

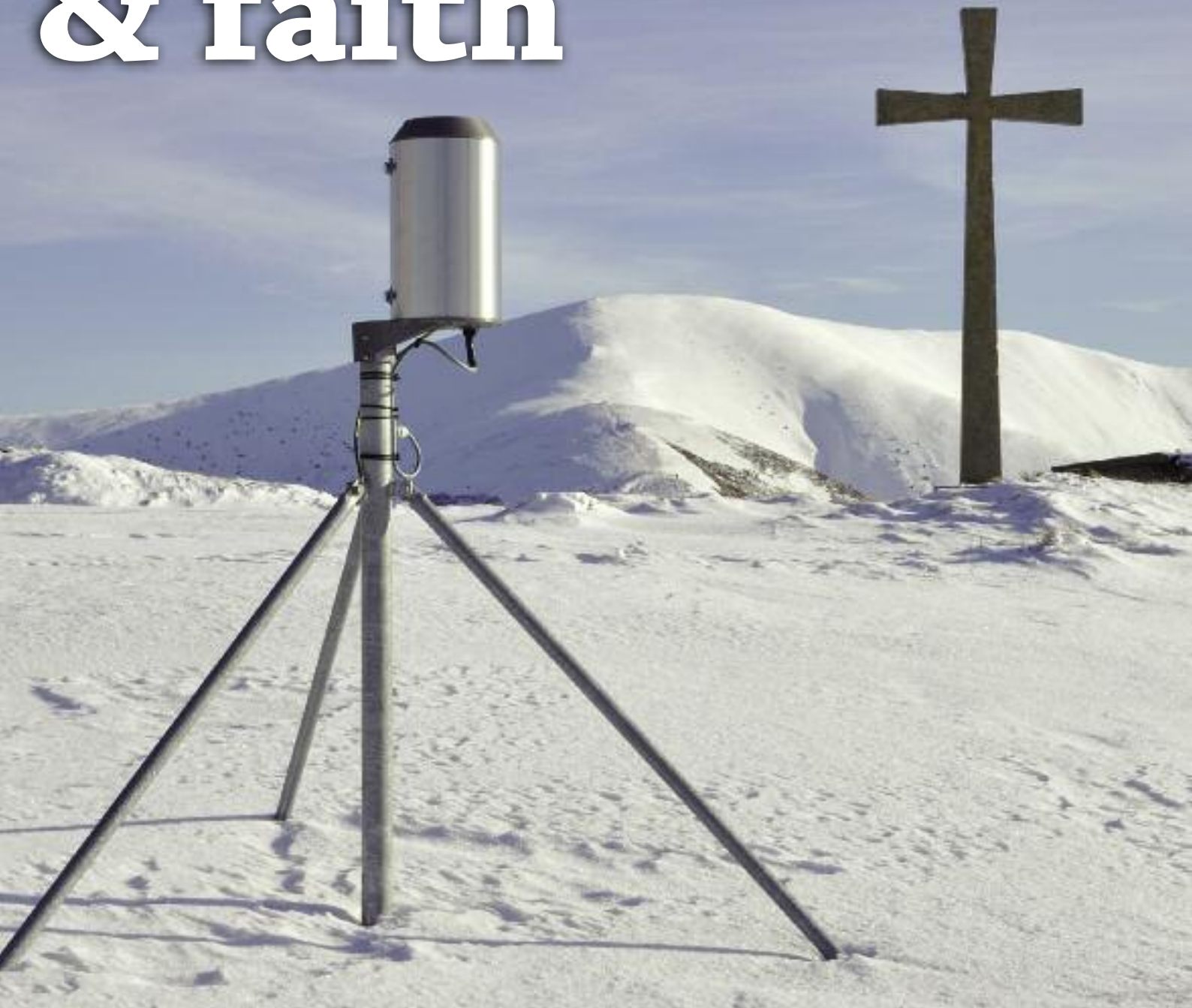
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MAY 2011

Science & faith



PHILIP BURCHAM | CLIMATE: I'M A BELIEVER | SUFFERING



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E D I T O R I A L

According to the historian, Paul Johnson, the modern world began in 1919 when Albert Einstein was able to prove his theory of relativity. This was the idea that space and time are relative concepts rather than absolute ones. This discovery was seized upon by scholars and press alike to advance the view that there were no longer absolutes of any kind, whether of good and evil, of knowledge, or of value. In other words, science had effectively triumphed over religion.

Nevertheless, to suggest, as Johnson does, that Einstein's discovery marked a totally new era ignores the fact that for almost a century scientists had promoted a range of ideas that challenged the very foundations of Christianity. Charles Lyell, in his *Principles of Geology* (1830-33), struck a major blow against biblical religion by promoting his theory of uniformitarianism, which stated that the present is the key to the past, thereby challenging the idea of divine intervention in the world.

Again, in 1859, Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species*, which denied special creation and claimed that natural selection was the basic mechanism for the evolution of all living things. Clearly, the currents of scientific scepticism were eroding the foundations of the Christian faith long before Einstein.

In more recent times, the so-called war between science and religion reached a climax when John Maddox, editor of the prestigious scientific journal, *Nature*, declared in 1994: "The practice of religion must be regarded as anti-science." Even more shrill and strident (and bordering on the hysterical) is the claim by the Oxford scientist, Richard Dawkins, that religion, and specifically Christianity, is a "great evil".

One interesting observation that so many of Christianity's detractors seem to have forgotten in the so-called "war" of science against religion is the fact that the major impetus for the modern scientific enterprise came largely from scientists who shared a Judeo-Christian worldview. They believed that God had revealed Himself clearly in every aspect of the creation and that we are without excuse if we choose not to see it (Romans 1:19).

What we now need is a new generation of scientists who both cherish genuine scientific discovery and can help us to see how this is consistent with God's revelation in the Bible.

Peter Hastie 



False conflict

AS SCIENCE MOVES FORWARD, IT IS LESS AT ODDS WITH FAITH.

Professor Philip Burcham is Head of the Unit of Pharmacology and Anaesthesiology in the School of Medicine and Pharmacology at the University of Western Australia. Philip was born in Western Australia and grew up in Perth. He came from a Christian home and developed a strong interest in science as a boy. After completing his secondary education (which was very science-focused), he gained a Bachelor of Science majoring in chemistry and pharmacology at the University of WA. He then undertook a PhD in pharmacology within the School of Medicine. His doctoral and post-doctoral research interests have been in pharmacology, and specifically in toxicology. When he completed his doctorate, Philip studied at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee for several years in a centre for molecular toxicology. Returning to Australia he worked for twelve years in pharmacology at the University of Adelaide. He has had a long-term interest in harmful chemicals and particularly the effects they have on living cells.

Philip is married to Elizabeth, whom he met in Nashville in the USA. Elizabeth has worked in Texas as an assistant professor of dietetics and as a nurse. They have a daughter, Lydia, and live in Perth. They are members of Fremantle Presbyterian Church, where Philip serves as an elder.

How should Christians regard science today? Are faith and science at war or in alliance?

Although I've never thought there's an



Philip Burcham
talks to
Peter Hastie

ultimate conflict between science and Christianity, there are many people today who don't share my view. I think the majority of people today would regard science and faith as being at war.

In fact, I experienced that outlook firsthand in my research training in Perth. On the very first day on the job in the laboratory, my supervisor gave me a pile of published papers to read on the research area that I would be working on. They were written by a leading researcher in the United States who was big in my field about 20 years ago. My supervisor said, "Oh, by the way, you'd better read all this stuff. However, I wouldn't take too much notice of it because the author's an (expletive-deleted) 'born-again' Christian."

I took them away, photocopied them and then started working through them. When I handed the originals back to him, I said, "Look, I hope this doesn't disappoint you, but I happen to be a Christian as well." Unfortunately, he wasn't happy about the fact that he had a Christian working with him and he virtually declared war against me. I studied in his lab for four or five years and I had several associates who literally tried to bash Christianity out of me throughout that whole period.

However, when I look back on these experiences as a young trainee, I think it was good for me. It forced me to grow up

as a Christian and really examine my faith. I started to read a lot about Christianity and the philosophy of science, especially in its more modern forms. I came to see that while people believed that science and faith were enemies, in fact the opposite was true. Science actually provides far more reasons for Christian belief than for atheism.

Why do you think your research colleagues were so hostile to Christianity?

I think they had a rather naïve view that Christianity is all about blind faith and that science is based on pure reason and rationality. In their view, there was no bridge between them. As far as I can tell, this approach to Christianity and science is a fairly modern development. It began to gather momentum in the late 19th century with the publication of a number of books, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom. These books painted a picture of what historians call "the conflict model" of science and Christianity. As far as I know, there would be few historians now who take these views very seriously or would consult these books as reliable descriptions of the historical relationship between Christianity and science.

What were some of the most influential books that shaped the conflict model of science and Christianity?

There are books like John Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), and Andrew Dickson White's *A History of the Warfare of Science*

with *Theology in Christendom* (1896). These came out between the 1870s and early 1900s. Then James Simpson wrote a book in 1925, *Landmarks in the Struggle Between Science and Religion*, that took a similar line.

In the midst of all this intellectual ferment, another significant event also took place: the Scopes trial in Dayton, Tennessee. This was over the issue of teaching evolution in Tennessee state schools. I developed an interest in this issue because my wife, Elizabeth, was born near Dayton. This case was a significant landmark in the development of public perceptions about science. The trial was portrayed as a conflict between rational scientists and illogical religionists like William Jennings-Bryan, who was prosecuting the case. I think this portrayal is an oversimplification of what happened at Dayton, but nevertheless, it's had a strong influence on our culture. People like H. L. Mencken, the famous atheistic journalist, reported widely on the trial. In fact, he wrote a number of very influential dispatches that were sent all around the world and painted a very negative view of anyone who took the Bible seriously. I think that the present militant conflict model between science and Christianity was actually initiated by science historians in the late 1800s and came to a climax in much of the literature that was spawned by the Scopes trial.

