appreciative of her contribution.

The college has recently appointed a Discipleship Training Coordinator who will begin to develop and coordinate the online discipleship materials. These courses are intended to provide resources which can be used by churches at any time to train and grow church members. These could be useful tools for our churches.

During our four days at the college, we sat in on classes taught by each of the permanent faculty members and were again impressed by the academic standard, the quality of the presentation and the level of interaction from the students.

The RTC currently has 45 students: 25 on campus and 20 by distance. These figures include 13 ordination students. A reasonable number of students are studying through one of the distance modes (on line / extensive / intensive / Skype.) This makes the student body on campus relatively small although some of the classes have around ten students. We pray that on-campus numbers will swell when the college moves its lectures to a Melbourne campus in 2017. Next year three RCNZ Ministry Students will begin studies on-campus at the RTC – André Posthuma, James Hyslop and Josh Meinsma.

### **Current students for the ministry**

*Josh Flinn* comes from the Reformed Church of North Shore. He is married to Hannah and they have a son, Asher. Josh has just completed three years of study at MARS attaining his M.Div. He and his family returned to NZ in June this year and in July began a vicariate in Nelson under the supervision of Rev. Daniel Wilson.

*Graeme Zuidema* comes from the Reformed Church of Bishopdale. He will finish his studies at the end of 2016 graduating, Lord willing, with a B.Th/B.Min. He hopes to do a vicariate in NZ beginning in February 2017. He is married to Amanda and they have two children. *André Posthuma* is an elder in the Bishopdale congregation and is currently doing his second year of internship in Bishopdale. André and his wife, Grace, have one child. André is a trained teacher and is in his second year of distance studies and will do two further years at the RTC.

*James Hyslop* is married to Amy and they are expecting their first child. He has completed a B.A. through Otago University, is serving as an elder in the Dunedin congregation, and is serving an internship year as well as doing distance studies through the RTC. He will do three further years of on-campus study at the RTC for an M.Div.

*Braam Jansen van Rensburg* is married to Jaimee and they have three children. Braam did a B.Th through Laidlaw Bible College while he was part of the Presbyterian Church of NZ. He subsequently came to the conclusion that he could not seek ordination in the Presbyterian Church and so contacted us about the possibility of heading towards ministry in the RCNZ. He and his family moved to Pukekohe in May 2015 and became members of the church there and Braam has recently been elected as an elder. Pukekohe Session supports Braam's desire to enter into ministry; if the Auckland presbytery also supports his desire he will, Lord willing, be placed in a vicariate in our churches in 2017.

*Nathaniel Rademaker* is from the Reformed Church of Palmerston North and is married to Sharon. They have four children. Nathaniel has received session's and presbytery's support for his desire to train for pastoral ministry. In July 2016 he began three years of study towards an M.Div at MARS.

*Josh Meinsma* is from the Reformed Church of Hamilton. He is married to Heidi and they have four children. Josh has received support from his home church and from Auckland Presbytery for his desire to train for ministry. He is currently doing some self-driven Greek study and will begin four years of study towards a B.Th/B.Min at the RTC in 2017.

*Daniel Flinn* is an elder in the Reformed Church of Palmerston North, is married to Candace and they have eight children. He has received session's and presbytery's support and hopes to formally begin study for ministry sometime in the future.

We have noticed an encouraging trend in recent times amongst men preparing for ministry. Two of the students listed above – André Posthuma and Josh Meinsma – have a particular passion for home mission work and are training with a view towards ordination as home mis-

sionaries. Their course of study has been structured to reflect this, taking in all four of the Evangelism / Missions subjects offered by the RTC. We believe that this is a timely development. We have been praying that the Lord would not only raise up sufficient men to supply our pulpits but that he would provide additional men who could be used in church plants and outreach work.

### **Vicars**

*Ryan Sparks*, who studied through Covenant Theological Seminary, completed his vicariate at Bucklands Beach, sustained his examinations and was ordained to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments in Bucklands Beach in May 2016. Ryan is married to Jenni and they have three children.

*Albert Couperus*, who studied through MARS, completed his vicariate in Hamilton, sustained his preliminary examination and has accepted a call to the church plant in Rangiora (Bishopdale). Albert is married to Hanneke and they have four daughters.

*Aaron Warner*, who studied with Albert at MARS, has been doing a vicariate in Dovedale and is married to Audra and they have four children – one of them kiwi-born.

