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*God Himself tells us
how the world
came into existence*



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Is Genesis 1 Real History?

Genesis presents itself as recording events that occurred in the past

A topic that regularly surfaces for discussion and that is currently talked and written about again is whether the first chapter of the Bible (that is Genesis 1:1-2:3) is truly historical. For many today the answer is obvious. Of course not! There was no human perception of what happened and should something not be experienced by people for it to be considered history? And so many disqualify Genesis 1 as being truly historical for no human witnessed the creation of heaven and earth. Furthermore, how could God create light before the light bearers? It makes no sense. Also, look at what all happened on the sixth day. Obviously it cannot be taken literally. Furthermore, science says that the world is billions of years old. But according to the Bible it is only thousands of years old. What do we do with these kinds of questions?

Conservative reactions

Liberal, critical scholars often dismiss Genesis 1 as a myth, similar to other ancient cosmogonies, whose purpose was to explain the present world, an explanation lacking historical credibility. Conservative scholars have reacted in several ways. Let me mention two of them. A favourite response is to consider the narrative of Genesis 1 to be a beautiful literary construction which is not intended to convey a series of actual events. This approach is usually called a framework hypothesis. There are many variations of this, but the essence of this theory is that the days are not given in historical order; rather the sequence is topical. Evidence for this is seen in the fact that the results of creation in days one (light), two (separation of waters above and below), and three (dry land, vegetation) seem to be parallel to days four (light bearers), five (fish and birds), and six (animals and man). However, it is

difficult to square this interpretation with a simple reading of Genesis 1 which clearly indicates a chronological order of days, detailing the historical events of God calling creation into being. It is not surprising that for many scholars the framework hypothesis is basically an attempt to make Genesis 1 fit with current scientific understanding, especially concerning the age of the earth.

Another common interpretation is that the days are to be understood as representing long periods of time. They are not to be taken literally. However, the text of Genesis 1 makes it very clear that days with an evening and morning are referred to (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The matter could not have been stated more clearly and unambiguously. Even liberal scholars who deny the historicity of Genesis 1 and consider it to be a myth acknowledge that the author had in view real days.

If these most popular conservative reactions are not satisfying, what do we do with Genesis 1? How do we understand it?

The context and genre of Genesis 1-2:3

A basic rule of interpreting Scripture is to consider the context. Genesis 1 is the beginning of the book of Genesis which narrates the history of the earliest events recorded in the Bible. At the same time, Genesis is also the history of God's self-revelation. Let us consider each of these two points.

First, Genesis is history writing. No reader of Scripture and no scholar will deny that Genesis presents itself as recording events that occurred in the past. In this book we find the account of creation, the fall into sin, the great Noachan flood, the history of Abraham and his offspring, and the touching account of Joseph and his brothers. If one reads Genesis from



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beginning to end, there is no indication anywhere that we are changing from myth to history writing. Genesis is one grand historical narrative. The beginning of Genesis is a splendid opening chapter, beautifully structured, and coming to the beautiful climax of a perfect creation called into being by the Creator with man, male and female, as its crown. This opening chapter is prose or narrative and like the rest of the book conveys historical events.

It is true that no humans witnessed the creation events described for us and wrote down their impressions of God calling this world into being. However, this does not take anything away from it actually having happened. God was there and He is the one who is speaking in Genesis 1. He tells us what happened at the beginning of time and in so doing, He identifies Himself as the Creator and Lord of all. Even though the topic is beyond our comprehension, we witness here the miracle of revelation. God Himself tells us how the world came into existence.

God's accommodation in revealing his creation

When Almighty God, Creator and Sustainer of all things, addresses human beings, then He must make Himself understood and must therefore accommodate Himself to human understanding. This reality is often used to suggest that Genesis 1 does not really mean what it says. The subject of creation is too difficult and so God put it in this form, but it does not really reflect what actually happened. However, two things should be noted. God always accommodates Himself to human understanding whenever He reveals Himself. This is true of all of Scripture and takes nothing away from the reality of what is recorded. Second, God is pleased to use language that we can comprehend. When God uses our language to reveal Himself and his works then what He says is true to the reality which is being conveyed. "God is not a man, that he should lie" (Num 23:19; cf. 2 Sam 7:28; Titus 1:2). With respect to the creation account this means that we can accept this account as true and factual because God has told us so in his Word. As Christ acknowledged to the Father: "Your Word is truth" (John 17:17).

