



the presbyterian banner

August 2017

*Remain in me, and I will remain in you.
No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine.
Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

John 15:4

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Editorial

It was sad news. From the Classis (Presbytery) of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) I had once served in for thirteen years there came this decision last month:

A proposed Church Order Overture change was approved, that 'The sessions shall see to it that the congregations assemble for public worship at least once a Sunday'. This will now be forwarded to be addressed at next year's Synod.

Now, this might not seem out of place to us. A number of our churches only worship once on the Lord's Day. But when you compare it to what is in the present CRCA Church Order you notice the radical change this is. Currently their Church Order reads:

Article 56 – Occasions for Worship Services

a. The sessions shall see to it that the congregations assemble for public worship twice each Sunday unless valid reasons make this impractical. In such cases the advice of classis should be sought.

So the status quo is that the Christian Sabbath in their churches is presently hemmed in by a worship service at its beginning and a worship service at its end. That much at least should be clear. Already in the early New Testament Church, the converted slaves would meet for worship before they had to work and when they finished their work. And looking through church history you find that times of genuine revival are marked by a return to a solemn view of the Lord's Day, which included two worship services bookending this day.

The question to ask here is not 'Why do you need to meet twice a Sunday?' but this: 'Why would you not want to meet a second time on the Lord's Day?' And there lies the rub. This is actually showing a heart of people who have become wrapped up in themselves and what they can enjoy rather than looking to the Lord in all things. You really have to wonder how much of the Lord's Day is his day!

Last November I had the opportunity to worship with a Western Australian CRCA congregation in the afternoon service. It had an attendance then more than twice we would on average get in our afternoon service. But within a short time after that, they ceased their afternoon worship services.

This is far from a state of revival – it is actually a sad regression! And it comes despite all the great and lauded advances in contemporary worship and testimonies and denominational ministries and unity and so on.

But we must take this into our hearts also. Would you miss the second worship service if it wasn't there? Why would you miss it if it wasn't there? If it is simply because it leaves a gap in our newsletter, that is no legitimate reason. If it is because it is handy for those who cannot get to the morning service, that is no genuine cause. The only real reason for missing a second worship service is because you yourself personally would not be able to worship the Lord twice on his day.

Think about it and pray about it. Do **you** need to do something about it?

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,
but let us encourage one another –
and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
Hebrews 10:25*

Photo Credit: Royal Australian Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne, Victoria.

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The Bible & Science

Conflict and Compromise

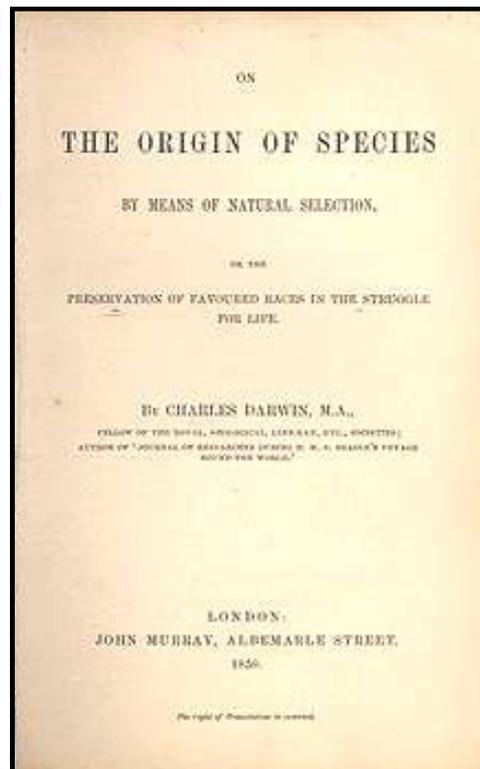
It is widely thought and taught that the Bible, particularly the Biblical account of creation, conflicts with the facts of science. If this is so we face the challenge of proving one or the other to be true, and by implication the other to be false. The argument is not so simple, of course. Indeed, is there really a conflict at all? I deliberately refer to the *facts* of science; facts are different to theories. The facts of science are not disputed. Controlled, repeatable experiments and measurements are the essence of science – what is called empirical or operational science. Experiments or observations produce facts. How these facts are interpreted is another matter. What model or theory is proposed to explain the facts is another matter. The data or facts may be carefully considered, and opinions of others sought, but in the end the theory remains a matter of opinion. It is not uncommon for data sets to be re-analysed and re-considered after the gathering of further data over time, and then interpreted by a totally different model.

Science is basically the study of the natural world. Geology is the study of rocks and biology the study of living things. Scientific study is possible because of the order and laws governing the natural world. Cultures and religions that fail to recognise such order did not progress in science. The Reformation and Puritanism saw an increased interest in science, leading to the great understanding that we have today about the universe, about living organisms, about cell structure and genetics. Scientists of the 17th century, men like Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke and Sir Isaac Newton, took history or pre-history

Moderator's Address

from the Bible. They believed the Bible to be the word of God. Indeed many scientists down to the present day believe the Bible; it is not only materialists, men who reject the supernatural, who can be objective scientists.

Darwin's theory of evolution provided a new framework or world view into which the facts of science might fit. This theory rejects the supernatural and seeks to explain the origin of life in an atheistic or Deistic manner. Although it is about origins, origins without the hand of God, it did be-



come a whole new world view affecting individuals and societies down to the present day. The church, even the Presbyterian Church, felt intimidated by Darwin's theory. Our question today is, why?

Origin of the Species

The theory of evolution was

Dr Dennis K. Muldoon

around before Darwin but it was the publication of his book, *Origin of the Species* in 1859, that impacted the western world. Darwin was an astute observer of nature; he loved collecting specimens. He began theological studies, but changed to being a naturalist even though he never formerly studied science. His big break came in 1831 when he was recommended to join the voyage of HMS *Beagle*, a five year voyage circumnavigating the globe. He took with him the recently published book of the geologist Charles Lyell, in which vast geologic ages were proposed. On this voyage he observed flora and fauna very different to what he knew from England. He observed how these were adapted to their environment, yet how they were similar in many characteristics.

