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Christian
Character:
growing
in
godliness

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All correspondence regarding editorial
content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
Email: walterwalraven@icloud.com
website: www.faithinfocus.org.nz

Editorial Assistant:

Mrs Joanna Voschezang

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Editorial

I am sure that you have heard statements such as, “he certainly is a character” or, “she has a strong character” or, “I don’t like that character!” There are so many ways in which the word character can be used, one only needs to have a look in a dictionary to find that out. It can refer to a person who is amusing, jovial, nice; it can describe behaviour or temperament, or refer to an individual.

Another way in which I have heard it used is to describe what someone is made of. “He has real character” or “he has real mettle” – able to cope well with difficulties or face a demanding situation in a spirited and resilient way. And I think we all know people that fit this description.

When I was growing up, good character was very important. How you were raised, who your family was, where you lived and went to school, were all contributing factors that had some bearing on how society assessed your worth. Being an asset to society was important. Having good character was instilled in us in the home and at school from a young age. And it was a time when the rod of discipline was used to drive away foolishness without government interference. I remember my Dad advising me about not hanging around with “that boy”, or “going out with that girl ...”. He tried to instill in us to be discerning about people’s character and therefore avoid potential grief. And I have always been very thankful for that.

However, as I look back in time, there was something missing! And that was godly nurture in the home. But of course, you wouldn’t expect that in a home where the Bible only sat on the shelf gathering dust.

When the Lord in His grace took hold of me, He showed me something completely foreign by bringing me into fellowship with Christians who took their calling very seriously regardless of whether they were parents or single. There was a serious emphasis on growth in godliness which was not only an outward manifestation. The Scriptures proclaim, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor 5:17). We should present ourselves to God with transformed and renewed minds and our bodies as living and holy sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2).

Growing in godliness is not an option but a must, it is for every Christian without exception. Each of us need to become more like our Lord Jesus Christ and show forth His character in how we live. He showed forth the fruit of the Spirit in perfection – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and loved His Father, with all His heart, soul, mind and strength. It is a tall order for us all, but we must strive to live a sanctified life and present a sanctified character for His glory.

Our contributors write from very helpful perspectives for our edification. What it is, how it happens and tools to help. *S.D.G.*

Featured in this issue:

Mr Paul Archbald considers what God desires from His people.

Mr David Stares looks at whether character is dependent on the individual.

Mrs Joanna Voschezang examines building Christian character by using the Proverbs.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand 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 New Zealand. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

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PAUL N. ARCHBALD

Who you are and how you show it

The subject of Christian character has been recognised as being of great importance throughout Christian history. Already in the Old Testament believers were commanded to “keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him (Deut. 8:6). The New Testament developed this subject further, as we shall see. Early Christian writings such as *The Shepherd of Hermas* (140-154 AD) and *The Didache* (probably also 2nd century) included instruction on it. We could also think of the famous medieval work by Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (1418-1427). In more recent times, there are many fine books on the importance of developing a Christian character that displays holy living: John Owen’s *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* and *The Mortification of Sin*; J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*; Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*; J.I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*; and *The Christian Life* by Sinclair Ferguson.

When we speak of someone’s character, however, there are two ways in which we could be looking at it. We might mean, “What is the underlying character of this person?” Or we might mean, “How does this person customarily act?” The two questions are related, but they are not identical. That is certainly so for the Christian’s character, which has an “in principle” aspect as well as an in-practice aspect. The Christian has both a new and an old nature – and a mighty big struggle between the two! Romans 7 makes that very clear.

The basis of the Christian character

We must consider the basis or source of our Christian character, for if we do not understand this, we will not know how to define it or how to be motivated to develop it. Fundamentally, the Christian character comes from God, through Christ. In the beginning,

God made man in His image – in righteousness, holiness and knowledge of the truth (Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:10). When man fell, he lost those aspects of the image of God. Now they can only be returned through the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:49). That is why the New Testament speaks of us being transformed into the likeness of Christ and conforming to His image (Romans 8:29). This transformation takes place through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18), working with the Word of God (Romans 12:2) which gives us true knowledge (Colossians 3:10). The Holy Spirit grants us the new birth, gives us the gift of faith and works in us to sanctify us progressively.

One of the implications of this is that we can only have and develop a Christian character by God’s enabling grace. We cannot create it by ourselves. We need to seek the Lord’s help for this constantly.

A second implication is that we ought to be thankful for every step forward in the process of sanctification – rather than patting ourselves on the back for resisting sin and growing in holiness.

A third implication is that our motive ought to be the glory of God that comes from us displaying His handiwork – His image and His restoring of it in us. Our motive certainly ought not to be the securing of a ticket to heaven by our own good works.

The inconsistent Christian character

Sadly, no matter how mature we are as Christians, we still have to wrestle with our old nature. We face the same struggle the apostle Paul describes in Romans 7:14ff. We have a new, Christian character and an old, very unchristian character. Because of the work of the Lord Jesus, we are regarded by God as if we had a completely Christian character. Because of the work of Word and

Christian character is impressed upon the whole person, motives, thoughts, feelings, words and deeds.

Spirit, our very *unchristian* character, tied up with our old nature, is being progressively put to death, so that the likeness of Christ shows through more and more. This is why there is a difference between our underlying character and the way we act – between the work of God to give us a new character and how we live it out.

Colossians 3 brings these two aspects together. The first four verses explain that the death and life of Christ have had a once-for-all effect upon us. We have died to sin because He died; we are alive to righteousness because He was raised from the dead; and our life will therefore be revealed with Christ at His return. However, we do not act upon this “in principle” reality as we should. Sanctification is still progressing

longsuffering, forgiveness and love. This kind of admonition is sometimes summed up this way: *Be what you are!*

It might not be a very happy second marriage if one party or the other kept on dwelling on their previous marriage, wishing for the “good old days,” noting their disappointment with their current partner. Yet that is often what we do, acting as if we were somehow better off when being conformed to the world. We could think of Israel complaining about manna in Numbers 11:1-6, viewing their harsh slavery in Egypt as a time of fish, cucumber and melons. It is essential for developing a Christian character that we remember what we have died to and what we are now alive to; what is slavery and what is freedom.

What the Christian character looks like

Assuming that you have been given a new identity in Christ, what is this character like? Some aspects of it will be seen only by the Lord. He alone knows all our motives. Are we doing what we do for His glory, out of love and fear of God? Out of gratitude? It is often hard for us to gauge our own motives. We can easily convince ourselves that our motives are nobler than they are in reality. Conversely, we can easily second-guess ourselves and conclude that our godly motives are self-serving. But the Lord knows. We can still examine ourselves and do our best, with the Lord’s help, to judge our inner motives and thoughts. Jesus’ explanation of the radical intent of the Law is brought out very clearly in the Sermon on the Mount. It is not enough to have merely an outward compliance with the Law. Christian character is impressed upon the whole person: motives, thoughts, feelings, words and deeds.

Of course, words and deeds are witnessed by others. Even then, they need to be interpreted. We may struggle at times to interpret our own words and deeds. Nevertheless, we examine ourselves with respect to motives, thoughts, feelings, words and deeds, because the Christian character is (or should be) displayed in all of them. Sanctification progressively changes the whole person – though some areas may see faster growth than others, and in some areas we may appear to stall for a while.

What we look for in our self-examination is described in many places in the Scriptures. We have already seen the description in Colossians 3. We could look at it in terms of the 10 commandments or the explication of them in the Sermon on the Mount. We could consider it in terms of becoming more



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in practice. The Lord uses means to carry out that work of sanctification. Most importantly, the Holy Spirit works in us by the Word, as mentioned. The Word of God supplies us with the motive to pursue holiness – gratitude for the saving work of Christ; a desire to be like the Lord Jesus, whom we love; a fear of God, that motivates us to take His commandments seriously. Colossians 3 therefore goes on to urge us to *consider* the members of our earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and greed. In other words, you have died to these things in principle, in Christ, therefore actually look at these sins according to this reality. You have laid aside the old self and put on the new self, therefore lay aside these sins and put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience,

like Christ – and therefore considering His character as revealed in the Scriptures. We could look at the “fruits of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23, in contrast to 5:19-21). 2 Peter 1:5-7 supplies another list of character-traits. We could also summarise it in terms of whole-hearted love of God and neighbour (Matthew 22:40). As mentioned, we are transformed by the renewing of our mind, through the knowledge we gain about Christian character in Scriptures such as these, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, on the ground of Christ’s work for us.

Developing Christian character

Given what has just been said about how we are transformed into the likeness of Christ, it should not be a matter of rocket-science to figure out how to grow in Christian character. Here are some suggestions, based on what we have seen in this study:

1. Since this character comes from the Lord, seek His help to develop it: pray for help.
2. Since it comes by the renewing of our mind, through Scripture, read and meditate upon God’s Word. It supplies our motives, the description of the Christian character, the exhortations to put off the old self and put on the new, and the warnings about the danger of living a lie. Specific areas where growth is slow, where struggles are fiercer, can be targeted. You can even place relevant Bible verses in places where you will see them every day, to help you remember.
3. Count your blessings. Thankfulness for God’s blessings, especially the gift of salvation, constitute a key part of our motivation for developing a Christian character.
4. Focus on the character of God. This is revealed in the Scriptures, which tell of His attributes and how they are displayed in His great and mighty works. Since the love and fear of God are also key motives, it is essential to learn what it means to know God in a close, personal relationship. As Jerry Bridges wrote, “So often we try to develop Christian character and conduct without taking the time to develop God-centred devotion. We try to please God without taking the time to walk with Him and develop a relationship with Him. This is impossible to do.”
5. Recognise the world for what it is. Hankering after the world is one of the biggest threats to developing a Christian character. Do you want to be conformed to the world or to Christ? We need to see the difference and commit ourselves to growing more and more apart from the world – while remaining in it. See

John 17:14-16 and Romans 12:2.