God does not make untrue statements and deceive us even as He accommodates Himself to our limited human capacity to comprehend. An interpreter of Scripture must go by what is written and by the

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Church News

The consistory of the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg declares that

Rev. T.G. Van Raalte,

currently on extended study leave per Article 14 of the Church Order, is available for call in the churches with a view to taking up pastoral ministry once again in September 2009.

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Examined by Classis Ontario West on March 11, 2009, and received consent to speak an edifying word in the churches effective May 22, 2009, upon successful completion of the academic year (C.O. Art. 21):

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Student S. Wagenaar

Student A. Witten

Examined by Classis Central Ontario on March 13, 2009, and received consent to speak an edifying word in the churches upon successful completion of the academic year (C.O. Art. 21):

Student R. Kampen

context in which it is given. We have historical narrative of a very lofty and beautiful style with clear chronological indicators of days of creation. God used words which we can understand. Creation took place in six days and on the seventh day God rested. That's what God told us. And not just in Genesis. In the fourth commandment God repeated these basic historical facts by justifying the Sabbath rest with the words: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exod 20:11; similarly Exod 31:17). There is no way anyone can get around these words which convey the historical events of creation, events even engraved in stone by the finger of God (Exod 31:18). We either accept them or reject them.

All discussion on Genesis 1 comes down to whether we accept the Word or not

Now the clarity of the revelation of Genesis 1 does not mean that we can now claim to fully or exhaustively comprehend God's work of calling creation into existence. We cannot. We can only repeat what God has told us, but we cannot unpack the full meaning of this revelation. Who can truly understand, for example, what it means that "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:3; 1 Cor 4:6)? What laws of physics would have had to be called into being for created light to exist? Scientists are still discovering new things about light. Clearly what Genesis tells us about the creation of light is not exhaustive but it is a true statement of what happened. The same can be said of all the other creation acts of God. We cannot fathom them (cf. Isa 40:25-26), but we may accept God's record of them to be true because God has told us so, not just in Genesis, but also elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Ps 8:3; 33:6, 9; Heb 11:3; 2 Pet 3:5).

The bottom line

Ultimately all discussion on Genesis 1 comes down to whether we accept the Word or not; whether we think we are wiser than God or not. Genesis 1 is part of God's revelation of Himself. We can trust that his revelation is true to the reality He reveals to us. As man's scientific knowledge increases, faith in the simple declaration of Scripture apparently becomes more difficult for many. It is then good to remember that blessed are those who accept the Scriptures as the Word of Father above. In other words we need to

have a child-like faith (cf. Mark 10:15). I do not mention this to squelch scientific discussion on the implications of Genesis 1 for science. To the contrary. A child is full of wonder at the work of Father and will be motivated to explore it more. Christians have historically been at the forefront of scientific investigations. But, a child of God will seek to explore God's handiwork, also as a scientist, with the full recognition of the truthfulness of the Word of God.

"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command" (Heb 11:3). God invites us to search out the wonders of his creation, but we are best equipped to do so if we do it in the light of his Word and revelation. That includes accepting Genesis 1 as it presents itself – a historical account of God's work of creation at the beginning of time, a work completed in six days, followed by a day of rest. By God's grace, our life rhythm of work and rest is still based on God's creating activity at the beginning of time (cf. Exod 20:8-11).



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Are You in the Good Friday Spirit?



MATTHEW 13:52

"A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

John 13:34

"Are you in the Good Friday spirit?" That seems a strange question. To ask if you are in "the Christmas spirit" before Christmas makes sense, but "a Good Friday spirit"? Allow me to make a case for it.

Christ knew that Good Friday would be a day of separation. So He prepared his disciples: "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me. . . [but] where I am going you cannot come" (v. 33). He alone could serve as the Passover Lamb. He had to be rejected by all, even by his own disciples. After his suffering, death, and resurrection, He alone would ascend into heaven while his disciples would remain on earth.

That was quite something for the disciples to hear. For Christ had called each of them with that command: "Follow me!" Separation was also quite something for Christ Himself to face. He loved his disciples deeply and his heart went out to them. Just as a mother's heart today pines for her children when she has to part with them at an airport, so does Christ's heart. Here Jesus tenderly addresses his disciples not just as "children," but literally as "little children." You can just feel the emotion.