Darwin's book, written some twenty years after the voyage, is subtitled, 'by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life' because in it he proposes his theory of natural selection or the survival of the fittest. Darwin had observed how cattle breeders selected for traits to improve their herds. He proposed Nature as doing a similar thing in the natural world, so that given sufficient time new species emerged, and given an even longer time he concluded, 'I believe animals are descended from at most four or five progenitors, and plants an equal or less number'. He did not accept any sort of power or Deity as involved in this process. Much of his book is actually defending his theory against attacks. He admits he lacked evidence of transition species, like a giraffe with a neck

half as long. Darwin believed 'missing links' would one day be found in the fossil record. His hope was not well founded because almost two hundred years later, with over one hundred thousand fossils documented, there are no missing links. Our Reformed fathers were not to know this of course, but they might have questioned the vast ages demanded by Darwin's theory.

Darwin used the word 'species' in the title of his book but he made no clear distinction between species and varieties. He makes no mention of 'kind' as repeatedly stated in Genesis 1-- God created X 'according to its kind'. He admitted that crossing species led to sterile hybrids, but dismissed this as a result of faulty reproductive systems. Darwin knew nothing about Mendelian genetics; he accepted Lamarck's ideas in proposing transmutation of species. Again, our forefathers might have questioned the fact of hybrid sterility. To be sure, not all of the men we will refer to accepted transmutation of species and the evolution of man.

Charles Lyell's book, entitled '*Principles of geology- an attempt to explain former changes of the earth's surface by reference to causes now in operation*' was published in 1830. Adopting a theory of *uniformitarianism* (originally proposed by James Hutton), he proposed a geologic timescale going back millions of years, in direct defiance of the Biblical record. Lyell coined the terms Paleozoic, Mesozoic and Cenozoic, supposedly going back c.500 million years. We note that the idea of 'the present being the key to the past' takes such study outside the realm of operational science.

Darwin and Lyell corresponded, developing their theories in the light of each other's. David Livingstone dismisses the idea that 'evolution is uniformitari-

anism applied to biology', but Darwin's theory has no credibility at all apart from the long ages as proposed by Lyell. Radiometric dating was used to date rocks as millions of years old but this involved many assumptions, one being uniformitarianism. Using Darwin's theory, rocks could be dated from the fossils they contained – biostratigraphy. So Lyell and Darwin worked in tandem to promote the idea of a vast age for the earth and for life on the earth. The catastrophic biblical flood had no place in their theories – hence *uniformitarianism* as against *catastrophism*.

Chalmers and the gap theory

Dr Thomas Chalmers is known to us as the father of the Free Church of Scotland, having led in the so-called Disruption in 1843. A leading evangelical theologian, Chalmers was also interested in natural theology and science. Within the intellectual community of the day Lyell's new theory was gaining popularity, and sections of the Christian community were ready to abandon a literal worldwide flood. Douglas Kelly writes that 'in the early 19th century, under pressure from the intellectual community which claimed irrefutable proof for vast ages of the world as well as the existence of fossils much older than biblical Adam, Dr Chalmers proposed inserting a gap of millions of years between the first two verses of Genesis to accommodate these aeons of earth history with their fossils into the traditional biblical story of beginnings'. Jonathan Sarfati writes more generally of 'conservative biblical exegetes being intimidated by science'.

Chalmers published his idea in 1814. His standing within the evangelical community meant that what became known as the 'gap theory', or 'ruin-reconstruction theory', became

popular by way of compromise between the Bible and science. The popular Schofield Reference Bible of 1909 incorporated this theory into the footnotes. The six days of creation remained as 24 hour solar days at this stage, but millions of years could be inserted between the first two verses of Genesis 1. The original Hebrew, however, does not really allow such a gap in the reading, although the KJV begins verse 2, 'And the earth was without form and void' when 'and' is not in the Hebrew it is not a *waw*-consecutive; and it certainly cannot be translated 'now' or 'because'. Noel Weeks calls the translation 'the earth *became* waste and void' a 'grammatically impossible translation' of Genesis 1:2. A straightforward reading of the text, a reading undertaken up until this point in time, saw no 'gap' between these verses, certainly not one of millions of years.

Chalmers died in 1847 so was not aware of Darwin's theory; would he have accepted proto-humans existing before Adam, or life of any form before divine creation? The name 'ruin-reconstruction theory' of course, proposes life and death before Adam; Genesis 1:2 becomes a re-creation after divine judgment upon Satan. The fossil record of the death and extinction of many species is placed in this gap. This means there was death before the sin of Adam. But in Romans 5:12 we read that through one man sin entered the world and death through sin. Further on, Paul writes of the whole creation subjected to futility and groaning (Rom 8:20, 22).

The popularity of this gap theory extended till recent times. In his book, *Understanding the Bible* (1972) John Stott wrote, 'evolution may have

been the mode which God employed in creating' – what is called 'theistic evolution'. He wrote, 'But my acceptance of Adam and Eve as historical is not incompatible with my belief that several forms of pre-Adamic 'hominid' may have existed for thousands of years previously... it is conceivable that God created Adam out of one of them'. This was the door opened by Chalmers' theory. Many accepted Darwin's idea that man descended from the apes with the proviso that his conscience or soul was given by God. Thankfully, Reformed men like Schaeffer and Lloyd-Jones did not accept such ideas, but many did.