If all of the men mentioned above come through their studies as planned, we will be seeking to place two vicars per year in 2017, 2019 and 2020 as well as a further vicar in 2021. There are currently five vacancies in the RCNZ (as well as a church plant with no minister) and one minister will retire in March 2017. A further minister will reach retirement age in 2019 and two further men in 2020. Although the current situation with students is encouraging there are not yet sufficient men to fill our empty pulpits over the next five or so years – let alone begin new church planting works. Please continue to pray that the Lord would raise up more pastors for our churches.

# A day at the One-Day Synod

## John van Dyk

It was early morning as the car sped along the country road from Auckland to Pukekohe. The sky was dark and grey, the air cold, and raindrops spattered against the windscreen. Our driver peered upwards through the window and remarked, his voice matching the gloominess of the conditions, "Good day to have a synod." And he was right. The Psalmist tells us it is good and pleasant when brothers dwell in unity, and this sentiment characterised the day for the delegates at what was, arguably, our churches' most unusual synod.

The need for this special synod is by now well known. The collapse of sixty-seven finance companies in New Zealand between 2006 and 2012 was bound to have fallout and not just for out-of-pocket investors. The Government swung into action and introduced sweeping changes to the regulation of the financial markets, including superannuation funds.

Our own Emeritus Fund, which provides retirement and insurance benefits to our ministers and missionaries had until 1 December 2016 to comply with these changes or shut up shop. The fund

was established in 1971 out of a joint effort with the then Reformed Churches of Australia and, through churches' contributions and investment earnings, by 2015 had increased to a reported level of \$2.1m.

When the tightened regulations first came to light, the trustees of the Emeritus Fund thoroughly investigated the possibility of compliance. It quickly became apparent that the obstacles could not realistically be overcome. There were obstacles such as transitional costs of compliance running into six figures; the requirement for a professional independent trustee who would exercise a high level of control over investment policy; a significant burden of time, responsibility and liability to the trustees that would make it almost impossible for them to discharge their responsibilities on a voluntary basis.

## Laying an old friend to rest

The trustees recommended to the Synodical Interim Committee, therefore, that the Emeritus Fund be wound up and a new committee formed to assess alternative vehicles for providing retirement and insurance benefits to our ministers and missionaries. Winding up would have been straightforward had it not been

for a clause in the Trust Deed governing the Emeritus Fund which stipulated that the fund could only be wound up by a synod.

So a synod it was. But still not straightforward. The Trust Deed also required that, on winding up, annuities (pensions) be purchased for each minister and missionary equivalent to the entitlement they would otherwise have received from the fund. However, there is no longer a market for annuities in New Zealand. The Trust Deed, therefore, needed to be amended to transfer each minister's and missionary's accumulated entitlement to a new fund.

Superannuation law specialist Mike Woodbury, a partner of the 'Big Three' law firm Chapman Tripp, was engaged to draft the amendments. Mr Woodbury was on hand to guide the delegates through the changes and see to it that all the documents that needed to be executed were signed on the dotted line. One wag was later heard to say that a lawyer at a synod is not usually a good thing; but Mr Woodbury's expert advice engendered confidence in the correctness of the process. The synod became something of an ink-fest as, during the course of the business, five deeds to wind



Dave Bryant and John Haverland checking the credentials of the delegates.



Martin Leenders – Emeritus Trustee

up the fund and a further twenty-one to establish a replacement retirement savings vehicle were signed.

### **A day at the synod**

Winding up the former Emeritus Fund is only half of the story. But before we turn to the replacement fund, let's put the business aside for a moment and hear something of the meeting. The folks at Pukekohe were excellent hosts and they deserve to hold synods on a regular basis. Truly. Delegates were treated to English tea shop style morning and afternoon teas, and a mouth-watering two-course lunch. Facilities are excellent with a spacious auditorium, fellowship hall and foyer, and plenty of meeting rooms. Attendees were whisked off to the airport or to their overnight accommodation with friendly, good-natured efficiency. Nothing was too much trouble.

Delegates drafted in the moderamen from the previous synod and, therefore, were presided over by the Reverends Peter Kloosterman and Robert van

Wichen, with scribes Mr John van Dyk and the Rev. Michael Willemse. Being a 'special synod', it was called in addition to the usual three-yearly national meetings, for a single purpose, and on this occasion for a single day. Because of the financial or remunerative nature of the business, some churches – six in all – sent a deacon as one of their delegates. The trustees of the Emeritus Fund were also in attendance.