6. Practice regular self-examination. Ask yourself where you are being tempted to be conformed to the world. Consider where you are falling down in these six recommendations.

This may sound to you like six clichés. In Catechism classes, I would say that about 20% of the questions can be answered in much the same way: “Er, read the Bible? Pray? Go to church? Talk to other Christians?” So many of the answers look like clichés because we know them so well, but we don’t act on them as we should. So we need to have them repeated frequently.

When we hear things frequently, but fail to act on them, we often think that the fault lies in the strategy. If only someone can give us some other fool-proof method for



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developing a Christian character! But even if they could, we might fail to act on that one as well. We are commanded to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:14). That is something to act upon, not to ignore. If, that is, you want to develop a Christian character. That “putting on” is acted upon by the kind of things mentioned in the list above. Let’s get on with putting on – with the Lord’s help – instead of putting it off.

Mr Paul Archbald is a member of the Silverstream Reformed Church and an emeritus minister.

DAVID STARES

Your Nature, God's Nurture

I'm beautiful in my way 'cause God makes no mistakes,

I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way.

Don't hide yourself in regret, just love yourself, and you're set,

I'm on the right track, baby, I was born this way.

Born This Way, Lady Gaga

It is difficult to know whether art creates our culture, or whether it simply reflects it, but if you are looking for an artist who has both changed and reflected our culture, you need look no further than Lady Gaga. One of the notable gear changes in our culture's ethical conversations has to be her 2011 record-breaking hit 'Born This Way.'

It's a song that begins with a message that we can all agree with: that past cultures have been so focused on external appearance, and on altering our appearance for others. In this culture, the message, 'I'm beautiful in my way,' is a refreshing alternative, perhaps arising from common grace. But this is not the end of the song. Being 'this way' is not just talking about appearance, but desires and actions too! The message is: just like my appearance is something I should be content with, all my desires and actions are things about me that are beautiful and deserve acceptance.

Should Christians think this way? No.

Do we think this? *Often the answer is yes.*

In this article I am going to be taking aim at one of the places that we are most forgiving of sins: our own personality.

Let me begin by asking a question: *what sort of person are you?* If we were to go out into the street and ask that question, we might get a variety of answers. People might say that they are introverted or extroverted, cynical or optimistic, feisty or placid. All of those can be true and in a beautiful variety of combinations. In fact, this is precisely what we pray for our churches, don't we? We pray that our churches will be filled with people with all sorts of personalities! The church should be a living temple built of diverse and beautiful bricks!

So, again, what sort of person are you? Are you an extravert or an introvert? Do you tend to think or feel? Do you relate to

the world with bare observation or critical thinking? Are you open to new experiences or do you love what you know?

And how did you become this way?

For many of us, when we consider our own personality, we can trace aspects of ourselves back to the greatest influences in our lives: The people who raised us, the friends who we spent time with the most, perhaps even personal heroes that we sought to imitate. Our personality develops largely apart from our own planning.

In a sense, we were 'born this way.' Not because our personality is genetic, but because it developed quietly over time from influences we didn't even see. And the result is, we are who we are.

In many ways, your personality is beautiful. It makes you unique, it makes you a precious jewel in the crown of God. But isn't it also true that we are often blinded to the sin that hides itself in our personality? This is the devil in the details, not only in *Born This Way* but also in how we evaluate our own broken condition. Our sin hides in the nooks and crannies of our personality, slinking back into the shadows when we try to shine the light on it.

What can this look like?

It looks like the extravert who finds that they always need to be the centre of attention to be happy.

It looks like the introvert who finds excuses to avoid the assembly and fellowship of God's people.

It looks like the strong-willed person who finds that they are regularly in conflict with people.

It looks like the placid person who finds excuses not to stand up for what they believe in.

It looks like the critical thinker who always has something judgmental to say about the people around them.

It looks like the open-minded person who can't make definitive statements about right and wrong at all.

Is it wrong to be introverted or extraverted, strong-willed or placid, critical thinking or open minded? No. These terms, and many more, might describe the personality of a godly person. And yet, in all cases, sin can build a nest in our personality.

Which leads us to the ultimate question of this article: *Can we point to any aspect of our character and simply say that we are 'born this way,' or the popular religiously worded version, 'this is how God made me?'*

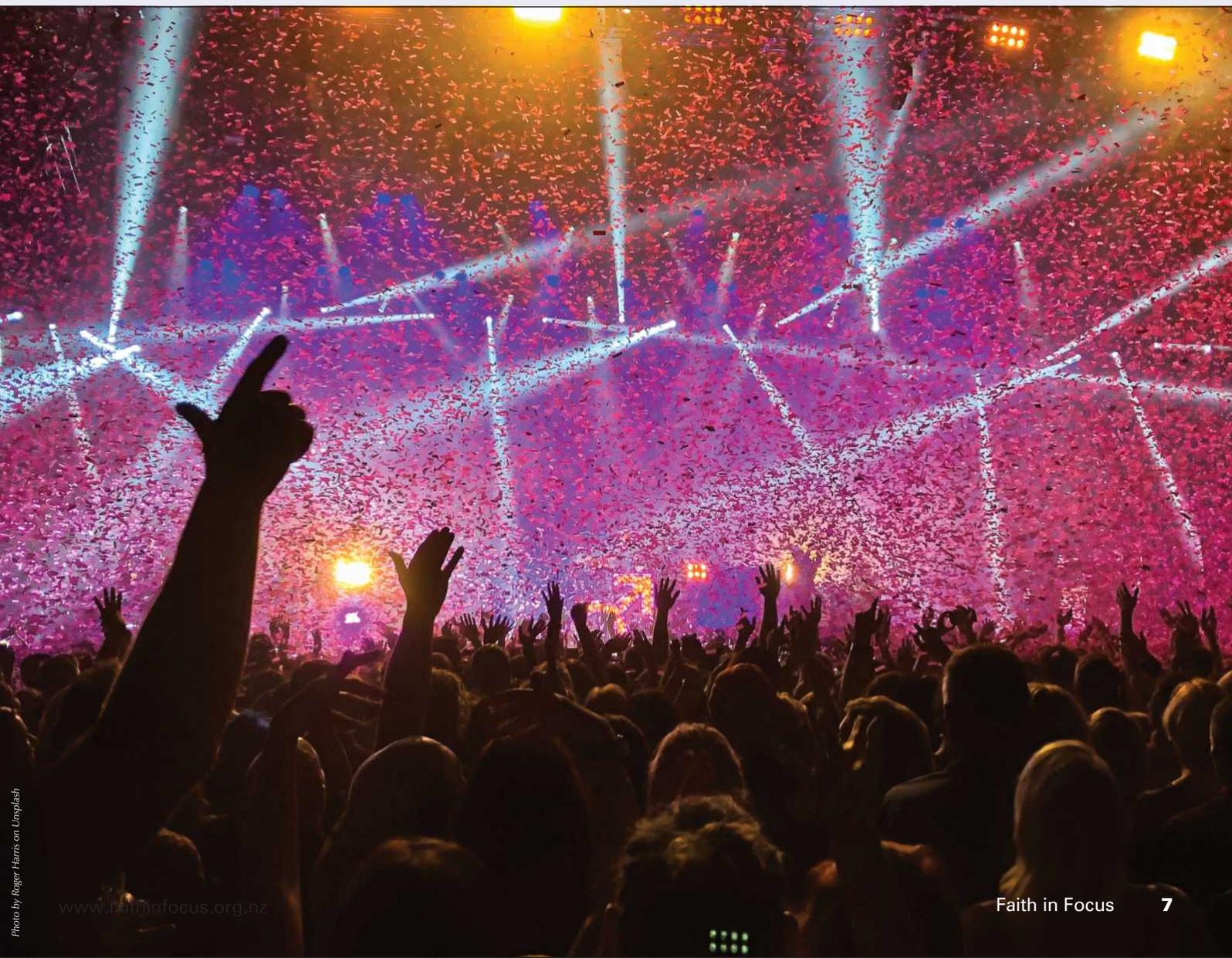
Well, what does the Bible say about this topic?

We have to understand that there is nothing to support the claim that God is happy with our spiritual condition just the way it is. We only need to look at passages

like *1 Thessalonians 4:2-3* which says, "For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification." (NASB) In this passage, Paul is telling the Thessalonians that they need to progress in their lives of holiness. Rather than living like Gentiles, they need to live a life in line with the commands of God. God's will is not that they would be slack with their progress in holiness, but God's will is that they would continue to grow in their obedience and holiness.