Scotland and liberal theology

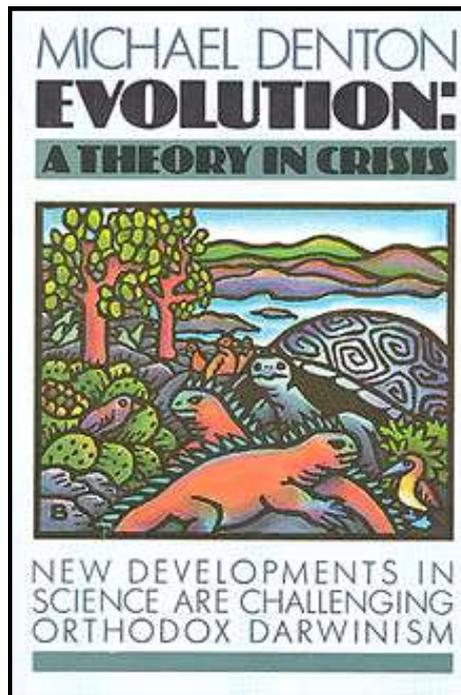
What was the situation in the Free Church of Scotland when Darwin's book hit the shelves? Chalmers' theory was still popular, but it was also the time when liberal theology arrived from Germany. Liberalism elevated rationalism about revelation; the Bible was no longer regarded as the inspired and inerrant word of God. To some in the church Darwin's theory of evolution was more rational than the biblical account of creation. Liberal ideas lead to the questioning of Confessional standards, and to the prolonged heresy trial and final expulsion of William Robertson Smith in 1881. Robert Rainy initially supported Robertson Smith, but in the end changed sides. Even so, Rainy was an advocate of relaxation in terms of subscription to the WCF and the adoption of declaratory legislation – this was in the lead up to church union in 1900.

In 1874 Rainy was made principal of New College, Edinburgh. I mention Rainy because the historian David Livingstone holds him up as a leading Scottish Calvinist who accepted the theory of evolution. In his inaugural lecture, Rainy said that evolution was going on before our eyes and that Darwin's theory of the origin of

man was irrelevant to theology. Prior to this, Free Church elders had strongly opposed Darwin's theory, particularly when Huxley, in an 1862 lecture on evolution, attacked the biblical account of creation.

Princeton and B.B. Warfield

Across the Atlantic in the halls of Princeton College, the winds of liberalism were also blowing. Charles Hodge visited Germany in 1926, but returned rejecting rationalism and 'higher criticism'. He



also rejected Darwinism as being theory not fact, and seeing its underlying atheism and rejection of teleology or doctrine of final causes. Yet 'in the 1870's he suggested the term 'day' could be understood as referring to great geological epochs' (Livingstone). B.B. Warfield came from a farm; his father was a breeder of cattle. As a young man, he was keen on science and studied Darwin's book. Warfield, who was taught by Hodge, was also ready to accept the long ages required by evolution, pointing to gaps in biblical genealogies. He also went further in accepting some form of evolution. In 1888 Warfield wrote, 'there is no necessary antagonism

between Christianity and evolution, provided that we do not hold too extreme a form of evolution'; that is, a form that rejects God and miraculous intervention (in the giving of the soul and in creating Eve). Warfield saw divine activity in creation, evolution and mediate creation. By mediate creation he did not mean 'theistic evolution' as such, but forming something by combination of creation and a process (i.e. evolution) working together. For example, Adam's body could be formed by a long process of evolution but his spirit was given by divine in-breathing.

While Warfield may have left the matter of evolution an open question in 1888, Fred Fargel does not necessarily agree with Livingstone who wrote that Warfield increasingly accepted evolutionary theory over the years. Even so, Warfield was seeking compromise between biblical inerrancy and an orthodox hermeneutic, and science, so-called. While Warfield was straining to accommodate Darwin's theory, Livingstone is straining to present this orthodox biblical scholar as an evolutionist. Livingstone is critical of the unintellectual arguments of creationists. The American Presbyterian Church in commenting on Livingstone's attempts to represent the theory of evolution as acceptable to biblical Christians writes, 'This fact alone should be enough to tell 21st century Biblical Christians, who have the benefit of hindsight showing where a century of evolutionary thought has taken our culture, just how problematic Warfield's thinking was on this subject'.

One thing Warfield noted was the continuing scepticism towards Darwin's theory in the scientific community. Discerning scientists saw the ongoing lack of evidence to support this theory. Missing links were not being found among the fossils. In

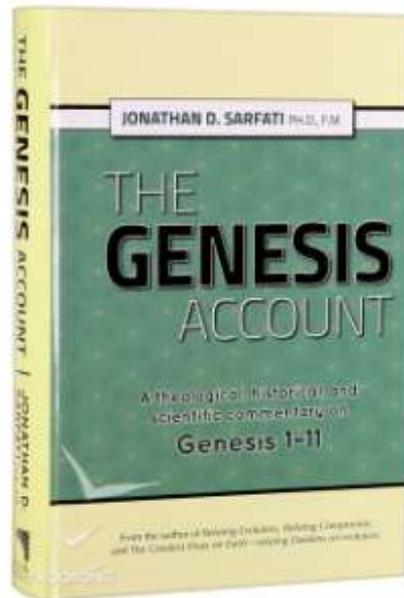
1986 Michael Denton, not a professing Christian, published *Evolution: a theory in crisis*. He writes of this theory, 'After a century of intensive effort biologists have failed to validate it in any significant sense'. This does not point to a return to the biblical account of creation by scientists but it should encourage Christians to return to the Bible and cease compromising with scientific theory. Men like Richard Dawkins tenaciously cling to the theory of evolution not because of their science, but because of their atheism. By the mid-20th century Christian scientists were re-evaluating the fossils, the facts, and fitting them to a different framework. By 1976 Henry Morris was ready to publish his work in *The Genesis Record*. He showed that the fossil record was consistent with a global catastrophe like Noah's flood, i.e. fossils of all kinds within a single layer of rock.