However, as far as I can tell, this conflict model is an historical anomaly, because if we look further back in Western history, the predominant view was that God revealed Himself in a limited way in nature and only fully disclosed Himself in His Holy Book, the Bible. On this model, science and Christianity do not contradict one another. So, if we find apparent contradictions, it's our responsibility to resolve them thoughtfully and carefully.

Is it fair then to say that the major cultural crisis that's faced the West over the last century has been the clash between religion and science, or naturalism versus theism? How has that affected the scientific enterprise?

Rather than speaking of naturalism, I prefer to speak of scientism, to distinguish what I think true science should be from the view of science held by those who subscribe to the "conflict model". According to scientism, the only way of explaining any phenomenon is by using

the scientific method and offering an empirical explanation. They would consider any explanation short of this incapable of qualifying as true knowledge.

I've run into many scientists who have really extreme views of that sort of position. I went through graduate school with one such scientist who was doing his PhD a year or so ahead of me. He once told me that we should burn the Reid library at the University of WA because it didn't contain real knowledge. The Reid library is the collection of literature for all the humanities including arts and law:



IF YOU'RE NOT THINKING ABOUT THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCIENCE, THEN YOU'RE NOT ABLE TO DEFEND IT IN THE MARKETPLACE OF IDEAS. SCIENCE IS IN DANGER OF BEING MARGINALIZED.

all the non-science subjects. It's a very impressive library. He was so dogmatic about his scientism that he thought we should burn it because it didn't qualify, in his eyes at least, as true knowledge.

Was he saying that if something cannot be proved by scientific method it doesn't constitute true knowledge?

Yes, he believed that if you couldn't prove something scientifically, then it was not a valid area for scholarship or investigation. You'd be surprised at the number of people who hold this view. Of course, not everybody who works in science holds these sorts of opinions. There are many people who have a much more balanced view of science and realise that it has its own limitations and assumptions that are derived from the scientific method.

Are many scientists aware of the work of Thomas Kuhn, who has shown that scientific revolutions are guided by reigning philosophical paradigms? Has this been a blow to scientists who think that their

research is based on pure reason?

Some scientists are aware of the limitations of scientific methods that Kuhn has referred to, but in my experience, many scientists are not interested in engaging with these sorts of issues. I read Kuhn's book when I was a PhD student, but I can't think of any colleagues in my particular discipline whom I know have considered it.

So they're not really thinking about the philosophy behind science?

No, and in my view, I think that's a bit of a weakness. If you're not thinking about the foundations of science, then you're not able to defend it in the marketplace of ideas. I think science is in danger of being marginalised within our societies, and not necessarily because of the rise of religion. There are also some strong secular forces within society that are hostile to science. So I think it's essential that we think more about the foundations of science.

What are some of the secular forces that are potentially hostile to science?

I think some of the deconstructionist trends in the humanities have the potential to undermine the work of science. Deconstructionists attack the idea of real knowledge and tend to emphasise that all knowledge is simply a construct. This represents an extreme, relativist view of knowledge. There have been a number of books from this point of view attacking science, particularly Newtonian science, as being ethno-centric. The deconstructionists have leveled similar criticisms about other leading figures behind modern Western science. Scientists cannot afford to duck these issues, and if they refuse to defend their discipline, it will not be good for the future of the scientific enterprise.

How open, generally, are scientists to discussions about the philosophical assumptions of the nature of science and scientific methods?

My own personal experience is that scientists tend to be limited in their consideration of these issues. In my own particular field of toxicology, I can think of one distinguished scientist who had a very limited view on these matters. He was a German specialist in chemically induced liver toxicity. I read a tribute to him at the end of his career, and he made a point of saying that he would interview everyone that came into his laboratory

and he would find out whether they had any interest in philosophy or theology, and if they did, he wouldn't accept them. He took a hard-line approach that helps to explain why many scientists tend not to think about anything beyond their own little research projects.

That can be discouraging initially. I've got a Christian friend who's doing a PhD in a semi-scientific discipline. He made a comment to me recently that the thing that really surprised him after starting out as a PhD student was the triviality and the small-mindedness of a lot of the academics that he had looked up to as an undergraduate. He was amazed to see how small their view of the world was when he had discussions with them in the faculty lounge over lunch. He came from a background in commerce and had worked all around the world. He was surprised to see that a lot of people in his university discipline didn't have that breadth. The same holds true for the hard sciences, probably even more so.

Many believed early last century that Einstein's discovery of the theory of relativity and Freud's explanation for human personality left us adrift on a sea of relativism. Were they right?

I'm not a great expert on theoretical physics, but my understanding is that some of the more popular conclusions that people drew about Einstein's theory were quite unfounded. I don't think that his theory of relativity actually affirmed physical relativism. One thing which it did affirm is that the speed of light is a constant which can't be exceeded. So, it's hardly relativistic in the sense that it's sometimes assumed. As far as Freud's views on personality are concerned, I'm not sure that many of his views have actually stood the test of time or are now accepted as authoritative in medical schools.

What are the implications for our lives if we adopt scientism or naturalism?

I believe that if you deny the possibility of transcendental truth, or at least a transcendental grounding for truth, then you are left to figure out things for yourself and make everything up as you go along in every area of life. I don't really think that's a way to sustain a civilisation or a personal life. Naturalism leaves us ethically and psychologically adrift. We are robbed of any absolutes.

Ultimately, if we view nature as a

closed system, it's hard to attribute value to particular aspects of it. For instance, how do we ascribe value to various living things? Philosophers like Peter Singer think that animals have as many rights as humans. I know that not everyone shares his views, but he represents a growing movement. Naturalism inevitably dehumanises humanity; it has far reaching implications for the sanctity of life, medicine and healthcare, as well as education. It certainly affects university life.



JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE WEARS A LAB-COAT AND MAKES BOLD ASSERTIONS ABOUT THE COSMOS DOESN'T MEAN THAT THE CLAIMS ARE NECESSARILY SCIENTIFIC.

How does it affect university life?

When I went through university as an undergraduate there were still vestiges of Christian theism there. At my graduation ceremony we recited the Lord's Prayer and at the close of proceedings the campus chaplain sent us on our way with a bidding prayer. But that's all gone now, and all we have in its place is a very cold, impersonal managerialism. In my view, that's really left a lot of people disheartened and discouraged. This is happening in other areas of life as well. It's really a consequence of how we understand ourselves as human beings. If we're just highly evolved apes, I find it hard to believe we have adequate theoretical foundations for aspiring to be anything great.

Many intellectuals believe that the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions destroyed all rational foundation for a Christian worldview. Is that true?

I think modern intellectuals are drawing a bit of a long bow to claim the Copernican revolution destroyed the foundation for Christianity. As far as I

am aware, quite a number of the reformers, for example, were quite keen on Copernicus. I think it was some of Luther's colleagues at the University of Wittenberg who actually published his work, and rightly so. They certainly didn't think that Copernicus was destroying the foundations of the Christian faith. They regarded scientific advance as providing a new insight into God's world, and so they didn't view it in negative terms.

The Darwinian revolution is a little more complicated, because Darwinism arose from a very different mindset to Copernicus. Copernicus had a theistic Christian understanding of reality. I think that in the light of Darwin's family background and personal life, he wasn't at all sympathetic to the Christian faith. He was very much part of the Enlightenment movement that wanted to explain reality without God. So, I think Darwinism raises different issues for a Christian to the Copernican revolution. I don't think that Copernicus' discoveries destroyed the rational foundations for a Christian worldview. On the contrary, I believe Christianity provides a foundation for science and intellectual life in a way that secularism does not.

Naturalists and scientists like Carl Sagan have used the mantra, "the cosmos is all there is or ever was or ever will be". Is Sagan right?

I am mystified as to how Dr Sagan could ever prove his statement scientifically. Neither he nor any other scientist was there at the beginning, so how can he know anything about it in a scientific sense? When he and others make these kinds of statements, they are really making statements of faith that are part of their naturalistic creed. He can't prove his assertion about the cosmos using scientific tests any more than a Christian could scientifically prove the existence of the Holy Trinity. So I think Sagan's view on the cosmos is really a faith-based position. Just because someone wears a lab-coat and makes bold assertions about the cosmos doesn't mean that the claims are necessarily scientific.

Do scientists often make faith-based statements that seem as though they are scientific?

Oh, yes. I mentioned the Scopes trial a little earlier. I've got the transcript of the proceedings, and to read it, well, it's really quite embarrassing. A number of pompous scientists offered their points

of view to the court and were simply sprouting nonsense. Remember this was about a decade before DNA was discovered and around thirty years before Watson and Crick figured out what DNA does. Nevertheless they were claiming that they had all the answers on genetics and inheritance. The reality was that they had no real ideas about it at all or, indeed, any right to speak that way.

Scientists are prone to pride as much as anyone else and like the sense of power that special knowledge gives. The problem facing scientists, however, is that they share in the fall along with the rest of the human race so it's easy for them to use their special knowledge as a weapon in their opposition to the Christian faith. We need to be aware of that.

When you look at the creation itself as a chemist, in what ways does it speak to you of God?

I'm particularly impressed by the stunning complexity of living creatures. Our generation has been privileged to gain special insights into how living systems tick. No other generation has ever had this exhaustive amount of information available to them.