Now, how do we grow? It is by the power of God. *Philippians 2:13* says "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." This means that God, by His Spirit, is working in your heart so that you will do his will, obeying his commands. But he doesn't just change your actions, he changes your heart, your will, so that you want to do what he commands.

Is God content to leave any part of us unchanged?



Today if you look at your character and see things there that you wish were gone, know that God intends to root those things out of you, and that you are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

What we find is that God’s intent is not to leave any part of us as we are. What we find in *1 Thessalonians 5:23* is that Paul prays, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The amazing picture of the plan of God for us is of entire sanctification. We look forward to the day when God will ensure that we are fully blameless, in all of our faculties. This is not completed in this life, but the project of sanctifying our whole person certainly begins and progresses in this life. These changes include the sins which have hidden themselves behind our personality.

Perhaps we secretly think that God isn’t powerful enough to change us! Maybe we look at ‘how we are’ and doubt that God can repair what seems to be permanently built-in to our hearts!

But in *1 Peter 1:18* we read that we have been redeemed “from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers.” What is he speaking about there? He is talking about “the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance.” (*1 Peter 1:14*) What Peter is saying is that we certainly do inherit our sinful way of life from our parents. Not only our sinful nature, but we can also inherit character and personality traits that we don’t choose. But the hope of the gospel is that God’s power to change us is not limited.

We can and we must trust that God can repair what is broken in our personalities.

So, do you want that repair to happen in your life in specific ways? Here’s how:

1) Live in the Gospel

You need to make sure that you know and bask in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel tells us that even though we are sinful by nature and in what we do, God loves us anyway because of Jesus. People who understand that God saves sinners aren’t afraid to admit their sin. Living in the gospel means that we can be honest about who we are and what we do, while at the same time living in hope because of God’s grace. It also provides us with the motivation to live for him!

2) Prepare for battle

Empowered and motivated by the gospel, we need to get ready to fight our spiritual battles. We need to pray (*Matthew 6:13*; *Luke 22:40*). We need to keep our heads up and our eyes open (*1 Peter 5:8*). We need to put our armour on (*Ephesians 6:11*). We need to be making the full use

of the means of grace that God gives. We need to be in worship, we need to be in his word, we need to be coming to his table, we need to be praying to him. In these ways God prepares us to fight our battles against sin.

3) Battle in God’s strength

This is an important last step. We don’t prepare for battle and then expect the battle to fight itself. We need not only to be ready, but, resting in Christ, prepared and empowered by God’s word and spirit, we must resolve to do battle against our sins. We fight against our pride, our selfishness, our anger, our lust, our idolatry, our fear of people, our lack of love, and whatever else might feel natural to us. We go to war in God’s strength through Christ.

So, today if you look at your character and see things there that you wish were gone, know that God intends to root those things out of you, and that you are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” (*Ephesians 2:10*)

Mr David Stares is the minister in the Masterton Reformed Church.

JOANNA VOSCHEZANG

Character in Proverbs

My husband and I enjoy taking personality tests for fun, partly because it can be a useful tool to help you understand your spouse better, but mostly because we think the results are hilarious. In every test we take we end up on opposite ends of the spectrum! The most entertaining ones are the tests which say: 'if you are x personality, don't marry y personality'. That's us, x and y, happily married despite our apparently incompatible personalities! We were pondering this seeming oxymoron and wondered how we ended up having a good marriage when most psychiatrists would tell us that, humanly speaking, we are not compatible. And it occurred to us that although we may be very different personalities, when it comes to character we value the same things. We both appreciate honesty, forthrightness, responsibility, trustworthiness, reliability, perseverance, creativity, etc ... Given that we were both raised in Reformed churches by parents of Dutch descent, in families similar in belief and values, it is not surprising that we have similar characters. Character, unlike temperament or personality, is not something we are born with but grows over time based on our upbringing and beliefs. Godly character is the result of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

If character is grown over time, based on our beliefs and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, then it follows that character is malleable. It is able to be formed from a young age, and continues to be formed throughout our lives, based on our circumstances and our reactions to them. The book of Proverbs in the Bible probably has more to say on the formation of character than any other book. Solomon's wisdom for building character is the main thrust of the entire book of Proverbs. These sayings of his and others focus the attention on the individual and are therefore applicable to all people at any point in history. They are not bound by cultural understanding or situation, or age or gender, but have value

for everyone. Proverbs is immensely practical, however it is not secular – 'the fear of the Lord' is the starting point for all that Solomon has to say. The purpose of the book of Proverbs is to encourage the growth of godly character, through knowledge and fear of the Lord, in the outworking of faith and obedience to God. Proverbs encourages us to find both moral skilfulness and mental discernment (Prov 1:2-6). Both of these are necessary in the development of godly character. Let's have a look at some of the character traits the book of Proverbs focuses on and how we might use these in our own lives to build up both ourselves and those around us.

Unsurprisingly, one of the most commonly mentioned traits in the book of Proverbs is that of **pride**. The temptation is common to all of us, is at the root of all sin from Adam to the present day, and causes the downfall of many. Solomon has plenty to say about

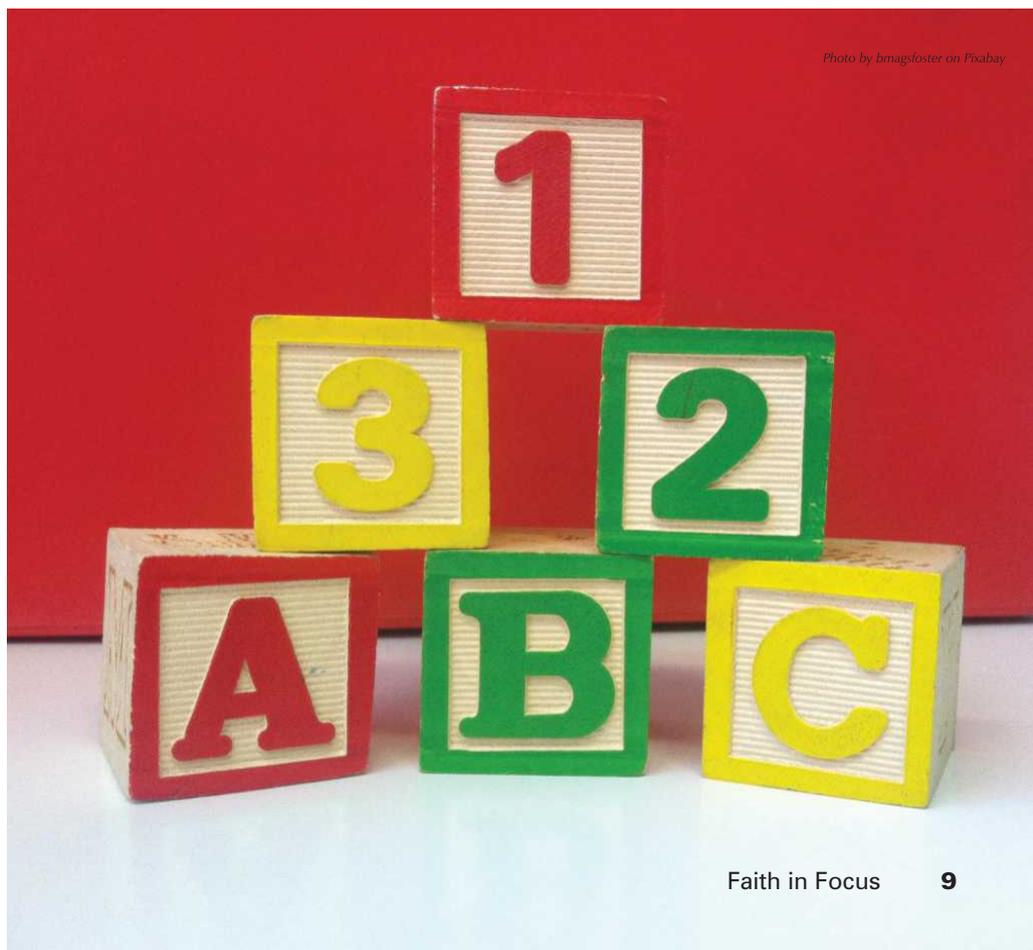


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Proverbs is an invaluable resource for teaching our children the way in which they ought to live. In training ourselves and our children we can point to Solomon's advice and pull examples from the present day to back it up

it. One of the most well known verses about pride, quoted widely even amongst non-Christians is, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (16:18). This is a good verse to memorise for whenever we may begin to feel a little puffed up! But training ourselves to avoid pride begins early. Solomon advises children to listen to their fathers' and mothers' instructions in order to benefit themselves long-term: "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck." (1:8-9) Proverbs is an invaluable resource for teaching our children the way in which they ought to live. In training ourselves and our children we can point to Solomon's advice and pull examples from the present day to back it up. I'm sure many of us can think of a multitude of examples of those whose pride in themselves or their accomplishments has led to their downfall. "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom." (11:2)

Part of what I love about Proverbs are the frequent contrasts; as we are trying to avoid one thing, we can intentionally focus on building the opposite. Instead of pride, humility! "One's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honour." (29:23) Lowliness of spirit and humility are not character traits encouraged in the world around us. We are constantly being told to blow our own trumpets, pat ourselves on the back, announce our value to all and sundry, and sing our own praises.

You just need to read a modern CV to get a feeling for this kind of talk! What Proverbs has to say to us about humility is counter-cultural.