Day-age theories

Biblical scholars, particularly those who had adopted liberal theology, but also evangelicals like John Stott, had abandoned the idea of a worldwide flood since 'the flood seems to have been a comparatively local disaster' (Stott). Nigel Cameron in *Evolution and the authority of the Bible*, concluded that 'every single commentator' in the 19th century, bar one, 'argues against the traditional idea of the flood'. The 20th century saw little change. These scholars also abandoned reading the early chapters of Genesis as historical narrative. Ancient Near Eastern texts like *Enuma Elish* were being compared to the biblical account of creation and the flood. Some, like a recent archbishop of Sydney, taught me that the early chapters of Genesis were a bit like the Book of Revelation, meaning they were full of sym-

bolism. In such a reading of Genesis, one can accept the 'day-age theory' popularised by Hugh Ross, and the 'framework hypothesis' advocated by Meredith Kline. One wonders why such theories were necessary when Darwin's theory of evolution was on the decline, but the theory of long geological ages has not declined in popularity. Millions or billions of years of the earth history continue to be taught and believed without question.

As previously stated, a vast age for the earth is essential for Darwin's theory of natural selection and the origin of the species. Chalmers' gap theory allowed such an age to be read into the Bible. Reading the days of Genesis 1 as long ages also gives place in the Bible for Darwin's theory, not that exegetes were necessarily attempting



such compromise; although this was certainly the case at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. We have noted that Hodge and Warfield departed from a reading of solar days in Genesis 1. They firstly abandoned the biblical genealogies, like that in Matthew 1, as having a purpose other than pro-

viding a chronology, but as the American Presbyterian Church comments, 'it is quite another matter to say they have no chronological purpose at all'. Why do we read all the 'begats' and the years in Genesis if they have no chronological purpose? Clearly, stalwarts of Reformed theology were trying to accommodate evolutionary theory.

With every day of the six days of creation we read 'so the morning and evening of the X day'. But Hugh Ross and others point to the absence of this formula with the seventh day, the Sabbath rest. He argues that the seventh day represents a minimum of several thousand years. Ross admits, 'I see the community of scientists, including astronomers and astrophysicists, as an *ethnos*, (as in a group to be witnessed to)'. He then says of the dogmas of a few-thousand-years-old earth, 'I cannot imagine a notion more offensive to this group' (in Kelly).

Oxford professor James Barr, who rejected any notion of supernatural Christianity or biblical inerrancy, wrote in 1984 "the apologetic arguments which suppose the 'days' of creation to be long eras of time, the figures of years not being chronological, and the flood to be a mere local Mesopotamian flood, are not taken seriously by any professor, as far I know' (quoted by Kelly). Kelly writes, 'a large percentage of conservative evangelical scholars refuse to interpret the Genesis text in its plain historical and literal sense in order to accommodate it to the premise of the reigning world view concerning origins'.

In conclusion, we must refrain from being mesmerised or intimidated by unproven theories or declarations by scien-

tists. Such theories continue to be thrown at us today with statements like, '99 percent of scientists believe it'. If it is a proven scientific fact, we will not hear such words. If it is proven scientific fact, it will not contradict our plain reading of the Bible. Let us have such confidence in the word of God.

Finally a small story: In India I had to register with the local police every year to get a residential permit which allowed me to stay in India. I was there as a Christian, teaching in a Christian college. For some years I went to the office with fear and trepidation. But then I realised that the

intelligence officer knew perfectly well I was a missionary, so why try to hide the fact? So I took a Scripture tract and gave it to him! The world expects us as believers to know the Bible and to believe the Bible. Let us do what they expect us to do, and what the Lord expects us to do (Rom. 1:16).

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The World in the Banner

Burma (Myanmar): Imprisoned Pastor Deteriorates

Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) pastors Dom Dawng Nawng (65) and La Jaw Gam Hseng (35) were abducted by Burmese military personnel on 24 December 2016, after they helped reporters document destruction caused by Burmese military aggression [RLPB 391 (29 Jan 2017)]. On 24 January the military handed the pastors over to police who accused them of spying and charged them with 'illegal association'. In a recent conversation with Morning Star News, Khon Peng, wife of Pastor Nawng, revealed that her husband is discouraged and his health is deteriorating. Nawng was transferred from Muse, 174km south to Lashio in April and the four-and-a-half hour road trip makes visiting difficult. Peng said her husband - who shares a cell with some 40 other prisoners - 'suffers from asthma' and 'has diarrhoea often'.

Attorney U Brang Di confirmed to Morning Star News: 'He lacks nutrition. As he is old, it makes it worse. He seems very weak.' The two pastors faced court for the first time on 3 May. Please pray.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin* | RLPB 412 | Wed 28 Jun 2017

UK Ed Dept Warns Jewish School To Teach On LGBT Issues Or Close

The consequences of redefining marriage continue coming to light with news that a United Kingdom Jewish school faces forced closure for not teaching LGBT issues. Vishnitz Girls School in London is one of seven known UK schools reportedly falling foul of the Department of Education and the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Schools for not provide "a full understanding of fundamental British values." as outlined in the Equality Act.

The school has been told it must "improve" or face closure for not teaching children aged three to eight LGBT issues. UK Education Secretary Justine Greenings has expressed plans to make LGBT education compulsory in all schools.

"Just three years after same-sex marriage has been legalised in the UK, the Government is now going after religious schools for not promoting or endorsing rain-

bow ideology," warns Australian Christian Lobby managing director Lyle Shelton.

"In Sweden, the Prime Minister has gone after priests and pastors, warning them to perform gay marriage or "find another job". The experiences in Sweden, the UK and other countries show that a same-sex marriage bill that supposedly protects religious freedoms will not stand the test of time.

"Taking lessons from other nations, Australian churches and schools need to be very concerned with the consequences of removing the gender requirement from the Marriage Act. A plebiscite or people's vote will allow all Australians the opportunity to vote on the consequences of redefining marriage," Mr Shelton said.