Not long ago I was at a conference in the United States where a Nobel Laureate was speaking on a protein complex, the ATP synthase, which is the structure in tiny little organelles in all living oxygen-utilising cells that generate the ATP, which is a cellular energy currency. These ATP synthases are stunning little structures. This conference had several thousand scientists present, in one of those giant American conference centres. He was showing these simulations of the ATP synthases, a tiny little nanometer-scaled structure that spins and is driven by protons and hydrogen ions that generate a gradient across the mitochondrial membrane. As this thing spins, it uses that energy to generate ATP, which is the energy currency for a lot of the processes in living cells.

It was such an overwhelming experience for me, to see the beauty of this structure projected on a large screen. Your readers can see simulations on Youtube. As I watched the simulation I thought to myself, "How could anyone not recognise that an intelligence lay behind the construction of this biochemical structure?" Even the simplest of creatures like bacteria have these sorts of complex structures. We have hundreds of comparable multiprotein structures

within all living cells. They perform all sorts of stunning functions that no other generation has ever really known about. We've only discovered these things in the last 20 years.

So you are saying that microbiology has discovered that there is another universe in each living cell?



I'M NOT SURE HOW LONG SCIENTISTS CAN REFUSE TO FACE UP TO WHAT NATURE, ESPECIALLY IN THE AREA OF MICROBIOLOGY, IS TELLING US.

Yes, exactly. A "universe within the cell" is a good way of putting it. Incidentally, the so-called universe inside the cell is as complex as the world around it. There are levels of complexity in the cell that we still, I suspect, don't know anything about. The existence of such organised complexity within the cell constitutes, to my mind, a profound challenge to naturalism. How can you possi-

bly account for those structures in even the simplest of organisms? Unfortunately, this way of thinking is dismissed among the scientific elite. However, I'm not sure how long scientists can refuse to face up to what nature, especially in the area of molecular biology, is telling us.

While the last century has been marked by a rise in religious skepticism, do you sense that there's any swing back, especially in some of the more recent discoveries in science?

I can see some encouraging signs. I think one of the positive developments in my lifetime has been an increasing number of Christian scientists who are affirming their Christian faith and explaining how Christianity and science can be complementary. I'm thinking of people like John Polkinghorne, Alistair McGrath, and Jim Peacock. I don't always agree with everything they write, but nevertheless, I think there's a movement there that appeals to many people. They are playing a valuable role in highlighting some of the inadequacies in the old "conflict model" of understanding the relationship between faith and science. They can see some benefits in the more complementary models that have been developed by a number of Christian scholars in more recent times.

Have scientists uncovered any evidence in recent times that the universe is not random or accidental,

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but carefully planned to sustain intelligent life?

The most striking piece of evidence to me is the existence of the genetic code. It's here that we discover the most stunning system for storing information in DNA and interpreting that code to synthesise new proteins, enzymes, and hormones as well as all kinds of structures that form the basis for life. Naturalism is incapable of providing a reasonable account of DNA's origin, much less the fabulous amount of information that it actually stores. So to my mind, the likelihood that genes were produced by random, accidental, unplanned processes is absolutely negligible.

Many Christians today believe in what's become known as the anthropic principle. What is meant by that?

The anthropic principle states that the physical structure of the universe is exactly what it must be in order to support life. This means that there are a number of physical parameters that describe, say, the strength of nuclear forces in the nucleus of an atom, which keeps electrons from collapsing inwards or determines the size of the gravitational constant. These numbers are specifically calibrated to support human life. According to the anthropic principle, if these numbers are tweaked by even the tiniest fraction, and I'm talking about many, many decimal points, then the life as we know it would be impossible.

One aspect of this principle that strikes me is the nature and properties of water. We take it for granted, but its chemical properties are profoundly important for the maintenance of life. If the forces of attraction between water molecules were any stronger than they currently are, then we wouldn't have the necessary balance of water vapour, liquid and ice that exist on planet Earth. All these various forms of H₂O are necessary for the maintenance of life. The differences involved in the chemical forces are tiny. If the dice had rolled in a slightly different way, as naturalists say, then water wouldn't exist and life wouldn't be possible because water is foundational to virtually every biochemical process in the body. The anthropic principle reminds us that the numbers seem to have been "rigged" or fine-tuned to support life.

Do you think that the anthropic principle represents a serious challenge to scientism and

naturalism?

Yes, I certainly do. Carter has done a great service by being the first person to name and employ the anthropic principle in its contemporary form. If you read the new atheists like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, they acknowledge that the anthropic principle is probably, in their view, the strongest argument that they have to contend with. It is fundamentally opposed to their arguments.



I THINK THE OPENING CHAPTERS OF GENESIS ARE PROBABLY THE MOST PROFOUNDLY PRO-SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE IN THE HISTORY OF THE WHOLE HUMAN RACE.

American scholar Patrick Glynn says the picture from 21st century science is closer in spirit to the vision presented in the book of Genesis than anything since Copernicus. Is that true?

I certainly don't feel the tensions between Genesis and science that seem to concern a lot of people. I think the opening chapters of Genesis are probably the most profoundly pro-scientific literature in the history of the whole human race.

As a scientist I am struck immediately by the very orderly way in which the creation account unfolds: it's almost the way we'd write a scientific paper. It starts from the simple ordering of nature, and proceeds to the more complex. It proceeds logically from the description of the cosmos to the description of planet Earth and the support for life.

If you read it against the other types of literature that are revered in different religious traditions, you'll be struck by the difference. I've read widely in this area and I've noticed that the other traditions, which contain many mythological elements, have no clear distinction between God and the natural order.

However, in the Bible, we meet a God

who is a rational being who deliberately plans the creation of the cosmos. He clearly designs the world to sustain life, especially human beings who bear His image. I think this understanding of the universe and life is profoundly pro-scientific. Indeed, I don't think it's any accident at all that science originated out of a cultural setting that was profoundly influenced by the Bible.

In what way did the science of biology in the 19th century create a crisis for Christian belief?

Some of the developments in biology after 1850 certainly posed a threat to Christianity because they provided an account of life that excluded any notions of God or design and suggested instead that life was simply the result of purely random processes. Charles Darwin, the naturalist, was largely responsible for this view.

My problem with Darwin is that his theory was accepted a century before we had even the most basic understanding of what constitutes life. He may have given us an explanation for life at what we call the macroscopic level, however he's no good at all, in my view, in explaining where life came from.

Probably the biggest challenge, I think, that biology poses to the Christian view of creation would be in the area of genetics where there is genetic evidence for similarities across species and common descent, in some sense. But, even in that area of genetics, the story's not watertight, because naturalism is unable to tell us where these stunningly complex genetic systems come from. Personally, I think there's still an awful lot of faith involved in embracing the Darwinian perspective. I don't think it excludes the Christian view of a creator.

I found it interesting that when I studied science at university the only lectures I received on chemical evolution were delivered in the zoology department by a zoologist. I majored in organic chemistry and they wouldn't touch that topic with a barge pole. If life evolved on earth the way many modern biologists explain it, then it defies everything you will ever be told in an organic chemistry degree about how to make complex molecules. You have to suspend just about everything that is known about organic chemistry to believe in chemical evolution.

I think chemistry deals much more with testable hypotheses. In chemistry you can show that a hypothesis is wrong very quickly through repeatable experi-

ments, whereas in biology you can come up with all sorts of fanciful explanations for evolutionary lineages and never have to prove any of it in a laboratory. In other words, it's possible to make up "Just So Stories" without having hard evidence to prove or disprove them empirically in a rigorous experiment.

Some scholars say modern science could have only developed on the basis of a Christian worldview. Has that claim any merit?

I certainly do a lot of reading in that area and try to keep abreast of it. I think it depends a little bit on what you mean when you say whether it "only developed". I think there's plenty of evidence that something like science originated in all sorts of cultures around the world in different historical settings, but I suggest that it's only in the Western world where we've been strongly influenced by Christian theology that we have seen science nurtured and flourish over many centuries.

Are you suggesting that important scientific discoveries have been made in cultures whose worldviews lack a good theoretical foundation for a philosophy of science?

Yes, I am. For instance, we can think of quite a few important discoveries that have arisen in a number of different cultures. The Arabs, as you will remember, led the field in algebra; the Greeks made some amazing discoveries in mathematics, trigonometry and astronomy while the Chinese were responsible for some remarkable developments in pharmaceuticals, for example. But none of those cultures developed the sustainable long-term scientific cultures of the Western world.

Many secular scholars claim that it wasn't until the Enlightenment that science came into its own. Is that so?

No, I think it's a false picture. It was in the Christian era of the Middle Ages that many of the first universities were established. In terms of my own interest, pharmaceuticals, monasteries started some of the first scientific studies of plants and their medicinal properties.

Admittedly, the ancient Greeks and Romans were already working in that field, but the Christian faith purified a lot of the pagan practices, especially because plants had been valued for a number of uses that were completely immoral such as poisoning your political opponents or

the unborn child. While those in power today "assassinate" their political opponents via the evening news, in ancient Greece the preferred method was poison from your friendly poisoner.

The impact of the Christian worldview in pharmaceuticals should not be underestimated. It sanctified science, in a sense, and initiated serious investigation of plants for their medicinal properties. This emphasis on an altruistic use of medicine, strictly controlled by Christian moral norms, saw a new development in the direction of pharmaceuticals. It also led to the first pharmacopoeia being written. Then along came the



IN A VERY PROFOUND SENSE, THE REFORMATION REJUVENATED THE WESTERN CHURCH WHICH, IN TURN, HAD A CATALYTIC EFFECT ON THE EMERGENCE OF SCIENCE.