Another popular topic in the book of Proverbs is that of **self-control**. Again, this is a counter-cultural notion. Nike says, 'just do it!' MasterCard says, 'There are some things money can't buy. For everything else, there's MasterCard'. When seizing the moment, obeying your impulses, and purchasing everything on credit card are the messages of the world, we need to work extra hard to build a character of self-control. I love the similes used in some of these proverbs: "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (25:28). Explaining this one to the kids meant a lesson in historical battle tactics and siege warfare, complete with illustrations! The gist of it, however, is that when we lack self-control we leave ourselves wide open to temptation. Satan can fire his arrows, sling his stones and throw his spears and we have no walls up to block them. Self-control is a character trait that is absolutely vital to withstand the attacks of the devil. It is also essential in avoiding strife: "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back" (29:11). How many of those currently in jail would not be there if they had held back their anger in a crucial moment? We must learn and encourage self-control in ourselves and those around us so that we may act in an appropriate and godly manner in the most difficult of situations.

Some of the most striking and protracted similes in the book of Proverbs are to do with the sluggard and the perils of **laziness**. The phrases that Solomon uses stick in the mind and can be easily recalled to assist in the fight against slothfulness. "Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways and be wise." (6:6) "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber and want like an armed man." (6:10-11) The Bible has a lot to say about the value of work and this is a great place to begin

for those who might be struggling. The principle of working in order to live has been around for a very long time! We can use a passage like this to encourage ourselves when we are feeling less than diligent, or to encourage those around us to carry on the good work they are doing. We may use it also to challenge those who are waiting for others to provide for them instead of being industrious. "The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road! There is a lion in the street!' As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth." (26:13-15) It is a worthwhile exercise to look at these rather humorous examples and apply them to our children/teenagers. Don't be like the door hinges, turning in your bed! Don't make up pitiful excuses to miss work, school, cadets, youth group, or Sunday worship. Avoid eating to excess and gluttony, binge drinking until you can't even lift your glass anymore. When my children are tempted to laziness or come up with poor excuses I sometimes quote to them: "There is a lion outside! I shall be killed in the streets!" (22:13) Then we can have a laugh about how silly they're being and carry on diligently.

Proverbs talks also about **contentment**: "A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot" (14:30), and it speaks about **truthfulness**: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight." (12:22) We could continue on and find verses about patience, peace, generosity, faithfulness, kindness and compassion, but space is limited!

I urge you to go to the book of Proverbs and find some key verses to assist with character development in areas you or those you love are struggling with. Print them out, colour them in, put them on your walls or use them as bookmarks. Memorise them, talk about them, encourage others with them. Proverbs is practical wisdom for your sanctification. Use it for your personal growth in grace and wisdom!

Mrs Joanna Voschezang is a member in the Hamilton Reformed Church.

Zurich Revolutionary: Ulrich Zwingli

STEVEN LAWSON



Other than Martin Luther, Heinrich Bullinger, and John Calvin, the most important early Reformer was Ulrich Zwingli. A first-generation Reformer, he is regarded as the founder of Swiss Protestantism. Furthermore, history remembers him as the first Reformed theologian. Though Calvin would later surpass Zwingli as a theologian, he would stand squarely on Zwingli's broad shoulders.

Less than two months after Luther came into the world, Zwingli was born on January 1, 1484, in Wildhaus, a small village in the eastern part of modern-day Switzerland, forty miles from Zurich. His father, Ulrich Sr., had risen from peasant stock to become an upper-middle-class man of means, a successful farmer and shepherd, as well as the chief magistrate for the district. This prosperity allowed him to provide his son with an excellent education. He presided over a home where typical Swiss values were inculcated in young Ulrich: sturdy independence, strong patriotism, zeal for religion, and real interest in scholarship.

The elder Ulrich early recognized the intellectual abilities of his son and sent him to his uncle, a former priest, to learn reading and writing. Thanks to his prosperity, Zwingli's father was able to provide his son with further education. In 1494, he sent the ten-year-old Ulrich to the equivalent of high school at Basel, where he studied Latin, dialectic, and music. He made such rapid progress that his father transferred him to Berne in 1496 or 1497, where he continued his studies under a noted humanist, Heinrich Woeffin. Here Zwingli

was given significant exposure to the ideas and Scholastic methods of the Renaissance. His talents were noted by the Dominican monks, who tried to recruit him to their order, but Zwingli's father did not want his son to become a friar.

Universities of Vienna and Basel

In 1498, Zwingli's father sent him to the University of Vienna, which had become a center of classical learning as Scholasticism was displaced by humanist studies. There he studied philosophy, astronomy, physics, and ancient classics. In 1502, he enrolled at the University of Basel and received a fine humanist education. In class, he came under the influence of Thomas Wyttenbach, professor of theology, and began to be aware of abuses in the church. He also taught Latin as he pursued further classical studies. He received his bachelor's (1504) and master's (1506) degrees from the school.

Zwingli was ordained to the priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church and immediately purchased a pastorate at Glarus, his boyhood church. Paying money to a prince for a church position was a common practice prior to the Reformation. His time was spent preaching, teaching, and pastoring. He also devoted himself to much private study, teaching himself Greek and studying the Church Fathers and the ancient classics. He became enamored with the pagan philosophers and poets of old. Most significantly, he began reading the humanist writings of Desiderius Erasmus and was profoundly impressed with his scholarship and piety. This sparked a highly prized correspondence with Erasmus.

During his service in Glarus, from 1506 to 1516, Zwingli twice served as chaplain to bands of young Swiss mercenaries. Swiss soldiers for hire were in great demand across Europe and were a major source of income for Swiss cantons. Even the pope had Swiss guards around him. But this practice cost the lives of many of the best Swiss young men. As a chaplain, Zwingli witnessed many of them fighting each other, Swiss killing Swiss on foreign soil for foreign rulers. He was forced to administer the last rites countless times. The Battle of Marignano (1515) took nearly ten thousand Swiss lives. Zwingli came to deplore the evils of this system and began to preach against it.

His final year at Glarus proved to be pivotal. It was at this time that Zwingli came to an evangelical understanding of the Scriptures. Erasmus published his Greek New Testament in that year, and Zwingli devoured it; it is said he memorized Paul's

epistles in the original language. This occurred a little more than a year before Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the Wittenberg Castle Church door. Thanks to his study of the Scriptures, with no knowledge of Luther's ideas, Zwingli began to preach the same message Luther would soon proclaim. He wrote: "Before anyone in the area had ever heard of Luther, I began to preach the gospel of Christ in 1516... I started preaching the gospel before I had even heard Luther's name ... Luther, whose name I did not know for at least another two years, had definitely not instructed me. I followed holy Scripture alone."

Popular Preacher at Einsiedeln

Because of political pressures and his sermons against mercenary fighting, Zwingli was forced to leave Glarus in 1516. He served as a priest at the Benedictine monastery of Einsiedeln until 1518. Einsiedeln was a resort city that was known for its shrine to the Virgin Mary. This shrine attracted large numbers of pilgrims from all parts of Switzerland and beyond. This wider audience heard Zwingli preach, which expanded his reputation and influence.

Einsiedeln was smaller than Glarus, so his duties were lighter. That afforded him more time for the study of Scripture and the Church Fathers. He read the works of Ambrose, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine, as well as the writings of Erasmus. Further, he copied by hand Erasmus's Greek New Testament. As he distinguished himself as a popular preacher, he also began attacking some of the abuses of the church, specifically the sale of indulgences, and his preaching began to take on a stronger evangelical tone. However, Zwingli did not yet see the need for changes in what the church believed. Rather, he felt reform should be primarily institutional and moral. Also, he remained more dependent on the Church Fathers than the Scriptures in his teaching. He was not yet ready for the work of reform.

In December 1518, Zwingli's growing influence secured for him the office of "people's priest" at the Grossmünster (Great Cathedral) at Zurich. This pastorate was a significant position. Zwingli immediately broke from the normal practice of preaching according to the church calendar. Instead, he announced he would preach sequentially through whole books of the Bible. On January 1, 1519, his thirty-fifth birthday, Zwingli began a series of expository sermons through Matthew that were drawn from his

exegesis of the Greek text. He continued this consecutive style until he had preached through the entire New Testament. This ambitious project took six years and prepared the ground for the work of reform that was to follow.

In autumn 1519, Zurich suffered an outbreak of the plague. Two thousand of its seven thousand citizens died. Zwingli chose to stay in the city to care for the sick and dying. In the process, he himself contracted the disease and nearly died. His three-month recovery taught him much about trusting God. This personal sacrifice also increased his popularity with the people.

Introducing Reform

As Zwingli preached through the Bible, he expounded the truths he encountered in the text, even if they differed from the historical tradition of the church. This kind of direct preaching was not without challenges. In 1522, some of his parishioners defied the church's rule about eating meat during Lent. Zwingli supported their practice based on the biblical truths of Christian liberty. He saw such restrictions as man-made. That same year, he composed the first of his many Reformation writings, which circulated his ideas throughout Switzerland.