### **A phoenix rises from the ashes**

The second half of the agenda saw the proposal of a replacement retirement savings vehicle. As the investigation of such a vehicle was beyond the remit of the Emeritus Fund trustees, a separate panel, the Future Retirement Savings Committee, had been appointed. Strange as it may seem, the new committee was populated with the same personnel who administered the Emeritus Fund, but, believe me, these were the people who were right for the job. At the outset of the synod they were thanked for their

presentation of thorough and clear material. It seems only fitting to acknowledge them by name: Colin Young, Sarah Bryant, Wayne Kingham, Martin Leenders, Jacob Ploeg and Michael Willemse.

The committee investigated the possibility of employing KiwiSaver as a possible alternative but it was discounted as it was found that overseas missionaries and some ministers coming from overseas would be ineligible, and there is less flexibility for early withdrawal. It was concluded that a master trust would be the best option and this was recommended. A master trust is a relatively efficient savings vehicle that allows access to wholesale investments at comparatively low fees. Savings are not locked in until retirement age, instead leaving-service benefits can be paid at any age, allowing the same flexibility as with the old fund.

The committee carefully considered several master fund providers and recommended SuperLife Limited. Michael Chamberlain, a co-founder of SuperLife, was in attendance and spoke about the



*Lunchtime! – one of the most important parts of the day.*



*The delegates from our churches.*



*Colin Young – Emeritus Trustee*



*Lunch preparation – a brilliant effort by the ladies of Pukekohe.*

benefits of master trusts and of appointing his company. Delegates availed themselves of the opportunity to ask questions and found Mr Chamberlain sincere and convincing, also when he was questioned about ethical business practices.

In future, churches will provide retirement savings in respect of their ministers and missionaries at the rate of eight per cent of their stipend. For most ministers, half of these payments will go into KiwiSaver, with the other half going to the newly established "The Reformed Churches of New Zealand Emeritus Savings Fund" managed by SuperLife. Each minister will have his own SuperLife account, similar to the practice employed by KiwiSaver providers. For the next eight years or so, the churches' payments to SuperLife will be funded by a surplus accrued in the former Emeritus Fund.

On retirement, ministers will be entitled to receive the balance in their accounts from both KiwiSaver and SuperLife. Regarding the latter, they can choose to receive a lump sum or a regular payment until their balance is exhausted. The estimated retirement payout for a minister with 25 years' service, subject to a raft of assumptions,

perhaps enough to purchase a modest house in Dunedin (hint, hint) – or a two-car garage in Auckland.

Churches will also pay the equivalent of one per cent of their minister's stipend to SuperLife for insurance cover. On a minister's death prior to retirement or total and permanent disablement prior to retirement, substantial entitlements are payable.

A new Emeritus Savings Fund Committee was established to oversee the day-to-day running of the new fund, and the interim Future Retirement Savings Committee was discharged with thanks.

The only recommendation the committee made that wasn't adopted related to the entitlement of ministers leaving for a non-sister church or exiting the ministry. The committee recommended that in such cases the minister should receive a reduced payout and then only after ten years' service. Some felt that the full balance contributed by the churches in respect of the minister should be paid out, however the majority view prevailed which was that the overseeing committee, in consultation with the churches, has the discretion to increase the payout up to the full balance based on the merits of the particular case.

### **What's it all about?**

Perhaps in future this special synod will come to be known as The One-Day Synod, The Super(annuation) Synod or The Deacons' Synod. Two aspects of the meeting stand out for me.

First is the high regard in which the office of minister, and the ministers and missionaries themselves, are held. There is a recognition that their calling is an honourable one, that they sacrifice much to pursue it, and that it is proper for churches to provide for them in their retirement.

Second is the call to hold the eternal perspective before us as we plan for the future. The Reverends John Haverland and Peter Kloosterman both spoke of this in their respective opening and closing addresses. In Psalm 17:15 the writer says, "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake [after the grave], I shall be satisfied with your likeness." This, our eternal security, is infinitely more valuable and dependable than any provision we can make for ourselves.



*Josh Flinn – my first Synod*





He split the rocks in the wilderness  
And gave them abundant drink like the  
ocean depths.

Psalm 78:15