+ *ACL*, 28 June 2017

How The Mighty Have Fallen

I have been writing for about 25 years. My first published article appeared in the January 1992 issue of a Canadian Reformed youth magazine called In Holy Array. The article was entitled "Women in Office" and it dis-

cussed the opening of ecclesiastical offices to women in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. In 1990, the CRC Synod decided to allow churches to admit women to the offices of minister, elder, and deacon. This set in motion the large-scale departure from the CRC which eventually led to the formation of the United Reformed Churches. My article expressed bewilderment that this could happen in a church with which, less than 50 years earlier, we had enjoyed Christian unity.

Now here we are 25 years later and I am again bewildered. A church federation with whom we still officially have sister-church relations (though suspended) has officially decided to do what the CRC did in the early 1990s. Over the last two days, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) have decided at Synod Meppel to admit women to all the offices of the church. Their sister-churches in Canada, Australia, Ireland, Korea, the US, and others all warned them not to but, regrettably, they did not heed these warnings. Especially amongst the immigrant churches in Canada and Australia, these decisions bring an enormous amount of sadness.

I know there are still faithful believers in the RCN. One such brother e-mailed me this morning to share his grief and consternation. These brothers and sisters will need our prayers as they seek to discern God's will for them in terms of church membership. It would not be easy to leave the church of your youth, the church where you made profession of faith, the church where you were married, and where your children were baptized. It wasn't easy for the concerned CRC members in the early 1990s either. Yet they didn't choose the easy path; instead, they chose the faithful path.

As for ecumenical relations, next year there will be a Free Reformed synod here in Australia. The Dutch churches were warned that, apart from repentance, our relationship with them would be severed at Synod 2018. We will be forced to follow through on that warning. The Canadian Reformed Churches have said something similar in regard to their next synod in 2019.

And then there's the ICRC, the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The RCN have badly miscalculated if they thought that these decisions would have no bearing on their membership in the ICRC. Next month, July 13-19, the next meeting of the ICRC is scheduled to take place in Jordan, Ontario. Again, one cannot but help think of what happened with the Christian Reformed Church in the 1990s. The CRCNA was one of the founding members of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), just like the RCN is one of the founding members of the ICRC. In 1997, NAPARC voted to suspend the membership of the CRC over their decision regarding women in office. Amongst the churches leading that initiative were two current sister-churches of the RCN -- the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church in the United States. The OPC and RCUS are still in NAPARC -- and also in the ICRC. Have the OPC and RCUS softened their stand on this issue since the 1990s? The writing is on the wall for RCN membership in the ICRC. The only question is one of time.

After the fall of the mighty CRCNA, many post-mortem analyses have been essayed. Most of them, including mine, lay the blame at the foot of developments regarding the authority of Scripture tracing back to the 1960s. Over the coming days, similar analyses will be writ-

ten about the RCN. It's a familiar story and it illustrates man's wickedness in departing from God's Word. It's not "Reformation" when you scorn the Scriptures and have women office bearers -- it's deformation. I've seen the story already play out twice in my short lifetime. I pray I won't see it a third time. I pray that we will have learned something from the sad fall of these two federations of churches that were once faithful and mighty in the LORD.

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12.)

+ *Wes Bredenhof, Free Reformed Churches of Australia*

Truly Good People Know They Are Bad

When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse he understands his own badness less and less.

A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right.

This is common sense, really. You understand sleep when you are awake, not while you are sleeping. You can see mistakes in arithmetic when your mind is working properly: while you are making them you cannot see them. You can understand the nature of drunkenness when you are sober, not when you are drunk. Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either.

+ *C.S. Lewis*

Vietnam: Imprisoned Pastor Punished For Talking

Central Highlands Protestant Pastor Nguyen Cong Chinh (45) was arrested in April 2011 because of his Christian witness. In July 2012 he was sentenced

to 11 years in prison. Not only does Pastor Chinh suffer persecution in prison, but his wife, Tran Thi Hong, also suffers violent persecution because of her religious liberty advocacy. On 25 May 2017 a delegation from the US Consulate visited Pastor Chinh in prison. Despite having been warned in advance not to say anything negative against the state of Vietnam, Pastor Chinh told the US delegation about the tortures, threats and mistreatment he has endured in prison. These include regular beatings, having shards of glass mixed in with his food, being held in stocks and having to endure long periods in solitary confinement. Now he is being punished for talking and his wife fears for his health and safety. Please pray.
 + *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 412 | Wed 28 Jun 2017*

Pilot Calls on Passengers to Pray after Engine Threatens to

Fail
 Passengers on an AirAsia flight from Perth, Australia heading to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia recently experienced a terrifying situation. *FoxNews.com reports* that, about 75 minutes into the six-hour flight, the plane began experiencing engine failure. The aircraft began shaking like “a washing machine,” according to passengers. The pilot manning the flight, who had been flying for 44 years, knew the situation was so bad that he reportedly asked passengers to pray. Passengers were also asked to “keep an eye on” the engine by looking out their windows, since the pilot did not have a good view of it from the cockpit. The prayers of the pilot and passengers apparently worked. The plane was able to get back to Perth with no loss of life and not even any injuries to any on board.