Christ then replaces the command "Follow me" with something else. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another" (v. 34). Love one another means: "Sacrifice yourself and your agenda for the sake of each other. Be willing even to wash each other's feet!" (cf. John 13:1-11)

Peter doesn't like what he hears. He doesn't want to give up following Jesus: "Lord, what can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (v. 37). But Christ insists on it, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later" (v. 36). It's as if He says: "Peter, instead of offering to follow me (something you won't be able to do anyway), love others. Peter, express your love for me in that way! That's the true Good Friday spirit!"

Christ calls this command "new." But didn't God already give this command to his people through Moses in Leviticus 19:18? Indeed, He did. On Good Friday however, this old command receives renewed importance! On Good Friday, by sacrificing his very self for the sake of his disciples, Christ would give the ultimate reason for his people to love one another deeply. Besides that, on Good Friday Christ would part from his disciples who were but little children ever prone to fight, and surrounded by enemies: "O disciples, especially now it is so important to put extra effort into truly loving one another!"

It's only here that Christ addresses his disciples as "little children." The Apostle John, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, picks up on this phrase in his first letter; there he uses this address no less than seven times. Why? To proclaim this command of Christ as valid for all God's people – especially those living in this world after Good Friday, without their Lord and Saviour physically present on earth.

What is so important for God's people now that Christ has shown

us the unfathomable depths of his love by dying on the cross for us? What is so important for God's people in this period when He is in heaven and we are on earth? That we love one another!

Of ourselves we too are really but weak little children in this world, vulnerable to infighting, peer pressure, egoism, addiction, disease, persecution, and lethargy. How important it is then to truly and practically love one another!

Says Christ, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." That's the distinguishing characteristic of a follower of Christ! Without that, all the rest of our activities – whether these be political, missional, or doctrinal – will be empty. As Paul puts it so emphatically, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor 13:1-3).

On this Good Friday, let's ponder the cross of Christ to appreciate the profound depths of his love. Let's press on in the trenches of life – in our marriages, in our families, in our congregations – truly loving each other, sacrificing ourselves and our agendas and our desires for the benefit of each other. Let's get into the Good Friday spirit.



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Remembering Creation (Part 2 of 2): The Gift of Modern Science

Scott Hoezee,
Proclaim the Wonder:
Engaging Science on Sunday
(Baker, 2003), 238 pages

The present series deals with two books by Reformed pastor Scott Hoezee on the gift of creation. The first one, which I reviewed last time, urges Christians to celebrate the beauty and grandeur of creation and to remember that they are mandated to care for it. I now turn to the second book. Herein the author still gives attention to nature and the environment, but his focus is primarily on the attitude of Christians toward the scientific study of creation.

That attitude tends to be ambivalent. Like their unbelieving contemporaries, Christians make a grateful use of the many gifts we receive in science-based technology, from MRIs to digital pace-makers, from microwaves to computers to CD players to wireless telephones – the list is endless. But while appreciating the tangible fruits of the scientific study of nature, believers fear its negative effects on religion and therefore often consider science itself with deep distrust. This is an uncomfortable position. It could even be qualified as a dishonest one. After all, does it really make sense to accept the very substantial

benefits of science and at the same time hold that science itself cannot be trusted as a reliable description of the world? Hoezee wants to explain how this has come about and to explore the possibilities of Christians coming to a more balanced view of modern science.

Scientific naturalism

One major cause of conflict, he points out, is the naturalistic mindset of many scientists and their popularizers. With the term naturalism I refer to the idea that (1) the world that we see is all there is, (2) the scientific method, and that method alone, yields objective truth, and (3) what science can't observe or explain doesn't exist. In this sense, it implies philosophical materialism and practical atheism. What we have to keep in mind, however, is that these naturalistic beliefs are not *scientific* conclusions; they are no more than assumptions, opinions. Hoezee uses as an example the *scientific* work on an electron and the *non-scientific, naturalistic conclusion* that God does not exist because the electron whirs around without any outside help. It brings to mind the Soviet cosmonaut who said he could prove God does not exist because he had not met him in space. The same type of faulty logic is frequently used in connection with other sciences – in

evolutionary biology, astronomy, geology, and also in neurobiology and brain research. A naturalistic conclusion drawn from brain research, for example, is that because scientists can now "map" the brain and locate the physical seat of memory, will, emotions, and so on, all mental states and all beliefs, including religious belief, have an exclusively material base. According to this theory humans possess no soul; religious faith is a "natural phenomenon" and belief in the supernatural the effect of a "God gene." An urgent task for Christians, Hoezee observes, is to learn to separate the corn of genuine scientific discovery from the chaff of the scientific and philosophical naturalism in which some scientists clothe their work.