Reformation and accelerated a lot of those tendencies. In a very profound sense, the Reformation rejuvenated the Western church which, in turn, had a catalytic effect on the emergence of science.

So how did the Reformation provide the groundwork for the discoveries of the modern world?

Scholars have pointed to a number of different ways in which Protestantism fostered the growth of science. In many ways it tended to produce a flatter, more democratic view of society. So there was less opportunity for the potential persecution of scientists, as might have occurred with Galileo. Incidentally, I think the treatment Galileo received from the Catholic Church has been rather overdrawn. Nevertheless, we didn't really see that kind of conflict occurring in Protestant cultures because they didn't have the kind of church hierarchy that was able persecute people so readily.

Again, the Protestant approach to Biblical interpretation by getting to the real meaning of the text and stripping

away allegorical interpretations promoted a rigorous method of analysis that was grounded in reality and not fancy. Protestantism became more interested in realism as a result.

However, I don't want to oversimplify things, because Catholics too made their own important contributions in science. During the counter-Reformation, for example, the Jesuits got very active in the area of astronomy and they've retained that activity to this day. But even that was a reaction to the Protestant Reformation.

Another thing that I have noticed in my reading of John Calvin's works is that he makes quite frequent positive references to science in his commentaries and sermons. You often get the feeling that he envies scientists or "natural philosophers", as he would have called them. So there was a positive affirmation of science. Perhaps Protestantism was more open to new ways of looking at the universe than Catholicism might have been. In that sense, the Reformation provided many of the foundations for modern science.

Are there certain moral or social aspects to Christianity that make it a powerful force in the growth of knowledge and scientific progress?

The Christian faith places the utmost importance on the discovery of truth and then acting consistently in the light of that truth. Christians, therefore, have a real sense of obligation in discovering God's truth wherever it can be found and doing so in a way that is consistent with God's character. One aspect of God's character is love, so Christians believe that they should serve others with their knowledge, not exploit them. Other values like hard work, patience and endurance are distinctively Christian, as are characteristics like cooperation. These are all vital qualities to produce research of the highest standard

Some of the most committed Christians in the post-Reformation period, the Puritans, were very interested in science. The Royal Society, one of the world's oldest scientific institutions, had a high membership of Puritans in its early days. The Puritans, of course, had a very high view of the need for personal integrity in all their dealings and they took life seriously as a gift from God. I think the Christian background of many of the greatest scientists helps explain why science got a stronger footing in Protestant countries.



By design

PHYSICS DESCRIBES THE PROCESSES BUT CANNOT EXPLAIN THE UNIVERSE.

John Lennox

According to Stephen Hawking, the laws of physics, not the will of God, provide the real explanation as to how life on Earth came into being

There's no denying that Stephen Hawking is intellectually bold as well as physically heroic. And in his latest book, the renowned physicist mounts an audacious challenge to the traditional religious belief in the divine creation of the universe.

According to Hawking, the laws of physics, not the will of God, provide the real explanation as to how life on Earth came into being. The Big Bang, he argues, was the inevitable consequence of these laws. "Because there is a law such as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing."

Unfortunately, while Hawking's argument is being hailed as controversial and ground-breaking, it is hardly new.

For years, other scientists have made similar claims, maintaining that the awesome, sophisticated creativity of the world around us can be interpreted solely by reference to physical laws such as gravity.



FOR ME, AS A CHRISTIAN BELIEVER, THE BEAUTY OF THE SCIENTIFIC LAWS ONLY REINFORCES MY FAITH IN AN INTELLIGENT, DIVINE CREATIVE FORCE AT WORK.

It is a simplistic approach, yet in our secular age it is one that seems to have resonance with a sceptical public.

But, as both a scientist and a Christian, I would say that Hawking's claim is misguided. He asks us to choose between God and the laws of physics, as if they were necessarily in mutual conflict.

But contrary to what Hawking claims, physical laws can never provide a com-

plete explanation of the universe. Laws themselves do not create anything, they are merely a description of what happens under certain conditions.

What Hawking appears to have done is to confuse law with agency. His call on us to choose between God and physics is a bit like someone demanding that we choose between aeronautical engineer Sir Frank Whittle and the laws of physics to explain the jet engine.

That is a confusion of category. The laws of physics can explain how the jet engine works, but someone had to build the thing, put in the fuel and start it up. The jet could not have been created without the laws of physics on their own – but the task of development and creation needed the genius of Whittle as its agent.

Similarly, the laws of physics could never have actually built the universe. Some agency must have been involved.

To use a simple analogy, Isaac Newton's laws of motion in themselves never sent a snooker ball racing across the green baize. That can only be done by people using a snooker cue and the actions of their own arms.

Hawking's argument appears to me even more illogical when he says the existence of gravity means the creation of the universe was inevitable. But how did gravity exist in the first place? Who put it there? And what was the creative force behind its birth?

Similarly, when Hawking argues, in support of his theory of spontaneous creation, that it was only necessary for "the blue touch paper" to be lit to "set the universe going", the question must be: where did this blue touch paper come from? And who lit it, if not God?

Much of the rationale behind Hawking's argument lies in the idea that there is a deep-seated conflict between science and religion. But this is not a discord I recognise.

For me, as a Christian believer, the

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beauty of the scientific laws only reinforces my faith in an intelligent, divine creative force at work. The more I understand science, the more I believe in God because of my wonder at the breadth, sophistication and integrity of His creation.

The very reason science flourished so vigorously in the 16th and 17th centuries was precisely because of the belief that the laws of nature which were then being discovered and defined reflected the influence of a divine law-giver.

One of the fundamental themes of Christianity is that the universe was built according to a rational, intelligent design. Far from being at odds with science, the Christian faith actually makes perfect scientific sense.

Some years ago, the scientist Joseph Needham made an epic study of technological development in China. He wanted to find out why China, for all its early gifts of innovation, had fallen so far behind Europe in the advancement of science.

He reluctantly came to the conclusion that European science had been spurred on by the widespread belief in a rational creative force, known as God, which made all scientific laws comprehensible.

Despite this, Hawking, like so many other critics of religion, wants us to believe we are nothing but a random collection of molecules, the end product of a mindless process.

This, if true, would undermine the very rationality we need to study science. If the brain were really the result of an unguided process, then there is no reason to believe in its capacity to tell us the truth.

We live in an information age. When we see a few letters of the alphabet spelling our name in the sand, our immediate response is to recognise the work of an intelligent agent. How much more likely, then, is an intelligent creator behind the human DNA, the colossal biological database that contains no fewer than 3.5 billion "letters"?

It is fascinating that Hawking, in attacking religion, feels compelled to put so much emphasis on the Big Bang theory. Because, even if the non-believers don't like it, the Big Bang fits in exactly with the Christian narrative of creation.

That is why, before the Big Bang gained currency, so many scientists were keen to dismiss it, since it seemed to support the Bible story. Some clung to Aristotle's view of the "eternal universe"

without beginning or end; but this theory, and later variants of it, are now deeply discredited.

But support for the existence of God moves far beyond the realm of science. Within the Christian faith, there is also the powerful evidence that God revealed Himself to mankind through Jesus Christ two millennia ago. This is well-documented not just in the scriptures



PHYSICS CANNOT INSPIRE OUR CONCERN FOR OTHERS, OR THE SPIRIT OF ALTRUISM THAT HAS EXISTED IN HUMAN SOCIETIES SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME.

and other testimony but also in a wealth of archaeological findings.

Moreover, the religious experiences of millions of believers cannot lightly be dismissed. I myself and my own family can testify to the uplifting influence faith has had on our lives, something which defies the idea we are nothing more than a random collection of molecules.


Just as strong is the obvious reality that we are moral beings, capable of understanding the difference between right and wrong. There is no scientific route to such ethics.

Physics cannot inspire our concern for others, or the spirit of altruism that has existed in human societies since the dawn of time.

The existence of a common pool of moral values points to the existence of transcendent force beyond mere scientific laws. Indeed, the message of atheism has always been a curiously depressing one, portraying us as selfish creatures bent on nothing more than survival and self-gratification.

Hawking also thinks that the potential existence of other lifeforms in the universe undermines the traditional religious conviction that we are living on a unique, God-created planet. But there is no proof that other lifeforms are out there, and Hawking certainly does not present any.

It always amuses me that atheists often argue for the existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence beyond earth. Yet they are only too eager to denounce the possibility that we already have a vast, intelligent being out there: God.

Hawking's new fusillade cannot shake the foundations of a faith that is based on evidence. 



John Lennox is Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, as well as Fellow in Mathematics and Philosophy of Science, and pastoral advisor at Green Templeton College of Oxford University. God's Undertaker: Has Science Buried God? by John Lennox is out now (Lion Hudson, £8.99). Reprinted from the Daily Mail, London.

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Calvin's science

THE BIBLE TELLS OF WHAT IS VISIBLE, NOT AS A SCIENCE MANUAL.

Peter Barnes

Calvin has been viewed in many ways down through the ages – as an advocate of freedom and as a despotic tyrant; as one who proclaimed capitalism and as one who was chained to medieval feudal society; and as one who opened up education in every area of life and as one who could see no further than his blinkered biblical spectacles allowed him to see.

As far as science is concerned, Calvin lived at the time of the new astronomy, when the old Ptolemaic and Aristotelian geocentricism was giving way to Copernicus' heliocentrism. Copernicus lived from 1473 to 1543, but his great work, *De Revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, only appeared just before his death, in 1543, when Calvin was aged 34. Copernicanism may prove an interesting introduction to Calvin's wider view of science and Scripture, and especially Genesis.