“I thought I might die..... Today was my beginning the trip, but I backed to the Perth due to technical issue.... Anyway I still arrive!!! Thank you God!!!” one passenger posted on Instagram, along with a video showing the shaking plane. AirAsia issued this statement following the harrowing incident: “Passengers were attended by our ground staff upon landing and were provided with all necessary assistance. Our engineers are taking the precautionary steps to check the aircraft.” Authorities report that it is yet unclear what caused the engine malfunction.
 + *Veronica Neffinger | Editor, ChristianHeadlines.com | Monday, June 26, 2017*

The Miracles At Calvary

The Glorified Saints	<i>Matthew 27:53b</i>	Sjirk Bajema
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Reading through the verses 52 and 53 may have raised a question in your mind. It is a question not directly related to the text. Especially after the previous miracle at Calvary it would have struck you. Because you just couldn't help wondering, “Where did they go?” Yes, where did those resurrected saints end up after this?
 Of course, that's not the point Matthew is making here. He simply records this miracle, the miracle of the open tombs, as a further proof that death has been defeated. The Advent Church returns to symbolise the fact that because of Christ's death they are in glory.
 But this question still bothers you: ‘Where did these men and

women end up?’ And, for that matter, ‘Where were they in the three days between the supernatural opening of the tombs and their appearance in the city?’
 There will be other questions, too. This is a unique story. But it is undeniably true. And here is why...
The time these saints reappeared
 This is where our text says, “and after Jesus' resurrection.” These resurrected saints have not actually been seen yet. Up to this point, their witness to Christ's death lay solely in the fact that they were no longer in their tombs – their bodies had gone! But now everyone could see just whose bodies were missing.

They all belonged to people who had believed and prophesied that the Messiah would come.
 But now there's no doubt they are seen. All thoughts and talk about their disappearance vanished, because they're right there! And they became visible at the exact moment of Christ's resurrection.
 A similar event occurred at the time of Christ's transfiguration. There was a definite purpose behind that. That was a foretaste of the glory of the Messiah. The three key disciples pointed clearly to where it was all going. And the transfiguration happened at a particular time in the ministry of Jesus.

In the same way, there's a clear purpose in these saints appearing now. They give a foretaste of the glory of believers. We realise we're being joined with them in the Church.

The Jewish rabbis had taught that in the messianic era many righteous would arise from the grave. They had even gone so far as to name which patriarchs would appear. Now those righteous people were here and were seen by many in Jerusalem at the time!

The word of prophecy is falling into place. It's all coming at the right time, because these saints only appeared after Christ had risen. They could only be witnesses when the Great Witness himself had testified. The first Sunday of the Christian church, the first Sabbath of the New Testament, is here acknowledged and kept by the dead before it's discovered and celebrated by the living. The words of Romans 14:9 are made clear, for the apostle states there, "Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of the dead and the living."

This makes the ultimate difference. The people of this world go to the cemetery to mourn. And some of them spend the whole day there doing just that. But Easter Sunday, for the Christian, turns the cemetery into the greatest reunion in history. Man's way leads to a hopeless end – God's way leads to an endless hope! Together with Christ, who is the first-fruit, there comes all this other fruit! It's the beginning of the most incredible harvest in the world! That's why this sixth miracle tells us of the time these saints reappeared, because it could not be any other time. This is God's perfect time – the right time.

The place where these saints turn up

Now we will see why this could not have happened anywhere else but in Jerusalem. "They went into the holy city," verse 53 says. And because of what we've read before, it seems they came from the cemetery outside the city. Not necessarily, though. As these saints appear to have risen from the dead and come out from their tombs on the Friday afternoon, it all depends on where they had been since then.

This is commonly acknowledged by the commentators to be a mystery. They say it is part of the unexplained – something we might get to know about in heaven, if we're really that interested in it then!

Could it be, though, that in their glorified state they had been in heaven itself for that time? That's where a number of other equally glorified saints are – like Enoch, and Moses, and Elijah. Then, when it was time for them to reappear, they did indeed go into the holy city. The holy ones entered the holy city to testify to the Holy One!

We may wonder why Jerusalem is in verse 53 called "the holy city". It is in this place that there had been the persecution the prophets of the past. And now she had murdered God's own Son – the greatest prophet of them all!

Yet, she is still the holy city. By God's sovereign grace, she was the place where he had been among his people. Not by virtue of the people themselves, mind you. We could never look to them. As indeed we could never depend now on the leaders and members of the Church universal. But because Jerusalem is God's chosen city, she is holy.

While we may despise what people in the church may do, let's never disparage the Church. She is our mother. And God is our Father. In Christ he is the husband who, like Hosea, has been the faithful husband, constantly saving her from the deadly consequences of her sins. And, in the end, he paid his own life for her. Christ has a purpose for his Church that she is yet to fulfil.

In Acts 1:8 the Lord Jesus, as he was about to ascend back to heaven, tells his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Thus it is in this city that it starts. This is the capital city of the King.

Matthew 27:45-54

⁴⁵ From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. ⁴⁶ About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

⁴⁷ When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

⁴⁸ Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ⁴⁹ But the rest said, "Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

⁵⁰ And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

⁵¹ At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks split. ⁵² The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³ They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

⁵⁴ When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

From here the Gospel goes throughout the whole world.

Matthew's readers would have been overwhelmed. Heaven has come down to earth -- the soldiers of the King tell us that D-Day has come. The battle has been won. They come in the Name of the Son. What may have been before the place the Lord had his presence, was now only the first place of all the places his presence would be. And it will be in Jerusalem that everything for us will end -- the new Jerusalem.

As the apostle John pictures it in his vision in Revelation 21, the verses 2 and 3, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'"

The Jews have an expression which has passed down through the generations. They say it to their fellow Jews when they take their leave. For when they say goodbye, they say, "Next year Jerusalem!"

Christians, let's look to enter the holy city, too, because we are going to the One up above -- the One where we will live with forever!

The way these saints come back

The time and the place these saints reappeared is vital. It points to what Christ has done and the difference that will make -- all over this world and for all eternity! Look at the last phrase in verse 53: "After Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people."

Over the years we can meet all kinds of people. Many of them we won't remember at all in times to come. So what would be the kind of thing that makes us remember

them? Why do we recall certain people and not others? Wouldn't it be something that stands out about them? Perhaps the way they look, the way they talk -- maybe it's that unusual name they have!

So what could it be about these men and women that not only would make them unforgettable, but would right then and there make them quite recognisable? Even if they had died hundreds of years before!