The power of science

Although they are mere assumptions, naturalistic ideologies have become powerful forces in our culture and strongly influence our society's worldview. Christians, including Christian students, are by no means immune to them. Their persuasiveness is based on the success of science proper. That success is evident. I already mentioned science-based technology, which constitutes very visible proof that science "works." True, scientific conclusions are tentative and always open to

revision, and in the course of history many a scientific theory has been adapted or replaced altogether. It is therefore unwise to build one's faith on any such theory, Darwinism included.

But there is more to be said. It is also true that there is steady progress in science. Herein it differs from other disciplines and the difference is largely due to the fact that science has techniques of prediction, proof, and verification that the other disciplines lack. It is largely self-correcting. This means that science, tentative though its conclusions are, must be taken seriously and receive its "epistemic due." History shows that it "can and frequently does get things right," and that scientific conclusions which seem disturbing are not necessarily erroneous. Hoezee refers in this connection to the well-known case of Galileo, whose promotion of a sun-centred world was initially rejected by many Christians as opposed to the Bible.

All this is not to suggest that science is necessarily a disinterested search for truth. As Hoezee remarks, many a scientist is exploitative, motivated by the desire to gain mastery over nature. Some are anti-humanist, attempting "to demote humanity's perceived place in the universe by suggesting that in the larger scheme of things we human beings are a mere blip, a trifle. . . ." Furthermore, any scientist who explains the world as the result of material causes and not as the work of God worships the creature rather than the Creator. Idolatry is not absent from the world of science. Nor are we to forget the evil uses that can be and in fact are being made of science and science-based technology.

Today there are means – especially in genetics but also in

other sciences – that, if used, can affect the very nature of humanity. All too often the scientific credo is that whatever can be done should be done, regardless of the consequences.

The "book of nature"

But if science can lead to idolatry, it is also undeniable that many scientific discoveries are to be recognized as God-honouring in that they show the Creator's majesty and power. Hoezee reminds his readers of the ancient Christian teaching (found also in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession) that God makes Himself known to us by two means, the first of which is the "creation, preservation, and government of the universe," the so-called book of nature. Here,

Christians must learn to separate the corn of genuine scientific discovery from the chaff of scientific naturalism

he comments, is a most compelling reason why Christians may not ignore the work of science; for where else do they find an equally careful study of nature? Hoezee quotes the well-known astronomer (and fervent believer in the existence of space aliens) Carl Sagan (d. 1996). This man was an agnostic who had little good to say about Christianity or any other established religion but who made, at least by implication, a justified criticism of religious attitudes toward science when he "wondered why hardly any major religions or religious thinkers had ever looked upon the wonders science has revealed about this universe and

then responded, 'Why, this is better than we thought! The universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, and more elegant.'"

When speaking of the wonders of science Sagan was no doubt thinking of the great astronomical advances of the past century in which he himself had been involved and which have so clearly shown the marvelous order and unimaginable greatness of the universe. He could also have referred to twentieth-century discoveries that demonstrate the uniqueness of planet earth and show that the earth, the solar system, and indeed the entire cosmos appear to have been *designed* for complex life, rather than being the accidental result of a mindless evolutionary process. Yet another striking scientific contribution of recent times is the discovery of the DNA structure and subsequent DNA research. In practically every area science gives us an unsurpassed vision of the intricacy, order, lawfulness, purposefulness, and richness of the creation we have been given to tend and enjoy. It should therefore inspire not only amazement but also thanksgiving. Indeed, knowledge of science must lead to gratitude, praise, and adoration.