There has been a particularly intense debate, albeit rather light on details, over Calvin's attitude to Copernicus. Martin Luther's response to Copernicus is fairly well known. He fumed: "This fellow ... wishes to turn the whole of astronomy upside down. Even in these things that are thrown into disorder, I believe the Holy Scriptures, for Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and not the earth" (Josh. 10:12-14).

It has been often assumed that Calvin's attitude was similar, and a number of hostile authorities – notably Andrew Dickson White and Bertrand Russell – claim, without citation, that Calvin quoted the text "The world also is established, that it cannot be moved" (Psalm 93:1), and concluded: "Who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit?" Edward Rosen was unable to trace the source of Calvin's supposed comment, and concluded that "never having heard of him, Calvin had no attitude toward Copernicus".



WHAT IS PLAIN, HOWEVER, IS THAT IF CALVIN KNEW OF COPERNICUS, HE FELT NO COMPELLING NEED TO QUARREL WITH HIM.

Joseph Ratner vigorously argues that Calvin must have heard of Copernicus. Apart from other considerations, Georg Joachim von Lauchen – better known to history as Rheticus (1514-1574) – was both a disciple of Copernicus and some kind of friend to Melancthon. G. A. Gerrish thus concludes: "It is hardly necessary to suppose that Calvin had never heard of Copernicus. What is plain, however, is that, if he knew of Copernicus, he felt no compelling need to quarrel with him." In 2007 Davis Young was maintaining a not dissimilar view: Calvin probably did know of the Copernican hypothesis but was reluctant to become entangled in debates over science.

In 1971 Richard Stauffer took the debate to another level by drawing attention to a sermon that Calvin preached, probably in 1556, on 1 Corinthians 10:19-24. Here Calvin attacked those who pervert the order of nature, adding that "We will see some who are so deranged, not only in religion but who in all things reveal their monstrous nature, that they will say that the sun does not move, and that it is the earth which shifts and turns." No other similar condemnations have turned up, and in Calvin's sermons on Genesis there are no references to either

Copernicus or the Copernican system.

Christopher Kaiser has argued that the sermon on 1 Corinthians 10:19-24 was not aimed at Copernicus, but Sebastian Castellio who was drawing on a passage in Cicero's *Academica*. The context in Paul's epistle has to do with the misuse of Christian liberty rather than the issue of cosmology. Calvin was, in Kaiser's view, arguing against Castellio's contention in favour of religious toleration. Hence, says Kaiser, "we are back to the situation Edward Rosen described in 1960: we have no clear evidence that Calvin ever commented on or even knew of the work of Copernicus".

In dealing with the sun standing still in Joshua's day, Calvin says almost nothing that indicates any interaction with Copernican theory. He comments mildly: "The question how the sun stood in Gibeon, is no less unseasonably raised by some than unskilfully explained by others ... In short, the sun, which was already declining to the west, is kept from setting." In the light of current knowledge, the only reasonable conclusion seems to be that, whether he was aware of it or not, Calvin by and large ignored Copernican astronomy. His approach to Scripture did not predetermine him to oppose it, although, if pressed, he probably would have regarded it as unlikely.

In his commentary on Psalm 136:7 ("[God] made the great lights"), Calvin wrote: "The Holy Spirit had no intention to teach astronomy; and in proposing instruction meant to be common to the simplest and most uneducated persons, he made use by Moses and the other Prophets of popular language, that none might shelter himself under the pretext of obscurity." Calvin, however, was not referring there to the Ptolemaic or the Copernican view of astronomy but to Genesis 1 which calls the sun and the moon the two great lights. Calvin says: "It is true, that the other planets are larger than the moon, but it is stated as

second in order on account of its visible effects.”

Calvin acknowledged that Saturn is larger than the moon, despite the fact that Genesis 1:16 calls the moon “the lesser light”, second to the sun, “the greater light”. However, Calvin went on to point out that to human sight it appears differently, and because Moses was ordained “a teacher as well of the unlearned and rude as of the learned, he could not otherwise fulfil his office than by descending to this grosser method of instruction”.

In his sermons on Genesis, Calvin declared: “So Moses refused to play the astrologer [i.e. astronomer], not that he was ignorant about that, but he conformed to men’s ignorance and debility so that, within our limitations, we might understand that we need to be instructed in the fear of God and in the trustworthiness of his goodness, and motivated to give him the praise he is due.”

Referring to Calvin’s commentary on Genesis, Jack Rogers considers that Calvin was conceding that there was scientific error in the writings of Moses, and adds that Calvin himself was indifferent to it. This misses Calvin’s point, for there is none of the dualism in Calvin’s thought that one finds in many post-Kantian thinkers. Calvin would never have agreed with Auguste Sabatier, the French Protestant theologian, who declared concerning science and piety: “There cannot be conflict between the two orders, because they move on different planes and never meet.” Rather, Moses was concerned with things as they appear to the naked eye, while the astronomer is concerned with things as they appear through the telescope.

Calvin held to the view that God spoke of scientific matters in Scripture as they are observable to us. With regard to the expanse of water above the heavens (Gen.1:6), Calvin declared that “nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world. He who would learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere”. Calvin was not saying that the Bible was spiritually correct while being scientifically inaccurate. To cite another, and common, example, the sun rises and the sun sets (Eccles. 1:5). This, alas, is not referred to in Calvin’s *Institutes*, but even in our day of universal Copernicanism, weather reports remain less than literalistic, and it is still said that the sun rises and sets.

It is a statement which must be approached as directed to our senses, not as literal science.

In its rightful sphere, science was something commendable, and Calvin wrote: “There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and on earth that declare His wonderful wisdom; not only those more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and all natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons,



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so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them ... To be sure, there is need of art and of more exacting toil in order to investigate the motion of the stars, to determine their assigned stations, to measure their intervals, to note their properties.” The created order, to Calvin, was indeed “the theatre of God’s glory”, and worthy of all admiration, contemplation, and study. That, however, was not *his* primary task.

It is worth focusing now more specifically on Calvin’s approach to Genesis 1-11. Calvin could be objectivity personified in dealing with Scripture. For example, he never pressed the point that the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, which is plural, was a clear pointer to the doctrine of the Trinity. In Genesis 18:1-15, Calvin was similarly reluctant to find any picture of the Trinity. He was wary of Christians who tried to prove too much from Scripture. If nothing else, Calvin was a careful exegete of Scripture – perhaps too cautious at times.

Whereas some commentators can find miracles everywhere, Calvin was rather hesitant. God set the rainbow in the cloud as a sign of His covenant with Noah. Calvin regarded as frivolous the

view that this was teaching that rainbows did not exist before the Flood. He considered that God simply took something that was common and gave it a new purpose. He was also willing to confess when he was not sure about a matter. In Genesis 9:25 God’s curse falls on Canaan, not all the descendants of Ham. Why? We do not know, and Calvin himself was prepared to leave this as a profound abyss into which we could not, and should not, descend. Armed with such a careful mind, Calvin, with regard to biblical passages that impinged on science, tended to adopt a literal view unless there was good reason not to.

Hence he believed that the earth was young, not old. In dealing with the doctrine of predestination, Calvin replied to “profane men”: “they will not refrain from guffaws when they are informed that but little more than five thousand years have passed since the creation of the universe, for they ask why God’s power was idle and asleep for so long.”

Contrary to Alister McGrath’s view that Calvin considered that the six days of creation were not to be taken as literally true, Calvin in fact explained them in a literal sense. Pointing to Genesis 1:5, he declared: “Here the error of those is manifestly refuted, who maintain that the world was made in a moment. For it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction. Let us rather conclude that God Himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating His works to the capacity of men.” God took six days not because He needed the time, but “that He might engage us in the consideration of His works”.

Calvin rarely referred to other writers

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in his works, but he clearly had Augustine of Hippo in mind here. Augustine seems to have been bewildered why God took so long to create the world. The great African father commented: "What kind of days these are is difficult or even impossible for us to imagine, to say nothing of describing them." He thought that God probably created the world in an instant. Indeed, Augustine told his readers: "And if you are not yet able to grasp this, leave the contemplation of it to those who have the capacity, while you yourself go on making progress by walking more slowly with scripture at your side, where she does not desert your weakness but matches her steps to yours in motherly fashion." Without naming Augustine, Calvin was replying to him.

To Calvin, Adam was a true historical figure, and can be distinguished from others in that "others had sprung from previous stock, and had been born of parents". Accordingly the Fall was a real event in time and space. Calvin does

not appear to leave room for physical death before Adam's sin: "Truly the first man would have passed to a better life, had he remained upright; but there



TO CALVIN, SCIENTIFIC-SOUNDING STATEMENTS IN SCRIPTURE ARE RECORDED FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF HOW THE WRITER OBSERVED THE PHENOMENA.

would have been no separation of the soul from the body, no corruption, no kind of destruction, and, in short, no violent change."

Finally, the Flood was not some local disaster for "the whole world was immersed in the waters". "When God exterminated all the world's creatures, we are informed again that He cannot punish us beyond measure, horrible as that punishment may be."

To Calvin, scientific-sounding statements in Scripture are recorded from the viewpoint of how the writer observed the phenomena, not how a scientific text book might detail the same events. Such an approach would allow him a certain amount of flexibility in dealing with awkward texts. However, he did not believe in creating difficulties when none existed, and favoured an interpretation of Scripture that was straightforward, which, being translated, usually means "literal". ap



Dr Peter Barnes is minister of Revesby Presbyterian Church, Sydney, and a church historian.