In November 1522, Zwingli began to work with other religious leaders and the city council to bring about major reforms in the church and state. In January 1523, he wrote *Sixty-seven Theses*, in which he rejected many medieval beliefs, such as forced fasting, clerical celibacy, purgatory, the Mass, and priestly mediation. Further, he began to question the use of images in the church. In June 1524, the city of Zurich, following his lead, ruled that all religious images were to be removed from churches. Also in 1524, Zwingli took yet another step of reform – he married Anna Reinhard, a widow. All of this appears to have happened before Zwingli ever heard of Luther. This was truly an independent work of God.

By 1525, the Reformation movement in Zurich had gained significant traction. On April 14, 1525, the Mass was officially abolished and Protestant worship services were begun in and around Zurich. Zwingli chose to implement only what was taught in Scripture. Anything that had no explicit Scriptural support was rejected. The words of Scripture were read and preached in the language of the people. The entire congregation, not merely the clergy, received both bread and wine in a simple Communion service. The minister wore robes like those found in lecture halls rather

than at Catholic altars. The veneration of Mary and saints was forbidden, indulgences were banned, and prayers for the dead were stopped. The break with Rome was complete.

Anabaptists: Radical Reformers

Zwingli also entered into controversy with a new group known as the Anabaptists or Rebaptizers, a more radical reform movement that began in Zurich in 1523. Though Zwingli had made great changes, he had not gone far enough for these believers. For the Anabaptists, the issue of baptizing believers only was secondary to separation from the Roman Catholic Church. The Anabaptists sought an entire reconstruction of the church that was akin to a revolution.

Zwingli saw the Anabaptist proposals as radical excess. In response to the Anabaptist demands for the immediate overhaul of church and society, he urged moderation and patience in the transition from Rome. He counselled that the Anabaptists must bear with the weaker brethren who were gradually accepting the teaching of the Reformers. However, this approach only caused the conflict between Zwingli and the radicals to widen.

An order by the magistrates of Zurich for all infants in the city to be baptized proved too explosive. The Anabaptists responded by marching through the streets of Zurich in loud protests. Rather than baptizing their infants, they baptized each other by pouring or immersion in 1525. They also rejected Zwingli's affirmation of the city council's authority over church affairs and advocated total separation of church and state.

The Anabaptist leaders were arrested and charged with revolutionary teaching. Some were put to death by drowning. It is not known whether Zwingli consented to the death sentences, but he did not oppose them.

The Lord's Supper controversy

Meanwhile, a controversy began brewing between Zwingli and Luther over the Lord's Supper. Luther held to consubstantiation, the belief that the body and blood of Christ were present in, through, or under the elements. There is, he contended, a real presence of Christ in the elements, though he differed from the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation, which holds that the elements change into the body and blood of Christ when blessed by the priest during Mass. Zwingli adopted the position that the

Lord's Supper is mainly a memorial of Christ's death – a symbolic remembrance.

In an attempt to bring unity to the Reformed movement, the Marburg Colloquy was convened in October 1529. The two Reformers appeared face to face, along with Martin Bucer, Philip Melancthon, Johannes Oecolampadius, and other Protestant leaders. They agreed in principle to fourteen of the fifteen items put before them: the church-state relationship, infant baptism, the historical continuity of the church, and more. But no agreement could be reached regarding the Lord's Supper. Luther said that "Zwingli was a 'very good man,' yet of a 'different spirit,' and hence refused to accept his hand of fellowship offered to him with tears." To colleagues, Luther commented of Zwingli and his supporters, "I suppose God has blinded them."

In one of the strange ironies of history, Zwingli, who earlier had opposed the practice of using mercenaries in war, died on the battlefield in 1531. An escalating conflict between Protestants and Catholics had cantons in arms, and a war soon broke out. The city of Zurich went to battle to defend itself against five invading Catholic cantons from the south. Zwingli accompanied Zurich's army into battle as a field chaplain. Clad in armor and armed with a battle-ax, he was severely wounded on October 11, 1531. When enemy soldiers found him lying wounded, they killed him. The southern forces then subjected his corpse to disgraceful treatment. They quartered him, hacked his remains to pieces, and burned them, then mixed his ashes with dung and scattered them abroad.

Today, prominently displayed at the Water Church in Zurich, is a statue of Zwingli. He is standing with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other. The statue represents Zwingli in his towering influence over the Swiss Reformation, strong and resolute. Though his Zurich ministry was relatively short, he accomplished much. Through his heroic stand for the truth, Zwingli reformed the church in Zurich and led the way for other Reformers to follow.

Dr. Steven J. Lawson is founder and president of OnePassion Ministries in Dallas. He is a Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, professor of preaching and dean of D.Min. studies at The Master's Seminary.

I beseech Christ
for this one thing
only, that He will
enable me to
endure all things
courageously,
and that He break
me as a potter's
vessel or make
me strong, as it
pleases Him.

Ulrich Zwingli



Sunday, August 28th, was the 56th anniversary of Reverend John Goris's ordination. He led the service at the Reformed Church of Avondale and preached on the same text that was used at his ordination service – Colossians 1:28 – “Him we proclaim.”

He had been scheduled to do this last year for the 55th anniversary but lockdown meant it did not happen.

A hymn that he composed, ‘O Sovereign

God,’ was also sung during the service.

We also gave thanks for his ministry in Tasmania and Queensland (Christian Reformed Churches of Australia), and Avondale, Mangere, Nelson, and Wellington (Reformed Churches of New Zealand), and for his continued publishing of books and poems and songs for the church.

We praise the Lord for His work through Pastor John's many years of service.
Soli Deo Gloria!

Focus on books

'Martin Luther – The man who rediscovered God and changed the world'

by Eric Metaxas, Penguin Books, 2018, 446 pages + appendix.

Reviewed by David Waldron

Eric Metaxas is an exceptionally articulate Christian who writes for a wide audience, both Christian and secular. He is a 'number one New York Times bestselling author' whose other books include 'Bonhoeffer', 'Amazing Grace' and 'Miracles'. His works have been translated into more than 25 languages. He is a senior fellow and lecturer at King's College in New York City.

The Washington post wrote of his biography of Martin Luther: "A meticulously researched and detailed account of Luther's life and times...A very human portrait...Metaxas is a scrupulous chronicler and has an eye for a good story. The result is full, instructive and pacy".

I found this biography to be carefully researched, biblically sound, theologically rich, thorough, informative and entertaining. It is a substantial book (446 pages) about a remarkable man who was greatly used by the Lord in the reformation of the church. Metaxas employs a rich variety of vocabulary in his engaging writing style. I sheepishly confess needing to check a few words in my dictionary – and I thought that I knew the English language well!

I had read accounts of the life of Martin Luther before, but never one as thorough, informative and, in places, humorous as this biography. To give you an example of Metaxas' amusing style, this is what he writes about Lucas Cranach:

"Even though Cranach would do all he could to promote the Luther brand and goose Luther's reformatory efforts, he also managed to stay in the good graces of Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz, for whom he did much work, and of the Catholic church of Rome generally. Cranach was a canny fellow who knew which side his bread was buttered on, as they say, and in his case it happened to be buttered on both sides".

Cranach was the artist whose portraits of Luther show us what this famous Reformer looked like at various stages of his life (copies of which, together with other

images in colour, are included in the middle part of the book).

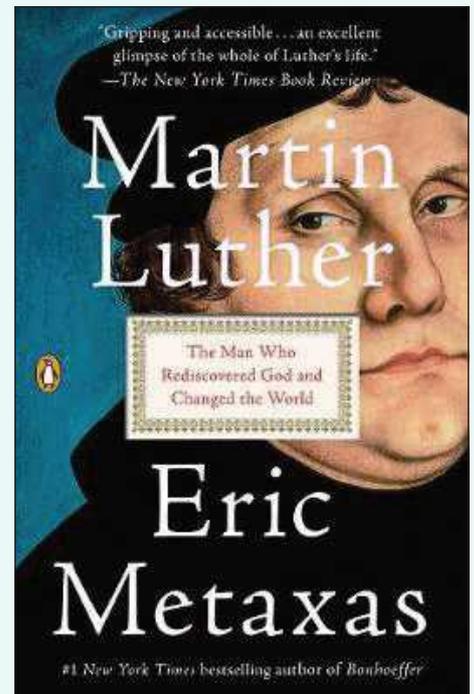
This biography covers, not only the life and character of Luther, but also many people with whom he was connected over the years including, as we have just seen, Lucas Cranach. Also, Frederick the wise, Erasmus, Spalatin, Reuchlin, Tetzl, Melancthon, Cajetan, Staupitz, Karlstadt, Eck, The Zwickau Prophets, Thomas Muntzer, and Luther's beloved wife Katharina Luther.

Most people reading this book review in Faith in Focus will know that a pivotal document called 'The 95 Theses' is understood to have been nailed by Luther to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on 31st October 1517. However, it is likely that many have never actually read this document. No worries! Metaxas helpfully includes all the 95 theses in his book (they occupy 8 pages). He also seeks to 'debunk some of the myths' about the life of Luther. Whilst some people may not agree with all his conclusions, his analysis of the facts he presents is worthy of serious consideration. The author also summarises the huge significance of Luther's work both during his own lifetime and subsequently. For example, when covering the period before Luther fully realised the significance of the pathway the Lord was leading him on, Metaxas writes:

"Luther's volcano was not quite on the verge of blowing, but it was not dormant either. The pieces of the bigger picture were coming together, and one of them of course concerned what Luther clearly saw as a church that was no longer in love with the truth and the pursuit of the same, that answered good and honest questions with an imperious "Be silent and do as we say, or else". Luther knew instinctively that this was wrong, that it went against the essence of God and the Bible".