Because of the gift of modern science, we know far more about the universe than did our ancestors. This is an undoubted benefit. But is it at the same time a serious drawback, since science can seem to go against revelation? Would we be better off to ignore science altogether (assuming that we could do so)? By way of answer, Hoezee asks a number of rhetorical questions: "Does our increased knowledge of outer space, the composition of stars, and the nature of their hydrogen-helium

fission make Psalm 19 meaningless? Do believers today, armed with tremendous amounts of astronomical knowledge, look into the night sky and conclude, 'Well, I guess God wasn't involved in all that after all, seeing as we understand it so well now'?" To ask the questions is to answer them.

When faith and science clash

Science has not disproved God's existence, nor can it ever do so. Science deals with the material universe, with what can be observed, weighed, measured, expressed in mathematical formulas. The supernatural, the invisible, the world of the spirit are outside its boundaries and competence. (Christians, incidentally, should keep this in mind and not attempt on their part to demonstrate scientifically that God exists and created the world. This is a matter of faith, not of scientific proof.)

Our primary battle is with scientific naturalism and atheism, rather than with science proper. Yet clashes between faith and science are possible and when they occur they demand an unambiguous response. If a scientist should claim, for example, that he can prove that Jesus never lived, "then Christians may politely beg to differ on the basis of their faith and on the valid way they receive knowledge of God through God's Word." No matter what naturalists claim, scientific knowledge does not trump revealed knowledge. At the same time, Hoezee adds, admitting such occasional disagreement is "quite different from a wholesale impugning of all science" and does not prove "that Christians are better off never taking science seriously."

In connection with the apparent clashes between faith and science, Hoezee upholds throughout the book the rationality and validity of

the knowledge of faith – such in opposition to the widely-held opinion that religious knowledge and illumination by the Holy Spirit do not constitute a way to truth. He quotes the work of Reformed philosopher Alvin Plantinga who teaches that according to a believer "a sense of God's presence and 'voice' simply wells up in a person because God, through the Spirit, is real and so causes this belief in us. . . ." As Blaise Pascal wrote in connection with his battle against rationalism and religious skepticism centuries before Plantinga, "The heart has its reasons, of which reason does not know." And as C.S. Lewis confessed, in the believer's walk of faith God becomes for him the "increasingly knowable God."

History shows that science can and frequently does get things right

This topic of the validity and certainty of the knowledge of faith deserves more attention than it often receives among us. It's an important aspect of any apologetics.

To be scientifically informed

The sub-title of Hoezee's book is *Engaging Science on Sunday*. He suggests that preachers, when the occasion arises and when it can be done "naturally," pay some attention to scientific insights and discoveries in their sermons and so help their hearers come to a more realistic and more positive evaluation of science. He even gives some examples of this type of sermon. Although the examples are interesting, I am not sure that we should follow the advice. For one thing, most people would want to get their scientific information from

experts, and for another, engaging science on our pulpits may well be risky so long as we routinely label the opinions we disagree with, also those held by fellow-believers, as heresy. I do agree with the author, however, when he urges preachers and others to increase their awareness of science, to become scientifically informed; and also when he observes that a preacher's apparent lack of awareness of and respect for the accomplishments of science tends to leave the impression that what scientific studies show has little to do with what the Lord says. That type of situation can only alienate Christian scientists among us, as well as Christian young people, who often know a good deal about science, its claims, and its accomplishments. The guidance they receive must be *informed* guidance.

Hoezee recommends the reading of books on contemporary science and on the relationship between theology and science and suggests several titles (pp. 189f.). I heartily agree also with that advice and use this opportunity to draw the attention of pastors, teachers, and other interested Christians to the work that is being undertaken by an international committee of Reformed teachers in the field of apologetics. One fruit of that project is an annotated bibliography, prepared by Canadian and Dutch educators and giving a selection of books with a variety of viewpoints on the topic under discussion. It can be found on the website of Covenant Teachers College, www.covenantteacherscollege.com – look under International Apologetics Project (IAP), Annotated Bibliography, Part III, Faith and Science.



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How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

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The Dissection of the Carnal Heart

Brad Bredenhof

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." Genesis 6:5

In a cool room, lit by a large lamp, stand two doctors gathered around the body of a man. The older of the two takes his scalpel and begins to cut deep into the chest. Once the heart is exposed, he swiftly cuts it loose and gently places it onto the table. The younger doctor's face cringes with horror, for the heart is black all around with an icy, cold appearance. A nauseous vapour arises which could churn the stomach of the most hardened man.