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Science and wisdom

20 DAILY BIBLE STUDIES IN PROVERBS 1-9

As soon as we declare that there is no place for the concept of a divine, supernatural being in the pursuit of science, we are making a very *unscientific* statement! True science must allow for *all* possibilities as it rigorously tests their validity. It is not logically impossible for there to be a God who created the world and who maintains it methodically in such a way that we can discover “laws” that help in our understanding of what is happening; but if this *is* true, and we make the assumption it cannot be taken into account in our “scientific” enquiry, we can come up with all the theories in the world to explain things, but they will all be seriously inadequate. They will only be part of the answer.

Proverbs belongs to the “Wisdom” literature of the Bible. It deals with God’s “wisdom” – the way He thinks, the way (and for what reason) He has put the universe together, what He wants us to know about these things, and the practical outworking of it all in our daily lives. This is especially relevant for us as we are called to be salt and light for Him in our “scientific” age.

Our society somehow thinks it is “Christian” (at least, that is how the two-thirds non-Christian world classifies us). But nothing could be further from the truth while ever we permit our scientific enquiry to exclude God. Let us embrace all good scientific knowledge and research – after all, it is our God, in whose image we are made, who makes science possible and meaningful. These studies in Proverbs will help us to see why “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (1:7) and why “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (9:10).



Bruce Christian is a former Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

DAY 1

Back to Square One

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 1:1-7

THE POINT King Solomon, David's son, will set out plainly, in short pithy sayings or "rules", for everyone (especially the young) to see, what is involved in living the way God designed us to live.

THE PARTICULARS

- Solomon's sayings will help us to:
 - gain wisdom, insight, understanding, discretion and knowledge;
 - discipline our lives in accordance with the LORD's ways;
 - be prudent, just and fair in all our dealings;
 - add to our learning;

- discern the LORD's will and be guided in it.
- The proverbs are to help the young and inexperienced – the naive.
- Some things in God's Word are like parables or riddles (see Mark 4:11-12) and the very first step towards understanding them is to acknowledge the Lord alone as the source of all wisdom, and to submit to Him with awe and reverence (holy fear).
- People who ignore God (fools) will never have real wisdom and will be characterised by a failure to accept His discipline.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Did you start at God's "Square 1" in your search for fulfilment?

DAY 2

Fools rush in...

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 1:8-19

THE POINT Solomon is aware of how attractive the world's ways of greed and violence are to the young (cf the drift of modern video games). He stresses the importance of parental guidance and points out the plain stupidity of falling into the trap of the world's ways.

THE PARTICULARS

- Parents are usually proven to be right in the end (but, sadly, we don't usually appreciate the full truth of this until we are one!).
- Children who obey their parents are the real medal winners.
- The spoils of crime often appear very attractive and easy to come by, but in the end crime never pays; the wages of sin is

- death.
- Gang mentality assumes there is safety in numbers and is always actively involved in recruiting new members – don't fall for it.
- The common purse is a fiction; there's no honour among thieves!
- Setting out on the path of crime leads to deeper involvement, even to the point of shedding blood. It is better never to start.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- White collar crimes usually start with seemingly innocent little misdemeanours. How careful are you with responsibilities entrusted to you at work? at school? at uni? at home?

DAY 3

The Day of Grace will end...

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 1:20-33

THE POINT Wisdom now speaks as a person. (We will hear again from her in chapters 8&9.) She calls out to everyone in the market-place to choose between her and foolishness. Her ways are open to all who will listen, not just to a social or intellectual elite, not just the king's family. We ignore her pleadings to our own peril.

THE PARTICULARS

- The offer of wisdom is presented freely, genuinely and passionately to everyone; anyone who is foolish enough to reject the offer must suffer the consequences. Read and compare the offer of the Gospel and the consequences of rejecting it in John 3:16-21.

- God is very open to everyone who turns to Him in repentance and faith, helping them to know Him more deeply; but He will openly oppose, devastate, and even mock, any who fail to learn from His gentle rebukes, appeals, and advice.
- A time will come when the opportunity for repentance is over.
- There is peace and bliss for all who respond to God's call.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Sadly, this passage is especially applicable to Australia where, in spite of ample opportunity to hear and respond to the Gospel, we persist in our foolish rejection of it. Pray for our nation!

DAY 4

The big IF

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 2:1-8

THE POINT God promises abundant wisdom, knowledge and understanding, along with security, success and fulfilment – the sort of things we would all love to be sure of having – but there is an important condition: IF we seek these things earnestly in Him alone. This is the same promise Jesus gave us in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

THE PARTICULARS

- The gaining of godly wisdom does not come without effort – but the effort is richly rewarded.
- It is the LORD, the covenant God of Israel and the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fount of all wisdom and

- knowledge; we must seek these things only in Him. (See Colossians 2:2-3)
- IF we walk in His ways He will grant us success and protect us.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- If God's promises are conditional, where does grace come in? Is Solomon implying we earn God's favour by our good works? What is the difference between trying to do this and earnestly seeking wisdom in God? (See Deuteronomy 4:29-31 and Jeremiah 29:11-13)
- Christians suffer. Why is it important to keep heaven in view?

DAY 5

Wisdom will enter your heart

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 2:9-15

THE POINT We are being influenced constantly (even more than we realise) by the wrong thinking of a world opposed to God. Even as Christians, the pressure of a secular society from the outside joins forces with the remains of our old nature within and we struggle. The only hope of winning this battle is by God's help from the inside to oppose the outside forces.

We need heart surgery that only God can perform. This is why Jesus came.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's wisdom entering our heart makes all the difference. Only then are we able to discern what is wrong with the world's way of thinking and know what is fair and right and

good.

• This wisdom and knowledge brings with it peace and joy, a real inner feeling of well-being: it is "pleasant to your soul" (10).

• We are always surrounded by those opposed to God's ways who are intent on convincing us to join them, often very subtly.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Christ is the ultimate expression of God's wisdom among us. Read the passage replacing "wisdom" with "Christ" in verses 10 and 12. Does this help you to see the Gospel clearly expressed?

• Why is secular humanism so dangerous in our society today?

DAY 6

Losing our virtue?

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 2:16-22

THE POINT The moral decline of our society and the lack of faithfulness in marriage demonstrate the seductive power of sex. The media thrive on it. Solomon uses this universal reality to drive home a warning about the spiritual danger we are in if we ignore, or even try to minimise, the urgent need for vigilance against the world's seductive ways and schemes. It is a matter of life and death.

THE PARTICULARS

- Marriage is a God-given covenant. Unfaithfulness is the breaking of this covenant with God – with all its consequences.
- Satan's most effective weapon is subtle seduction; it is as

powerful as (and sometimes even involves) sexual seduction.

• As Christ's Bride, the Church must be acutely aware of, and actively resist, the seductive power of the world to woo it.

• The "land" in verses 21 and 22 is a symbolic reference to heaven. These verses are a sobering reminder of the eternal peril of rejecting God's wisdom in Christ or of failing to remain faithful.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• In what areas do you think Christians today have already compromised too much with the world?... the movies we watch? ... the magazines we read? ... women's fashion? ... relationships?

DAY 7

The profile of God's person

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 3:1-10

THE POINT The gist of Solomon's advice to his son is: put the LORD first in every part of your life – your thinking, your relationships, your planning for the future, your persona to others, your attitude to yourself, your possessions.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's ways are the foundation for longevity and prosperity.
- Love and faithfulness, the two basic aspects of God's own character mentioned together in more than 20 verses in the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 86:15), are to be at the centre of all our relationships.
- In all things, the LORD's ways are more reliable and trust-

worthy than our own ideas or instincts. If we are openly and unashamedly committed to following Him, and don't start thinking we are clever by putting confidence in ourselves, we can't go wrong.

• A good, practical way of demonstrating this commitment is to give at least a tenth of all we receive from God straight back to Him (see Malachi 3:6-12); He wants to bless us abundantly.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Read through the 10 Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) and think about how this advice of Solomon reflects their teaching. How do you rate? Does your life follow God's wisdom or society's?

DAY 8

God knows what He's doing!

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 3:11-20

THE POINT God's wisdom is the basis of all that is; it is the foundation of the Universe. The secret of a person's life – true inner peace and happiness – is to find this wisdom. This will, of course, involve accepting God's discipline as a genuine expression of His love!

THE PARTICULARS

- Hard as it may be, we should never question God's right to discipline us, or complain when He does – it is the proof of His love.
- God is a father who derives great pleasure from having us as His children, not one who is removed, or who just tolerates us.
- The wisdom of which God is the source is the greatest thing

we can ever discover or grasp; it is like the treasure or the pearl in Jesus' parables (Mt. 13:44-46) – worth selling everything to get. It is the source of pleasure, peace, blessing – of true Life itself.

• This wisdom portrays Christ Himself, the root and reason for all Creation (see John 1:1-4, Colossians 1:15-17, Hebrews 1:2-3).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

• Read the commentary on this passage in Hebrews 12:4-13. The Creator of the Universe is a wise and loving Father who knows what He is doing. Does knowing this help you to submit gladly to His discipline in the troubles you face but can't understand?

DAY 9

Wise rules for sensible living

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 3:21-35

THE POINT Solomon makes it clear to his son that the only sensible and satisfying way to live is God's way; God's outline for a contented and fulfilling life covers every practical aspect and deals with every contingency – only fools would reject it for wickedness.

THE PARTICULARS

- We need to stay alert, wise, and focussed to keep to God's path.
- The outcome of living God's way includes: • respect; • safety; • protection from danger, deception and disaster; • restful sleep; • success; • good things; • blessing on home/family; • honour.
- The rules for living God's way include: • reward the deserving;

- pay (and just give) on time; • don't betray a neighbour's trust; • don't be judgemental; • don't use violent means; • don't mock.
- God gives grace to the humble, but mocks and curses the proud.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- So many in our present society are rejecting God's simple, practical wisdom and choosing the way of wickedness with all its obviously harmful consequences. Why do you think this is so?
- Self-esteem is an issue today. Why shouldn't Christians worry about it? Compare the two uses of "confidence" in 26a and 32b.