In his epilogue, provocatively entitled 'The man who created the future', Metaxas outlines the immense impact Luther had on many aspects of modern western life that we tend to take for granted. These include democracy, freedom, social reform and the power of media to greatly influence populations.

Metaxas also includes part of Melancthon's eulogy at Luther's funeral.



“Some have complained that Luther displayed too much severity. I will not deny this. But I answer in the language of Erasmus: “Because of the magnitude of the disorders, God gave this age a violent physician.”...I do not deny that the most ardent characters sometimes make mistakes, for amid the weakness of human nature no one is without fault. But we may say of such a one “rough indeed, but worthy of all praise!” If he was severe, it was the severity of zeal for the truth, not the love of strife, or of harshness....God was his anchor, and faith never failed him”.

I thoroughly recommend this book. Please don't be put off by the size! I tackled it a few small chapters at a time as my bedtime read over an extended time period. This gave me time to reflect on the content and also enabled me to include all the other pressing tasks which tend to constitute so much of our modern lives. Clearly Martin Luther was a busy person too, certainly much more than me, and perhaps more than you too! Not only did he read widely, travel, translate the Scriptures and faithfully defend the faith, he also preached over 7,000 sermons during his lifetime, of which about 2,300 exist today in manuscript form.

David Waldron
Christchurch

The Holy War

By John Bunyan

Reviewed by Will van Kessel

John Bunyan could be said to have authored the most influential book in the English language (other than the King James Bible) – The Pilgrim's Progress. But he has also written another dramatic allegorical novel – The Holy War.

Bunyan's plan for his readers was for them to experience the struggles of the city of Mansoul as a fierce battle rages to take control of it. However, alongside this knife-edge drama Bunyan wished his readers to understand how the struggles of their souls ran in parallel to the struggles of the wretched inhabitants of that place.

The righteous and honourable ruler Shaddai and his son Immanuel rule Mansoul with justice and equity. But the ruler of darkness – Prince Diabolus – has other plans. With his evil captains and their battalions Diabolus plots the fall and destruction of the once happy city. The first to fall is Captain Resistance as Diabolus knows that there is only one route into the city and that it can only be breached through the permission of the people of Mansoul itself. With Captain Resistance gone, the city is laid open to Diabolic lies and the next to fall is Lord Innocency and then the city is lost.

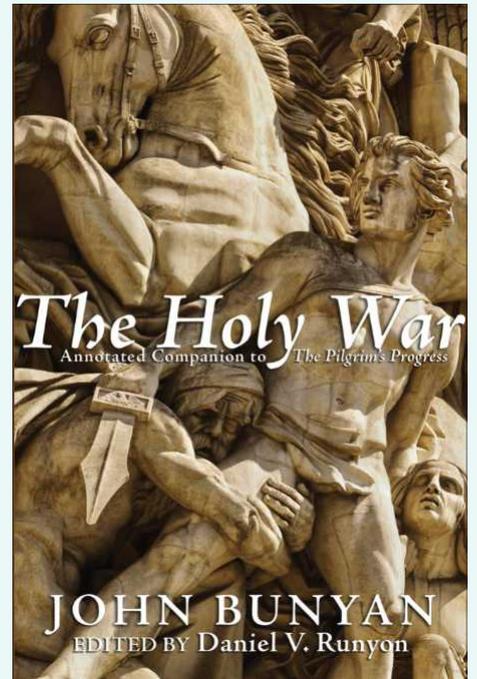
So begins a story of treachery and deceit, foolishness and pride, forgiveness and final redemption. In fact this is, as Bunyan intended it, the story of a sinner saved by the grace of God.

Do read this marvellous story and may God give you blessing and insight into His ways and works.

God bless.

Will Van Kessel

Dovedale Reformed Church



You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed. Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.

John Bunyan



CROSSROADS PRISON MINISTRIES NZ NEWSLETTER, JULY 2022

“Comfort, comfort my people’ says your God” are the opening words of Isaiah Chapter 40. This Chapter closes with the words: “He gives strength to the weary, and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” May we all continue to hope and trust in the Lord as we experience the ongoing disruptions and frustrations from Covid.

Despite the difficulties around the Covid restrictions Chaplains continue to support *Crossroads* as they have opportunity. One Chaplain shares: “I just got your email now as today is my first day back on site in four months! Thanks so much for sending the updates through (monthly) really appreciate you blessing our men with this wonderful material. Take care.” From another prison a Chaplain emailed: “The numbers doing *Crossroads* reflects Chaplaincy’s lack of contact with prisoners during this Covid time. Chaplains are still only on site one day per week. We have little contact with prisoners. Staff shortages are a big issue which means prisoners have limited unlock time. Still we continue to trust in the Lord. Thank you for your ministry.”

One of our student’s shares: “Thank you to the Crossroads team for all that you have done for me during these 12 lessons (Great Truths Course) of the Bible study. Your knowledge, patience and loving comments have inspired me more to continue on. Of course when all of these things are achieved and completed we foremost must give praise and thanks to our God for His wisdom that our teacher and guide the Holy Spirit gave each and every one of us. Thank you”

Another student wrote: “I love doing the Crossroads Bible studies so much. They have been a really big help to me. I come from China and the Japanese Manga is ‘my kind of language’ I grew up reading Japanese Manga. I am finding the Manga books help make it easier to learn about and understand God’s Word. Thank you for your letters, your encouragement and your prayers. I am happy to continue my study. I love you all who work at Crossroads. Thank you for your encouragement and for helping me and supporting me as I grow in my Christian life.”

As at 31st March 2022 the prison population in NZ was 7669 – 426 of these were female prisoners. There are 18 prison facilities in NZ. According to the figures at 31st March the 3 largest prisons are Mt Eden with 901 prisoners, followed by Spring Hill with 774 prisoners and Christchurch Men’s with 753 prisoners.

At the end of our financial year on 31st March 2022 our income was \$35,821 and our expenses were \$20,397. Our expenses are considerably lower for several reasons – from October 2021 we were no longer required to pay a subsidy to Crossroads USA for the lessons we used each quarter. We are very grateful for this. Also our postage costs were less as we did not process the same number of lessons mostly due to the Covid lockdown in August 2021 which lasted 5 months in the Auckland, Northland and Waikato regions, affecting 7 prison facilities.

On behalf of our students we thank you for remembering those in prison. We are grateful to all those who faithfully review the Lessons and encourage the students with their letters and prayers. Thank you to all those who support us financially with your very generous donations. It is very

much appreciated. Also thank you so much to all those who uphold the students and the work of Crossroads in your prayers. All of you are a vital part of this ministry helping us to bring God’s Word to people in prison.

From time to time we receive emails from students who are released. I recently received this email from a student: “I am supporting a young friend on his journey who is in prison. He is a new Christian and I suggested to him that he would gain a great deal of insight into all things regarding the building of his faith through the Crossroads Studies. He said he would like to start and I was hoping you could send him the Welcome Pack. I think he would gain a great deal of stability from doing the Crossroads programme. I know that it was greatly instrumental in establishing my faith and understanding.” We enrolled this young man. A social worker from a Rehab centre emailed: “I am emailing on behalf of a current resident. He was completing some of your studies while he was in prison and was wondering if it was possible to continue to do your Bible studies while in rehab.” We followed up with sending this student his next lesson.

A student who recently started the Tier 2 level shares: “I grew up as an only child in a nonreligious family. Being the only Chinese/Maori at primary school I was often bullied because of my ethnicity. I struggled to fit in. During my high school years I became involved with a Christian youth group and I gave my life to the Lord. It felt great to finally ‘fit in’. But my faith would backslide over the next 25 years. 2016 was the lowest point in my life. I made wrong decisions, trusted the wrong people, even ignoring my own inner voice which culminated to my being incarcerated with no material possessions or assets. I lost EVERYTHING. My self worth was placed in materialism. Reality hit hard and fast. This is my first and last time in prison. I was afraid. I admitted I could no longer run away from God so that’s when I decided to surrender completely my life to Him. As I write this I am now halfway through my 13 year sentence. I used to be a control freak but once I learned to not stress over things you have NO control over was

liberating. You can only control your own behaviour and attitudes. My journey inside has been insightful. I am learning new things daily. God has shown me I had the wrong perception of who He is, a false belief of 'What can God do for me?' He has shown and proved to me he IS a loving Father who wants to have a close relationship with us and wanting only the best for us. We choose to make our life difficult when it doesn't need to be. It's ok to fail. I had to in order to be receptive to His calling. Life difficulties are not to break us but to make us stronger. God had been trying to get my attention my whole life. Well it took my being incarcerated to see that. I had to lose everything in order to learn He is sufficient for me. You cannot run away from God."

Back in 2020 at the beginning of the Covid restrictions we noticed all outgoing prison mail was being sent from a central P.O. Box in Wellington. This caused (and continues to cause) delays to postage going out from the prisons with further delays at each prison when the mail is checked. This culminated in no mail coming to our office for more than 2 weeks in June 2022. I understand that this was due to a lack of staff at the central point in Wellington.