"Ah, I see you are ignorant of the rottenness of pride." The older doctor shakes his head grimly. "Pride has permeated the entire heart. Like gangrene, his pride has spread from the heart into the

whole body until all that the heart and body are capable of is prideful ambitions. For pride he will go to war; he will hate or kill. Pride will cause divisions and factions, and ultimately, pride will make a man unwilling to bow before God or receive the salvation He gives."

"But what about the icy, cold appearance? What has caused that?"

"Yes, the icy coldness of the human heart. It is cold to God and to the things of God. It has no interest or desire in spiritual matters – the heart of man is cold and dead as stone."

The older doctor cuts the heart in two. Infection gushes out, spilling over the table. "This, my friend, is the infection of selfishness. It is a product of pride – because of pride, all a man can do is selfish. He only thinks of himself and only asks, 'How can I get what I want? What about my rights and freedoms?' The selfish heart screams out, 'Serve me – all that matters is me.'"

The young doctor picks up one half of the heart but screams in horror, dropping it back on the table. "It is full of worms!"

"Yes, these worms are called bitterness and unforgiveness. They eat away at the heart, leaving holes, which, although tiny, eventually destroy the heart. When a man does not forgive and holds a grudge, this is the result. It may at first seem harmless but this is the end of such sins."

As the younger doctor continues examining the heart and its surrounding arteries and veins, he comes across arteries that are completely clogged. "What is the cause of this?"

"Ah, the clogged arteries. This man has filled himself up with the vanities, the merry-making, and the business of this world, leaving no room for thoughts of heavenly things. He has stored up for himself treasures on this earth but has given no thought to any treasures he might store up for himself in heaven."

"Look, this part looks healthy." The younger doctor points at a small portion of the heart that still has a healthy red colour.

"Yes, it seems healthy. Shall we examine it further?" As the older doctor cuts into the seemingly healthy piece further rottenness is revealed. "This reveals that no matter how good a man may seem and how noble his deeds, they are still infected with pride and selfishness and thus are of no merit before God."

Picking up a piece of the heart, the older doctor points out tumors that have grown throughout the heart. "These tumors grow when sins are cherished and nourished rather than repented of and fought against. By filling our minds with evil thoughts, by pouring in filth from television, radio, books, bad company, or any other external evils, these tumors find nourishment to grow. Not only do they grow but they produce toxins which merge with the infection of selfishness and these get pumped throughout the body. Man's delight in sin continues to grow and further destroys him."

Thus I have shown you the heart of carnal man and the effects of sin on the heart. When an unregenerate heart is carefully examined and dissected, you will find that it is most vile. To some this may seem rather crude or insulting but when viewed from the perspective of a Most Holy God and by his Law, the truth is even worse. The natural condition of the heart of man is dead, cold, rotten, and hopelessly past any chance of recovery or healing.

To be born again is nothing short of a miracle. It is in fact the most amazing miracle. Only the Master Surgeon, Jesus Christ, can take such a heart and renew it. This Great Doctor takes his surgery kit – the knife of the Word of God, the probe of life and circumstances, and the salve of the Holy Spirit – and He cuts and snips away. When a spiritually dead man is saved, his heart begins to beat again. A new tissue is grafted around the heart which is called justification. The sinner is seen as righteous for Christ's sake. The continual process of repairing the heart inwardly is sanctification through the healing salve of the Holy Spirit. This

continues until we die and through death we are purified and given a renewed body with a perfect heart. Truly, that day shall be most glorious!

Dear reader, what does your heart look like? Do you truly examine yourself? And, when you do, what do you find deep down inside? Can you say with Paul, "O, wretched man that I am"? Without the realization of your sinfulness, you will never think that you need a Savior. Knowing your sins and misery will give way to great appreciation for the forgiveness and freedom from slavery to sin. Thanks be to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who has rescued us from this body of death.





Letter to the Editor

May I respectfully disagree with the article "All or nothing" written by Dr. C. Van Dam in the January issue? This article deals with incrementally changing ungodly laws and especially the abortion law. There is no law dealing with abortion in our country and therefore nothing to improve upon.

I am all for working incrementally to reduce abortion, as in:

- Defunding of abortions
- Closing abortion facilities
- Banning certain methods of abortions
- Getting doctors to stop doing abortions.