The account of the Transfiguration helps us here. There it is quite clear who Moses and Elijah are. Jesus becomes glorified before them there in the presence of two old covenant saints -- they whose brightness is awesome! It's so obvious who they are that Peter wants to put up shelters for them. But that's when the voice from the cloud speaks. Then they realised why Moses and Elijah were there. They were gone when Peter, James, and John looked up after humbling themselves before the voice. Those two saints from the past had performed their prophesied witness to their Lord.

And it's the same in our text. As soon as these resurrected saints had testified to the Lord, they went back up to heaven. Let's not think otherwise, for they couldn't have lived their lives ever again amongst us. Just think of the confusion and disruption that would be for those who had died only a few years before. Would their spouses have to take them back, even if they'd remarried in the meantime? Besides Hebrews 9 verse 27 is very clear, "man is destined to die once." That's God's order for us.

There's not even the hint of reincarnation here!

These saints didn't live human lives again. Neither did they stay until Pentecost, as some have suggested. Then we would be sure to find other references to them in scripture. And anyway, what could that add to their purpose for being here?

These holy ones came back as a further confirmation of the reason for Christ's death and resurrection. They proclaimed that he is the One they had been waiting for -- the Messiah. What was sown in weakness, to use the words of Paul in 1st Corinthians 15:43, is now raised in power. We've got something out of this world to look forward to!

This is all due to the One those ancient saints witnessed to during their short time in Jerusalem. We must remember that to take our eyes off Jesus for a moment while we ponder this strange story, is to forget its chief character -- the One it is all about. He is Christ the King; he rules everything because he has conquered death's sting; he never sinned.



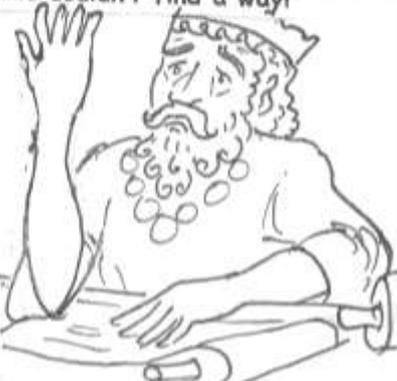
Ponatahi Christian School, a conservative Reformed school in New Zealand, is seeking a Year 0 to 1 teacher to begin in September or October, the Lord willing.

We are a tight-knit school committed to providing a consistent Christian education, with staff members from all over the world.

The school will assist with New Zealand teacher registration and in any professional development required for delivery of the New Zealand curriculum.

For more information please email the principal, Peter Bertram at principal@ponatahi.school.nz and look at <http://www.ponatahi.school.nz/>.

Children under the Banner — Daniel 6

<h2>The Lions' Den</h2>	<p>King Darius's officials plotted how to get rid of Daniel.</p> 	 <p>They persuaded the king to sign a decree that couldn't be changed</p>
 <p>BY ORDER OF THE KING.</p> <p>For the next thirty days everyone must worship the king.</p>	 <p>Daniel continued to pray to God three times a day.</p>	<p>How could the king save Daniel? He couldn't find a way!</p> 
<p>Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, but God sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths. They didn't harm Daniel at all.</p> 		 <p>"Has God been able to rescue you?" cried King Darius.</p>  <p>"Yes, O King, God has protected me from the lions." replied Daniel</p>

Prescribed Search Work

AUGUST 2017

Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under

SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE (Intermediate omit questions 6 and 8)

1 SAMUEL chapter 19

1. What were Jonathan's words when he spoke well of David to his father? (2 verses)
2. What two attempts did Saul make to kill David? (2 verses)
3. Where did David flee when he escaped from Saul?
4. What happened to Saul when he went to Nain to take David? (2 verses)

Chapter 20

5. What did Jonathan ask David to do for him while he still lived, and for his house for ever? (2 verses)
6. What plan using three arrows did Jonathan suggest in order to send a secret message to David? (2 verses)
7. How did Jonathan know that his father had determined to kill David?
8. What did Jonathan say to David after the lad was gone?

JUNIOR

MARK chapter 10:13--31

1. How did the disciples act when young children were brought to Jesus? But what did Jesus do? (2 verses only)
2. What did the young ruler do when Jesus told him to sell what he had and give to the poor?
3. What things did Jesus tell the disciples would happen to him at Jerusalem? (2 verses)

Chapter 10:46—52

4. With what words did Jesus heal blind Bartimaeus?

Please send the answers to:
Mrs I Steel
PO Box 942
Epping NSW 1710
 The questions for the whole year
 are available from the above postal
 address or by email at:
iesteel@gmail.com

Film in the Banner

Hollywood conquers the world...?

Andrew Wibe Bajema

The Chinese film market was an afterthought in 2008 when *Kung Fu Panda* was released, but its popularity due to its incidental reliance on Chinese culture, traditions and settings saw the start of a dramatic change in the film industry that is only beginning to gain momentum. More than ever films are being specifically tailored to the Chinese market, whether it is the final third of

Transformers: Age of Extinction (2014) taking place in Hong Kong and conveniently seeing the Chinese government heroically protect it; to the scruffy Europeans taking a Marco-Polo trip to find articulate and proud Chinese protecting the world from demons in *The Great Wall* (2016); or the *Warcraft* (2016)

film finding a much larger market in China to warrant sequels, which would not have been possible solely on the backs of American audiences. It is no understatement that this is one of the greatest changes in mainstream film, where the expression of ideas takes a radically different direction. The Western film industry is finding that this new global market confronts them with norms and standards very different from its own.

While examples of these differing ideals are everywhere, a striking one comes out of the original Hong Kong film *Infernal Affairs* (2004), a brilliant tale of intrigue and espionage that ends in a self-

conviction and redemption. However the mainland Chinese version was blatantly censored to force the idea that Chinese authority must never be compromised. Yet this censorship was nothing compared to the Oscar-winning remake *The Departed* (2006), where in contemporary Hollywood fashion, the redemptive core was completely ripped out for the sake of gritty nihilism.