Please continue to pray for the students (prisoners) as they deal with the ongoing impact of the Covid restrictions on their lives. Pray for the Chaplains as they endeavour to support prisoners despite the limited access. Please also pray for the Corrections Officers as they watch over the prisoners in a very volatile environment.

If you would like further information you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroads Prison Ministries, PO Box 11005, HASTINGS 4156.

Focus on the Christian life

JON D PAYNE

Holding fast without compromise

The Christian way is to remain faithful at all costs. Sincere believers do not make deals with the world. We are called and empowered to live by conviction, not compromise, even amid fierce opposition. No one knew this better than Margaret Wilson and Margaret MacLachlan, two godly women who were unashamed of the gospel and loved Christ more than earthly comfort; indeed, even more than life itself.

In the spring of 1685, during times of severe persecution, the two Margarets stood trial as prisoners at Wigtown, a small burgh in the southwest of Scotland. They were unjustly sentenced to death by drowning. What were their crimes? First, they refused to publicly submit themselves to King James II and his unwarranted ecclesiastical authority. Second, they rejected the state church's false worship. And third, they attended conventicles – illegal worship services that met in private homes and open fields. In a word, these two women, one elderly and the other a young maiden, lived by the courage of their biblical convictions. The world hated them for it, as Jesus declared that it would:

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you ... Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours." (John 15:18, 20)

Fastened to two long wooden stakes in the rising tidal channel of the River Bladnoch, with their enemies and loved ones looking on, the two Margarets refused to recant. The younger Margaret quoted from Romans 8 as the waters swelled around them. She proclaimed: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." They held fast to God's promises until their

final breaths, passing from the deadly waters of Bladnoch to the living waters of eternal glory in the presence of God and the angels. For these two seventeenth-century saints, death was preferable to compromise.

Church history is full of inspiring examples of Christians who refused to compromise in order to avoid persecution and hardship. That is why we must study church history. The same is true of God's Word. For instance, think of Daniel and his three friends. They lived in Babylon under wicked rulers and false religion, yet they were unwilling to conform to the seductive lies of the world. By God's grace, and with the Spirit's abiding strength, they lived with biblical conviction and rejected cultural accommodation. For Daniel, this meant worshipping God, as he always had, when it was made illegal to do so, upon the pain of death by ravenous lions (Dan. 6:1–28). For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, it meant courageously refusing to bow down to the blasphemous golden image at Nebuchadnezzar's gala, even though defying the royal edict meant being burned alive in a fiery furnace (3:1–30).

The Bible is full of emboldening examples of those who held fast to the promises of God in the face of cultural lies, pressure, and persecution – men and women of whom "the world was not worthy" (Heb. 11:38) and who "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name [of Christ]" (Acts 5:41). We must return to these examples often, for through them we are encouraged to stand fast ourselves in this present cultural moment. We must stand against the wicked trends and ideologies of our culture and stand in the true grace of God (1 Peter 5:12).

Upon honest evaluation of our lives, however, it's clear that we don't always exercise the blood-earnest conviction of the two Margarets or the godly courage of Daniel and his three friends. We want to, but we don't – and they didn't always live this way either. Affected by cultural hostility, fiery persecution, and a desire for worldly acceptance, we sometimes allow fear to cultivate a heart of compromise. It can even become a pattern if left unchecked.

But we must not despair. Giving up is not an option. Rather, we must remember

the gospel – that Christ died on the cursed cross to pay the debt of all our sinful compromises. Jesus paid it all. By exercising faith in Jesus, we not only receive forgiveness and imputed righteousness, but we also receive the Spirit-wrought power that animates our conviction amid

worldly opposition. Therefore, dear believer, as you seek to stand fast without compromise, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Compromise is less likely when our precious nail-scarred Savior is in view.

Dr. Jon D. Payne is senior pastor at Christ Church Presbyterian in

Charleston, S.C., and executive coordinator of the Gospel Reformation Network. He is author of In the Splendor of Holiness.

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Growing Pains

What shall I do when I grow old?
Will I stoop, will I be bald?
Will I change or stay the same,
Or forget from where I came?

What shall I fear when I grow old?
Will I hide, will I be bold?
Will I fear going insane,
Or bravely blink and lose my brain?

How shall I live when I grow old?
Will I sleep, will I be cold?
Will I still take care of you,
Or envy what I used to do?

How shall I know when I grow old?
Will I think, will I recall?
Will I hear your loving voice,
Or shrink at every sudden noise?

Where shall I be when I grow old?
Will I stay, or home be sold?
Will I feel secure from danger,
Or will my neighbour be a stranger?

How shall I look when I grow old?
Will I hate, me to behold?
Will I have a bitter face,
Or will it mellow with good grace?

Who shall be there when I grow old?
Will I see an increased fold?
Will I meet each child, each spouse,
Or will my kin forsake my house?

Where shall you be when I grow old?
Will you still be there to hold?
Will we both our grandkids see,
Or will your heart be torn from me?

Where shall I be when you grow old?
Will I still be there to hold?
Will our life remain for two,
Or will my heart be torn from you?

Why do we think of growing old?
Will we guess, can we unfold?
Will God show us what's in store?
Or show His love; we need no more

And when this world, grown frail and old
Will be done, long since foretold
Will we stand, and sing His praise
Together young for all our days

*Jos Knol
27.05.'13*

THEODORE G. VAN RAALTE

Keller: Can we take Genesis 1 literally, if we hold that God used evolution to create?

As I explained in a previous blog entry[†], Keller entertains the real questions Christians ask when they are told that biological evolution is compatible with the Bible. The first “layperson” question considered by Keller is, “If God used evolution to create, then we can’t take Genesis 1 literally, and if we can’t do that, why take any other part of the Bible literally?” Keller’s short answer is, “The way to respect the authority of the Biblical writers is to take them as they want to be taken. Sometimes they want to be taken literally, sometimes they don’t. We must listen to them, not impose our thinking or agenda on them.”

At first glance this is a solid answer – the Bible has authority! But I’ll have more to say about that below.

Genre and intent

Keller expands upon his answer first by delving into the genre of Genesis 1 because “the way to discern how an author wants to be read is to distinguish what genre the writer is using” (3). “How an author wants to be read” is a bit ambiguous, but I’ll take it to refer to authorial intent (Keller’s point is going to be whether or not the author wants us to read Genesis 1 literally and chronologically). The link he proposes between genre and authorial intent, however, is not straightforward. Consider this example: If I use poetry to communicate to my wife how much I love her, my intentions are just the same as if I had

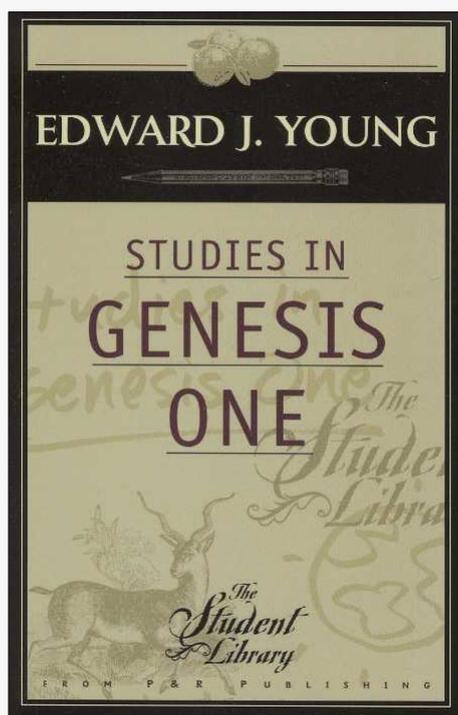
written it out prosaically. Even if I used a syllogism, “All my life I have loved you; today is a day of my life; therefore I love you today,” my intentions would still be the same (though she’d call it a silly-gism). It’s true that in poetry I’m more likely to use figures of speech but those as such don’t remove historicity from the poetry. See Psalm 78 for a good example of poetry replete with historical truth.

Genre of Genesis 1

Keller next asks what genre Genesis 1 is and starts his answer with the conservative Presbyterian theologian Edward J. Young (1907–1968) who, he says, “admits that Genesis 1 is written in ‘exalted, semi-poetical language.’” Keller correctly notes the absence of the telltale signs of Hebrew poetry. Yet he also points out the refrains in Genesis 1 such as, “and God saw that it was good,” “God said,” “let there be,” and “and it was so,” and then adds, “Obviously, this is not the way someone writes in response to a simple request to tell what happened” (4). He completes this part of the arguments with a quotation from John Collins that the genre of Genesis 1 is “what we may call exalted prose narrative ... by calling it exalted, we are recognizing that we must not impose a ‘literalistic’ hermeneutic on the text” (4). Thus this argument is now complete: the genre of Genesis 1 prohibits us from reading it literally.