But I would stop at *supporting* a law by actually working for a less ideal abortion law. We may not support evil, especially not the evil of the murder of unborn children. I am afraid we are starting to see this as an issue, not a baby holocaust.

The examples from the Bible and history Dr. Van Dam uses have nothing to do with allowing the murder of some people so others may live. I thought the theory of the life boat has been decided upon long ago.

This article had a couple of comments that raise my eyebrows.

1. A lifesaving procedure on a pregnant woman, in which her baby is induced to be born and dies, is not an "elective" abortion. In medical terms an abortion is the premature birth of an unborn baby. A "spontaneous" abortion is what we call a miscarriage. A "selective abortion" is the purposeful killing of an unborn baby. Let us be careful not to call an effort to save the mother, with the sad result of the death of her child, an allowable instance of abortion. The term does not apply here. There are no exceptions to this hideous practice (Jer 7:31b). If a poll would be taken, you would be considered "Pro-Life" with exceptions.

2. This 1988 proposed law (C 43) that Dr. Van Dam mentions was so flawed it would not have saved a single baby. Like Rev. Ken Campbell said at the time: "This law would have made abortion illegal, except if you wanted one."

Joanne Dieleman

Response

I have the greatest respect for Mrs. Dieleman who for twenty-five years worked ceaselessly to protest abortion and tried to rescue the unborn from Toronto abortuaries. I therefore do not wish to argue with her in the press, but would rather pay tribute to her. Those who wish to reflect on the matter further after reading her letter can consult the original editorial

and come to their own conclusions.

I would like to take this opportunity to clear up one apparent misunderstanding. When I wrote about outlawing abortion except to save the physical life of the mother, I meant that if both the life of the mother and the unborn child cannot simultaneously be saved, then saving the mother's life must be the primary aim. The word "abortion" is widely used in this context (e.g., Douma, *Ten Commandments*, 219), but I can see Mrs. Dieleman's point if she does not want to speak of abortion in such a circumstance.

C. Van Dam

Dear Editor,

I refer to a most recent article "With Pack and Planet Guides" in *Clarion* Volume 58, No. 4. The author gives a practical insight to travel and maintaining church membership. Sadly the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), incidentally a sister church of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), were not mentioned on the list of websites advertising the smorgasbord of churches one could attend to remain a living member of the church while continent hopping. As an Aussie FRC member I have enjoyed the company of quite a few knucks from our much loved CanRC; during this time I have ferried my fellow knucks around, had them stay at my place while they have eaten my food, drank my milk, eaten my cereals, lodged in my house, windsurfed on my board, fished from my boat, enjoyed our youth events, and even – sometimes – married our girls, but even more importantly while in our great state they attended the FRCA, your smaller sister in Australia! From time to time I have found myself in other countries and enjoyed this reciprocity of fellowship and communion with brothers and sisters.

So I guess I feel just a tad "ripped off" that the FRCA was not given a "plug" in the half page spread it took to advertise other Reformed churches with which the CanRC do not even have a sister church relationship without even a warning by the editor. I trust that your young people will not follow the "van der Pyl travel guide" but will follow the travel guide of Article 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession and LD 38, and oh, BTW, I found a few good articles on a website that some of you might know, these articles might also help in deciding what travel destinations to chose:

<http://yarrow.canrc.org/ABitToRead.html> – four articles I would particularly recommend are entitled “Why Should I Go to This Church?”, the articles are written by someone with the surname of “Bouwman” – seems to be reasonably lucid with the pen and worth reading before getting a passport or a ticket. To any Canadian intending to travel down under I look forward to seeing you. To any Canadian who had the pleasure of eating my cereals – watch out, because I will see you in July and you will need to stock up on vegemite and weet-bix!

Tim Houweling
Down Under – over and out
houweling5@bigpond.com

Apologies to our Australian readers

In the February 13, 2009 issue of *Clarion* we published an article by M. van der Pyl entitled “With Pack and Planet Guides.” To her article she attached a listing of church names and websites; however, the name of our sister churches, The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, was not included. We apologize to our Australian readers for this oversight and would request all of our readers to add this church federation to the list, as well as its website: www.frca.org.au.

The Editor

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

Book Review

Reviewed by D. Pot

Folded Hands by Rev. A. Veldman

Another publication in the series of “The Reformed Guardian”

As you probably have concluded from the title *Folded Hands*, this is a lovely booklet on the topic of prayer. Rev. Veldman, minister of the FRC of Southern River, explains in the foreword that the congregation of Southern River has been successfully involved with a number of congregational projects, prayer being one of the topics.