DAY 10

Family altar? ... kidding?

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 4:1-9

THE POINT Solomon had the privilege of having King David as his father. The example David set in the home in mentoring his children with care and effort had a big impact on Solomon. (Perhaps there were times when he wished he'd taken more notice!) The key was that the wisdom David taught was God's wisdom, not psychology or sociology or any other form of humanism. There is such an urgent need today for sound, systematic, regular and robust teaching of the wisdom of God's Word in Christian homes!

THE PARTICULARS

- The passion with which Solomon pleads concerning the need to walk in God's ways comes from his own experience as a child. His godly instruction from David and Bathsheba began at a very early age before he had any brothers or sisters* (v.3). (*ie living – his older brother had died, see 2 Samuel 12:15-25)
- The attaining of (God's) wisdom is worth anything it costs.
- Regardless of how the world judges, walking in the path of God's wisdom brings rewards of grace, honour and splendour.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why are we so lax with family devotions? Does it matter?
- What sort of life-style does the world honour with garlands?

DAY 11

Two roads, two destinations

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 4:10-19

THE POINT The path of wisdom and the path of wickedness are quite different and divergent, with completely different destinations. It is not possible to walk with one foot in each. It is dangerous even to investigate, or experiment with, the path of the wicked.

THE PARTICULARS

- The path of wisdom is straight, true and uncluttered by traps.
- Wise instruction is the essence of life: it must be guarded well.
- The path of the wicked must be avoided at all costs: there are to be no test runs or road trials just to see what it is like!

- Restlessness and irresponsible and wanton behaviour mark the life of the wicked. Their mission in life is to make others fall.
- The path of the righteous, those who make the wisdom of God's ways their greatest delight, leads to ever increasing light; the path of the wicked, who reject God's ways, leads more and more to greater confusion and frustration, and deeper darkness.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Have you had any experience of experimenting with the way of the world? What did you learn from that experience?
- Read what Jesus said about the 2 paths in Matthew 7:13-14.

DAY 12

Guard your heart

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 4:20-27

THE POINT The heart in Hebrew thinking is more what we would call the mind, although it can be used to refer to emotions, and even the will. However we see it, it is, as it is physically, the "wellspring of life", the source and sustainer of all that keeps us going. Solomon insists that God's wisdom must be at the heart of all we are and do, and we must carefully guard and hold that position.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's Word, the source of His wisdom for us, is to be our focus.
- God's Word is the source of our whole life, health and wellbeing.

- The guarding of our heart (mind) must be our top priority (cf. Jesus' teaching in Mark 7:20-23 re the importance of the heart).
- Four parts of the body are important for sticking to the right path, the path of wisdom: the heart (thoughts), the mouth (speech), the eyes (what we look at), the feet (where we go).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- What does verse 21 imply about the need for daily Bible reading?
- What are some ways in which we can be led astray by our hearts (minds)? ... our mouths? ... our eyes? ... our feet? Think about what Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-30 and Mark 9:42-48.

DAY 13

The destructive power of sex

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 5:1-23

THE POINT Sexual sin is singled out in this chapter as being particularly dangerous because it is so easily slipped into and it has such a devastating, life-changing effect. Sex is a wonderful, beautiful thing in its proper context of marriage (verses 15-19), but outside that context it is a far-reaching, soul-destroying evil.

THE PARTICULARS

• Seductive lips can appear very attractive at first. The warning, “Do not go near the door of her house” (v. 8), must be taken very seriously. How many adulterous liaisons (especially among Christians) begin with what seem to be just harmless

gestures?

- Adultery inevitably leads to the disaster of ruined lives. (This is especially the case when it means the end of an otherwise good, productive, God-honouring ministry within the Church!)
- Lack of (self-)discipline and the ignoring of (often well-intended, loving) correction is the basic cause of many a man’s downfall.
- Marriage should give abundant opportunity to satisfy needs.
- A man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, ... all the time!

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Should we be more vocal against the sexual sins of our society?

DAY 14

Wear your heart on your sleeve

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 6:1-19

THE POINT We cannot hide anything from the LORD (5:20); thus we should always maintain an open attitude towards Him, and this is best cultivated by having an open attitude towards each other. We should be “up front” in all our dealings with our neighbour, be willing always to put in an honest day’s work, and never be involved in underhand tactics. God hates deceptive stirrers!

THE PARTICULARS

• It is often pride that gets us into neighbourhood disputes. If we have embarrassed ourselves by a mistake it is better to admit it, have it out in the open, and seek forgiveness and rec-

onciliation. Trying to ignore it or cover up only leads to worse trouble.

- Ants are always on the go. (Have you ever seen one resting?) We should learn from their industry, even when unsupervised! How we use our time should always be open to scrutiny.
- Secretly plotting evil or stirring up strife will inevitably, even without warning, lead to the downfall of the troublemaker.
- “There are six...seven...” (16-19) means the list isn’t exhaustive.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do you have someone to whom you are accountable on a regular basis? Why not use the “6...7” things as a check-list?

DAY 15

Don’t play with fire

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 6:20-35

THE POINT God again warns us, through Solomon’s testimony, against the grave danger of sexual sin. It is so insidious we must give careful and constant attention to God’s Word (cf Psalm 119:9). Theft born of desperation may even be excusable, but the sin of adultery, so easy to fall into, allows no evasion of its consequences.

THE PARTICULARS

- God’s Word should be such a part of our daily life as to guide us, guard us, and govern us. It is a lamp, a light, and a lash.
- A seductress can make herself seem very attractive and even right, but ruin is attached to her as closely as burning is to fire.

• Theft is always punishable but there can be circumstances of desperation when it is, at least, understandable; but this is never the case with adultery – it is never, ever excusable.

- Adultery always hurts someone else who will demand revenge.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- How are you going with your daily Bible readings? Moral failure is inevitably associated with the deterioration of one’s devotional life. A failure to spend time with God each day can be a good alarm bell. I once had in the front of my Bible: “This book can keep me from sin, but sin can keep me from this book”.

DAY 16

A highway to the grave

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 7:1-27

THE POINT This passage reinforces the warning from the previous chapter but makes clearer how the seductress can use language that can make her actions sound right (verses 13-18). “God is obviously in this relationship because we have such peace about it” is a far too familiar lie. But we should note, too, that God is also warning us against spiritual adultery: attaching our affection and allegiance to other “gods” instead of remaining faithful to Him.

THE PARTICULARS

- We should be more closely and regularly related to God’s Word than to our closest family member; it should be a part of us.

• Other people can usually see reality more clearly when we are being seduced into a trap. The counsel of friends is important.

- Effective seduction (of any kind, into any sin) never appears to be what it actually is. We’re good at rationalising our actions!
- The trap of seduction springs quickly; go nowhere near it, ever.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Why is Solomon spending so much effort warning us against adultery? Is he over-rating its power? What about other sins?
- Does your weakness lie somewhere else? The same rules apply.

DAY 17

Another voice calls out

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 8:1-21

THE POINT The thrust of this passage is summed up in Jesus' words as He entered Jerusalem for the last time: read them in Matthew 23:37-39. God is sovereign in His world. He determines the course of history. He makes the rules and brings about judgement. His wisdom is therefore the way that is best for our welfare, our peace and happiness. Out of His great love He pleads with us to reject the seductive voice of the world's ways and to follow His ways.

THE PARTICULARS

- God's wisdom takes every opportunity to call out to all of us in every situation to stop being gullible and foolish in the world.

- God's ways are always right and true (cf Psalm 18:30); we can trust Him never to deceive us or lead us astray (cf Job 13:15-16).
- God's wisdom is of more value than any riches the world can offer, it goes hand in hand with discretion, honesty and humility, and must be the basis of all sound and successful government.
- Wisdom forms a loving relationship with all who seek it, and it bears the fruit of prosperity in its fullest and most enduring sense.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Our life-style today seems to give much more air time to the world's voice than to Wisdom's. Which influences you more?

DAY 18

Wisdom's identity revealed!

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 8:22-36

THE POINT The description of the Logos (Word) in John 1:1-4 makes it clear that Logos is identical with Wisdom of Proverbs as described in today's passage. But John 1:14 tells us that the Logos became flesh and dwelt among us, ie that Logos is Jesus. Personified Wisdom in Proverbs is therefore none other than Jesus Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity! The Universe finds its real meaning and purpose in Wisdom (Proverbs), ie in Jesus (John – see also 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30, Colossians 1:15-17; 2:2-3; Hebrews 1:1-4).

THE PARTICULARS

- God did nothing apart from Wisdom (ie Jesus); how foolish of us to think we can achieve anything without it (ie Him,

Jesus)!

- Wisdom (ie Jesus) was there at the beginning, inhabits Eternity, participated in the whole of Creation, and is the source of its joy.
- God's true blessing is for those who have a constant, personal, and expectant relationship with Wisdom (ie with Jesus).
- Wisdom (ie Jesus) is the only source of Life; to ignore it (Him) is to have a love-relationship with Disaster and Death.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Is your relationship with Jesus the most important of all your relationships? What specific things do you do to cultivate it?

DAY 19

The perfect hostess

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 9:1-6

THE POINT Wisdom is the perfect hostess: her dwelling is built to perfection ("seven pillars"); her meal is prepared and laid out ready on the table; the invitation to share in it is made from the highest vantage point so that none will miss hearing it; the maids are ready to welcome all who will accept; and no qualifications are needed to be eligible to accept, apart from a recognition of a personal need for her hospitality and a willingness to leave everything behind in order to come. To eat with her is to live.