Picture from the movie, 'The Great Wall': Scruffy Westerners seek Chinese secrets—an apt analogy for contemporary Hollywood.

In this, the American rendition made less sense than the censored Chinese version, showing that moral decay is far more dangerous to the quality of cinema than obvious censorship (*The Departed* was banned altogether in China).

Not all Chinese censorship is solely for the sake of its own political authority, other times it is for good reason. Take R-rated *Logan* (2017), which received many Chinese cuts, against R-rated *Hacksaw Ridge* (2016), which received none. *Logan* is a fantasy that is violent and bloody for the sake of it, attempting to be edgy in the wake of the financially successful yet despicable *Dead-*

pool (2016); while *Hacksaw Ridge* aimed at replicating the horrors of war, using them for a clear moral purpose. Much like classic Hollywood's Motion Picture Production Code up until 1968, many of these limitations and strict Chinese guidelines aren't pointless, and don't prevent popular directors like Stephen Chow (*The Mermaid*, *Kung Fu Hustle*) from creating

meaningful universal messages; actually it may very well promote it.

The most recent stirs in global censorship aren't in mature-rated films though, more and more Hollywood is attempting to push its agenda in supposedly family-friendly films. Malaysia recently wanted to cut a

few seconds of homosexuality out of *Beauty and the*

Beast (2017), "We have approved it but there is a minor cut involving a gay moment. It is only one short scene but it is inappropriate because many children will be watching this movie," said the film censorship board chairman Abdul Halim. On the day of release Disney decided to pull the film altogether because majority-Muslim Malaysia wouldn't play along with their LGBT agenda. Russia equally won't play along; giving *Beauty and the Beast* and *Power Rangers* (2017) an adult 16+ and 18+ rating respectively for the promotion of homosexuality, lambasting their value as 'family friendly' films and shov-

ing it in the face of Hollywood. And who could blame them? Neither of these themes needed to be in family films. China too, has its limits with fragrant homosexuality and nudity, as in *Cloud Atlas* (2013), almost 40 minutes of such 'romances' was taken out to fit the Chinese mould. The Wachowski sisters (formerly brothers) showed no problems with the cuts; surely if they were creating a 'work of art' they should kick up a stink.

Here the question must be asked: Why can China and others be excused for their moral standards by Hollywood, but we in the

West must just put up with it like sheep going to the civilisational slaughter? Hollywood has continually overstepped and abused its own artistic licence and freedoms, so now it has taken only two short decades for Russia and China to look saner in the face of the West's own top-down lunacy, where even anti-Christian nations have more common sense and common decency. The progressives' ironic inability to criticise and push their agenda onto other cultures, whether Chinese, Islamic or otherwise, represents a great opportunity for Christians to use

those countries' censorship and rating systems as guidance for our own film-going experience. As international interests and values increasingly become the norm, Hollywood faces a great conundrum: to survive it needs to sell the world its goods, but is unable to peddle its own decadence whole and uncut as the rest of the world just ain't buying!

Churches in the Banner

Hunter Youth Conference

Nic O'Dell

The first "Hunter Youth Conference" was held in Raymond Terrace on the church property this weekend (30th of June to 2nd of July). As this year marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, the underlying topic of the talks and discussions was the Reformation and its implications for Christians today with the overall theme "Here I Stand".

The first two talks, "Standing by Scripture Alone" and "Standing in Christ Alone" were presented by Rev. George Ball, with Rev. Robin Tso giving the final two talks, "Standing by God's Justifying Grace Alone" and "Where do I Stand Before God in the World?".

It was a great encouragement to have the conference attended by nearly 30 children and youth from both the Hunter and Taree congregations and beyond. It was

also a wonderful opportunity from the Lord to invite young friends and relatives from a relatively unchurched background to enjoy the weekend and learn about the salvation to be found in Jesus alone.

salvation, justification, sin, and sanctification, with some of the youngest participants eagerly explaining the gospel, justification and some of the pressures they face even in primary school.



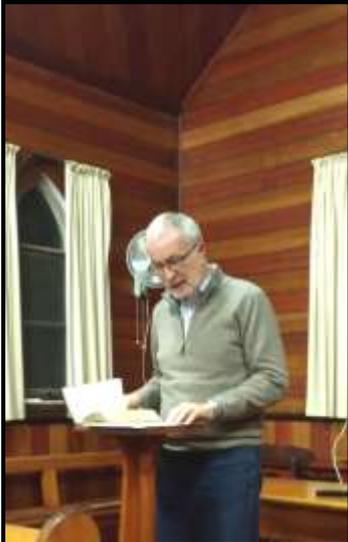
Waiting for others to arrive

The two conference discussion groups were divided according to age with a high school and above group and an under 12's group. There was great encouragement in seeing the interest and thirst for knowledge as both groups discussed the doctrines of eternity,

The first evening was spent around the campfire with several of our young communicant members, as well as our speakers, sharing their personal testimonies of Christ's saving grace in their lives. And the second evening was spent visiting with some of the parents who were invited for dinner and a campfire. The Lord provided many wonderful opportunities for evangelism, teaching and fellowship during the conference.



From top left: Alex Hilberts giving a devotion; camp fire group; camp fire; evening meal; children playing; further camp fire scene; young people together, Rev George Ball delivering talk. Below is a scene from the back of the Raymond Terrace manse.



Was this space for your church news and photographs?
Ask your minister or elder how your congregation can be part of this positive promotion of the denomination, as well as keeping the rest of us up with what's happening!
Camps, special events, youth news, seniors, engagements, marriages, births, anniversaries, obituaries... the list goes on and on!
Perhaps you could volunteer to send in some news and photos?