This project material is available from *Bijbelstudiebond* (www.bijbelstudiebond.nl) in The Netherlands. The original outlines were written by a few ministers

from our Dutch sister churches and have been translated and adapted by some members of the congregation of Southern River.

The project itself is a tool for the various Bible study clubs within the congregation and does require six to eight weeks of study to complete. During that time period Rev. Veldman also delivered three sermons related to the topic of prayer. The seventy-six page book contains:

- A number of user-friendly outlines on the topic of prayer for youth clubs as well as men and women’s clubs
- A speech delivered at a congregational meeting by Rev. Veldman as an introduction to the project

- Three sermons with a distinct focus on the topic of prayer.
- Folded Hands* is easy to read and hopefully finds a place on many a bookshelf in our homes. If other congregations are interested in running congregational projects, I am sure Rev. Veldman would be only too willing to serve you with advice and material. Since the liturgy comes along with the sermons, they can easily be used for reading purposes in other congregations. Happy reading and listening.

The booklet is available at Pro Ecclesia Bookshop for just \$10 or from Mrs. F.G. Janssen, PO BOX 300, Armadale, WA 6992. Subscribers to the Reformed Guardian series pay \$8.



Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

***The Discipline of Grace:
God's Role and Our Role in
the Pursuit of Holiness***
Jerry Bridges (Colorado
Springs: NavPress, 1994)

Additional Information: Paperback,
251 pages, \$13.67

A while back I picked up an earlier book by Jerry Bridges and ended up coming away rather disappointed. While he had some good points and clearly respected the authority of the Bible, there were just too many infelicities and missteps to allow me to recommend it. But having read some of his more recent articles in *Modern Reformation* magazine, I thought that perhaps his views had changed and developed in a more Reformed direction. So I gave him another chance and picked up this more recent book. Am I glad that I did! This is a Bridges book that I can enthusiastically recommend.

Bridges is well-known for his emphasis on the pursuit of holiness. However, he has come to realize that that this pursuit can never be divorced from the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Hence, the first chapters work out what the gospel is and what bearing it has on how we conduct our lives. In the later chapters, Bridges outlines several spiritual disciplines, but always explains how they relate to the gospel.

The gospel-centred emphasis is what I appreciate most about this book. The author insists that believers need to be fixated on the good news of Christ – in fact, we need to preach it to ourselves each and every day and live out of its joy and strength. Let me whet your appetite with more:

"Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach

of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace" (p. 19).

"But there is something more basic than discipleship, something that actually provides the necessary atmosphere in which discipleship can be practiced. The one word that describes what we must continue to hear is *gospel*. We need to continue to hear the gospel every day of our Christian lives" (p. 21).

"So if we want to grow in our love for God and in the acceptable obedience that flows out of that love, we must keep coming back to the Cross and the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. That is why it is so important that we keep the gospel before us every day. Because we sin every day, and our consciences condemn us every day, we need the gospel every day" (p. 126).

This is a book on spiritual growth that everyone could read with great profit. I only have two reservations. One has to do with the fact that Bridges' view of the Christian life appears truncated in this book. What I mean is that the church and its ministry are, at best, in the background. The means of grace (the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments) do not receive any

attention; yet these are crucial for us to grow in grace and knowledge. We not only need to preach the gospel to ourselves, we also need God to preach the gospel to us – which happens through the Word and sacrament ministry of the church. Bridges could have added a chapter, "The Discipline of Biblical Church Membership."

My other reservation has to do with Bridges' view of revelation. He sometimes writes about God speaking to him apart from Scripture. In the other book I read this was a more serious problem – in *The Discipline of Grace*, Bridges is much more careful and usually explains what he means – it's not that God speaks to him audibly apart from Scripture, but that God is leading him through certain events, people, thoughts, etc. I'm glad that he is more careful in this book, but we do need to clearly distinguish between God's authoritative speech in Scripture and his providential guidance of our lives. Interpreting the latter is much more subjective. Sometimes it seems that God was telling us to go one direction, when in reality his will was for us to go in another. Aside from those two points, this is a book well worth reading and sharing with others.

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