Misleading appeal to E. J. Young

However, if we follow the trail via Keller’s footnote to E. J. Young’s, *Studies in Genesis One*, we discover that Keller sidestepped



[†] <https://creationwithoutcompromise.com/2016/03/09/keller-if-biological-evolution-is-true-are-we-just-animals-driven-by-our-genes/>

Young's real point. Here's the fuller quote, "Genesis one is written in exalted, semi-poetical language; nevertheless, it is not poetry" (italics added). Young continued by pointing out what elements of Hebrew poetry are lacking and by urging the reader to compare Job 38:8–11 and Psalm 104:5–9 to Genesis 1 in order to see the obvious differences between a poetic and non-poetic account of the creation. Prior to this paragraph Young had written,

Genesis one is a document *sui generis* [entirely of its own kind]; its like or equal is not to be found anywhere in the literature of antiquity. And the reason for this is obvious. Genesis one is divine revelation to man concerning the creation of heaven and earth. It does not contain the cosmology of the Hebrews or of Moses. Whatever that cosmology may have been, we do not know ... Israel, however, was favoured of God in that he gave to her a revelation concerning the creation of heaven and earth, and Genesis one is that revelation (82).

In note 80 of the same page Young elaborates further,

For this reason we cannot properly speak of the literary genre of Genesis one. It is not a cosmogony, as though it were simply one among many. In the nature of the case a true cosmogony must be a divine revelation. The so-called cosmogonies of the various peoples of antiquity are in reality deformations of the originally revealed truth of creation. There is only one genuine cosmogony, namely, Genesis one, and this account alone gives reliable information as to the origin of the earth (82n80).

With these words of Young guiding our hearts, we turn back to Keller's statement that it is "obvious" that someone would not compose an account in the exalted style of Genesis 1 "in response to a simple request to tell what happened." But what if the things therein described happened exactly in that exalted way? Of course we are reading "exalted prose" – precisely because the things described are so wonderful! The literary style not only fits but even reflects the miraculous events. God is glorified repeatedly, all the more because it is literally true.

An old canard: Genesis 1 versus Genesis 2

Keller's second reason – and strongest, he says – why he thinks the author of Genesis 1 didn't want to be taken literally is based on "a comparison of the order of creative acts in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2" (4). This argument is a bit more complicated and deserves closer scrutiny than I will give it here. But the basic

point is that Genesis 2:5 apparently speaks about God not putting any vegetation on the earth before there was an atmosphere or rain or a man to till the ground. This, says Keller, is the natural order. Genesis 1 is the unnatural order, so it's not literal. His argument is an old canard, but really it is a lame duck.

Let's examine it: Keller says that Genesis 1 has an unnatural order because light (day 1) came before light sources (day 4) and vegetation (day 3) came before an atmosphere and rain (day 4). However, he reads the text too quickly here, for the separation of waters above and below occurs on day 2, allowing rain before vegetation. On day 4 God set the light sources in the firmament that was already there on day 2. Further, the old light vs light bearers problem is far from sufficient to jettison the chronological order of the creation events in Genesis 1. And, finally, a normal day without light or water wouldn't kill these plants anyway.

To continue: the order of events in Genesis 2, especially verse 5, is not in the least contrary to Genesis 1. Rather, whereas Genesis 1:1–2:3 refers only to "God" and focuses on the awesome Creator preparing and adorning the earth for man, Genesis 2:4–25 focus on this God as "Yahweh" who lovingly and tenderly creates the man and the woman, prepares a beautiful garden for them, and who thereupon enters into a loving relationship with them. Each chapter makes its own contribution to the story, with chapter 2 doubling back in order to more fully explain the events of the sixth day. This is a common occurrence in Hebrew prose. Further, we can easily fit 2:4–25 chronologically in between 1:26, "Let us make man in our image" and 1:27, "So God created man in his image ... male [Adam] and female [Eve] he created them."

Finally, Genesis 2:4 begins the first "toledoth" or "generations of" statement, which after this becomes a structural divider in Genesis, occurring nine more times. Young argues that we should translate "toledoth" as "those things which are begotten" (59). If we follow this suggestion, we see that Genesis 2:4ff tell us about the things begotten of the heavens and the earth, such as the man, who is both earthly (his body) and heavenly (his spirit), or the garden, which is earthly, yet planted by God. When Genesis 2:5 states that "no shrub of the field" had yet grown and "no plant of the field" had yet sprouted, it portrays a barrenness which sets the stage for the fruitful garden (2:8–14) and the fruitful wife (2:18–25). Further, the "shrubs" and "plants" of the field likely point to cultivated plants that require human tending. Adam will be a farmer. If so, the point of 2:5 is not the lack of vegetation altogether, but the lack of certain man-tended kinds, such as those Yahweh God would plant in the Garden of Eden.

Thus, it's clear that the primary author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit and that the authority of the text resides in his intentions first of all. This is why one of the primary rules of interpretation is to compare Scripture with Scripture. This book alone is God's Word!

Both of Keller's grounds for not taking Genesis 1 literally have been exposed as weak at best.¹ In contrast, E. J. Young's strong arguments for the literal, historical reading of Genesis 1, a few of which we reviewed here, remain firmly in place. Exalted prose indeed, and true!

Therefore, we ought to conclude the very opposite of Keller. Whereas he argues that we cannot read both chapter 1 and chapter 2 as "straightforward accounts of historical events" and that chapter 2 rather than chapter 1 provides the "natural order" (5), we most certainly can read both as historical and literal.

Keller pulls together both the genre and the chronology arguments and concludes,

So what does this mean? It means Genesis 1 does not teach us that God made the world in six twenty-four hour days. Of course, it doesn't teach evolution either ... However, it does not preclude the possibility of the earth being extremely old (5).

However, both of Keller's grounds for not taking Genesis 1 literally have been exposed as weak at best.¹ In contrast, E. J. Young's strong arguments for the literal, historical reading of Genesis 1, a few of which we reviewed here, remain firmly in place. Exalted prose indeed, and true!

Whose authority?

Finally, a word about the authority of the text: Keller states that we must "respect the authority of the Biblical writers." His wording is similar to John Walton's in his speeches at a conference I attended in September 2015.² Walton frequently spoke of "the authority of the text" and stated that it rested in the original meaning "as understood by the people who first received it." But missing from both Keller and Walton is the recognition that all Scripture is breathed by God (2 Tim 3:16) and that therefore the primary author is the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21). We are not called just to respect the authority of human writers or of the text, but of God himself! There are passages of Scripture for which the first intention of the human writer – as far as we can discern it – does not reach as far as the divine intention (for example, certain Messianic Psalms such as 2 & 110, or the injunction about the ox not wearing a muzzle as it treads out the grain (Deut 25:4; cf. 1 Cor 9:9; 1 Tim 5:18). In fact, Peter tells us that the Old Testament prophets searched with great care to find out the time and circumstances of the things they prophesied about Christ – implying that the prophecies went beyond the knowledge of the prophets themselves. He adds that these are things into which even angels long to look (1 Pet 1:10–12). Thus, it's clear that the primary author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit and that the authority of the text resides in his intentions first of all. This is why one of the primary rules of

interpretation is to compare Scripture with Scripture. This book alone is God's Word!

Let us take great care in handling the Word of God, greater care than Keller does on this point. And let us conclude that the text of Genesis 1 itself clearly indicates it is to be read literally, historically, and chronologically (Keller, at least, has not proven otherwise).

1 In addition, Keller's note 17 on page 14, linked to a different section of his paper, asserts that prose can use figurative speech and poetry can use literal speech. It appears, then, that he undercuts his own argument.

2 See my blog entry at <https://creationwithoutcompromise.com/2016/02/03/the-lost-world/>.

Dr. Van Raalte is professor of Ecclesiology at Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, prior to which he served as a pastor for eleven years. He completed a Ph.D. at Calvin Theological Seminary in historical theology, focussing on the work of Antoine de Chandieu (1534-1591) and Reformed Scholasticism.

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Indwelling Sin and the Believer

“The evil which I would not do – that I do.” Romans 7:19

Permit me to tell you a little part, (for some things must not, cannot be told,) not of what I have *read* – but of what I have *felt*, in illustration of the above passage.

I would not be the sport and prey of wild, vain, foolish, and vile imaginations – but this *evil* is present with me! My heart is like an open highway – like a city without walls or gates. Nothing is so false, so frivolous, so absurd, so impossible, or so horrid – but it can obtain access, and that at any time, or in any place! Neither the study, the pulpit,

nor even the Lord’s table – exempt me from their intrusion.

But if this awful effect of heart-depravity cannot be wholly avoided in the present state of human nature – yet, at least, I would not *allow* and *indulge* it; yet this I find I do! In defiance of my best judgment and best wishes – I find something within me which cherishes and cleaves to those evils, from which I ought to be horrified by, and flee from – as I would *if a toad or a serpent was put in my food or in my bed!* Ah! how vile must the heart (at least *my* heart) be – that can hold a parley with such abominations, when I so well know their nature and their tendency.

Surely he who finds himself capable of this, may, without the least affectation of humility (however fair his outward conduct

appears), subscribe himself *less than the least of all saints*, and the very *chief of sinners!* But the Lord knows how this *dead fly* taints and spoils my best services, and makes them no better than *splendid sins*.

This is only a *faint sketch* of my depraved heart. But though my disease is grievous, it is not desperate; I have a gracious and infallible Physician. I shall not die – but live and declare the works of the Lord.

But I shall not always be as I am now! Yet a little while, and I shall be freed from this vile body – which, like the leprous house, is incurably contaminated, and must be entirely taken down. Then I shall see Jesus as He is, and be *like* Him, and *with* Him forever!



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