THE PARTICULARS

- There is nothing secretive or restrictive about God's offer of

salvation; it is strong, free, and open to all who will listen.

- God's salvation is not tight-fisted or penny-pinching; He is not inviting us to something that we will find uninteresting or boring (regardless of what the world might think); He is inviting us to experience Life at a level we have never known before.
- The invitation anticipates Jesus' words: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32).

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Do your non-Christian friends look at your life and get a wrong impression about what they're missing? How will you change?

DAY 20

The choice: Wisdom or Folly?

THE PASSAGE

PROVERBS 9:7-18

THE POINT Like Wisdom, Folly also invites all who will to enter her house to dine. The details of the invitation are almost identical, but with a slight twist: there is the "excitement" of "forbidden fruit"! What happens inside, however, is quite different: her ways are Death. Because "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom", the "mockers", who refuse to acknowledge Him, can never be convinced to change his ways and make the wise choice.

THE PARTICULARS

- Trying to convince someone with a mind-set against God about the error of his ways generates only insult and abuse.

Someone with a mind-set towards God, however, is glad of the warning.

- It is useless seeking wisdom without giving God due reverence.
- God blesses the wise with abundant life.
- In the matter of wisdom and foolishness, the ultimate gainer or loser is the man himself. (This is the thrust of verse 12.)
- Forbidden fruit is always more attractive to man's sinful heart.

TO PONDER ... AND TO PRAY

- Proverbs 1-9 show clearly the stupidity of rejecting God's way. Why do so many people still do so in the face of the evidence?



news

WRF BUILDS MINISTRY

The **World Reformed Fellowship**, at its board meeting in Maryland, US, in March, decided to pursue stronger ties with all of its 53 member denominations. It formed a **Commission on Denominational Affairs** to see if there are better ways in which the WRF may serve the denominations, reports **John Wilson**, convener of the **Presbyterian Church of Australia's Relations with Other Churches Committee**.

The Australia New Zealand region has only two denominations as members, the **PCA** and **Grace Presbyterian NZ**. The WRF may approach three other denominations, the **Christian Reformed Churches of Australia**, the **Reformed Churches of New Zealand** and the **Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia**.

The WRF has also formed a steering committee to help member churches minister to Muslims both in their home countries and also in the countries to which they have migrated.

NEW LIFE REBORN, FREE

Australia's **New Life** Christian newspaper is back, born again, and free, available as an email or by download from its website, www.nlife.com.au.

Published monthly for now, it is edited by **Bob Thomas**, former **Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia**, and former editor of *AP*.

Thomas said the online magazine expected to cover expenses from advertising and donations, so was not making any charge for subscriptions. "It therefore doesn't matter how many friends you forward *New Life* to, but please encourage them to 'subscribe' for themselves," he said.

CHRISTIAN PAPER GROWS

A British Christian newspaper has grown from scratch to a circulation of 60,000 while mainstream newspapers have been fighting gradual decline, losing readers to news websites, 24-hour TV news programs and iPhone apps for a daily diet of news.

But **Good News**, an evangelistic newspaper launched 10 years ago, has grown to more than 60,000 copies every month since its launch in 2001. Churches, city missions and evangelistic groups across the country buy the paper to give away. It has grown almost completely by word of mouth recommendation and gentle encouragement on their website, www.goodnews-paper.org.uk.

Editor **Andrew Halloway** says the paper sows seeds that local churches can follow up, using the stories as an opportunity to discuss the gospel. *Good News* is a mission, run as a charity, and so the price of each copy is kept as low as possible – currently just UK14p (21 Australian cents).

AUSTRALIA BIDS FOR CONGRESS

Australia is bidding for the **World Congress of Families** to be held in Sydney during **National Families Week** in May 2013. The theme for the 2013 Australian bid is "Happy Family, Healthy Economy" and the organisers are asking for letters of support from the broader Australian community.

Bid Committee chairwoman **Mary-Louise Fowler** says the congress was founded in 1995 by WCF **International Secretary Dr Allan C. Carlson**, a noted family academic and researcher. There have been five congresses so far: Prague 1997, Geneva 1999, Mexico City 2004, Warsaw 2007 and Amsterdam 2009.

HOPE IN PAKISTAN

An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan's Faisalabad district on Monday, April 18, 2011, sentenced to death a Muslim man who had gunned down two Christian brothers accused of blasphemy on July 7 last year. The court also imposed a fine of \$47,784 on the convict.

Maqsood Ahmed was convicted of killing the **Rev. Rashid Emmanuel**, 32, and his 30-year-old brother, **Sajid Emmanuel**, and injuring police inspector **Mohammad Hussain**. They were brutally gunned down as they were leaving a court in Faisalabad on July 19, 2010, on blasphemy charges, which they had both denied.

The convicted murderer was also sentenced to 10 years imprisonment under Section 7-C of the Anti-Terrorism Act and 324 of the Pakistan Penal Code and a fine of \$2380. Under Section 337-D, he will pay \$5,950 compensation to the

injured inspector and serve a 10-year term.

This news is a good sign for Christians, and other religious minorities in Pakistan, local rights groups said, as it is the first ever case of its kind where the accusations were heard on merit by the court and the accused was punished according to the law.

NEW BLASPHEMY CHARGE

Police in Punjab Province, Pakistan have illegally detained a Christian on a "blasphemy" accusation, even though one officer said he was certain a local Muslim falsely accused 40-year-old **Arif Masih** because of a property dispute.

On April 5, Shahid Yousuf Bajwa, Masih's next-door neighbor, initially filed a First Information Report against "an unidentified person" for desecrating the Qur'an.

According to Section 61 of Pakistan's Criminal Procedure Code, an arrested person must be produced within 24 hours before a court; Masih has been detained at an undisclosed location without a court appearance since April 5, with police failing to register his arrest in any legal document.

Investigating Officer **Qaisar Younus** denied that Masih was in police custody,

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but **Superintendent of the Police Abdul Qadir** told *Compass* that Masih had been detained for his own safety.

COPTS PROTEST

A Middle East journalist is reporting that nearly 100,000 Christian Copts staged a rally on April 15 in Cairo. **Mary Abdelmassih**, writing for the *Assyrian International News Agency*, said that the rally began with an eight-kilometre march from the Coptic Shubra district to Tahrir Square. Many Muslims joined the march, as well as prominent Coptic activists and heads of Coptic human rights organisations.

"We want to show everyone that Copts are present and have fair and lawful demands," said **Father Mettias Nasr**, one of the organisers of the rally. "We want a secular, democratic state, a constitution void of any religious clauses, and laws that prohibit discrimination."

Abdelmassih said that the rally was organized by the Maspero Coptic Movement to commemorate the 40th day of the death of nine Copts, killed by Muslims and the Egyptian army on March 9.

Assist

CHRISTIAN FREED

A Bangladeshi judge has exonerated a Christian sentenced to one year in prison for selling and distributing Christian literature near a major Muslim gathering north of the capital, Dhaka.

AP reported last month that **Biplob Marandi**, 25, had been jailed, but on March 29 the magistrate in Gazipur district court cleared the tribal Christian and ordered him to be released, attorney **Lensen Swapon Gomes** told *Compass Direct*.

He had been arrested for "creating chaos at a religious gathering" because he was selling Christian literature near the massive **Bishwa Ijtema (World Muslim Congregation)** on the banks of the Turag River.

CHINA IN MAFIA VIOLENCE

Chinese government is employing tactics including "mafia-type violence" in its ongoing campaign against the country's Christians as persecution worsens for the fifth consecutive year.

This is the verdict of a new report on 2010 by **ChinaAid**, which monitors and reports on religious freedom violations in the country.

The recorded incidents of persecution, which include beatings, torture, arrests, harassment and church demolitions, rose nearly 17% from 77 cases in 2009 to 90 in 2010, while the number of people persecuted increased by nearly 14% from 2935 to 3343. The number of people detained soared 43%.

ChinaAid president **Bob Fu** said that these cases were just the tip of the iceberg; the Chinese government's stranglehold on information and other security measures made it impossible to ascertain the full extent of the persecution. But the report paints a clear picture of the situation, documenting incidences from all parts of the country and all levels of society.

Barnabas Fund

NIGERIAN MUSLIMS RIOT

Muslim rioters have killed more than 100 Christians and burned down more than 40 churches in an attack that began on Monday, April 18, 2011, in response to the election of **Jonathan Goodluck**, a Christian, as president of Nigeria, according to *International Christian Concern*. The rioters even destroyed the homes of many Muslims who supported **President Goodluck**.

ICC says that the Muslim attackers allege that the election was rigged and **General Muhammadu Buhari**, a Muslim presidential candidate, is the rightful winner. Yet, impartial observers have called this election the fairest in decades.

According to the Commonwealth observers' report, "The elections for the National Assembly and the Presidency were both credible and creditable and reflected the will of the Nigerian people."

INDIAN CHRISTIANS ARRESTED

Fourteen Christians, including two pastors, were arrested on March 29 for converting to Christianity without an official permit in the Indian state of Orissa.

The **Global Council of Indian Christians** reported that the arrests came after a police complaint was filed against pastors **Samuel Mohopatra** and **Manuel Mahopatra** and 12 newly converted Christians. The Christians were produced before a court and were released on bail the same day, charged under the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act,

Sajan K. George, president of the Global Council of Indian Christians,

called on **Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik** to withdraw the accusations and put a stop to anti-Christian violence in the state.

STUDENT OUT FOR SHARING

A former student at a high school in Southern California recently filed a lawsuit against the school district after he had been suspended for sharing his faith.

About a year ago, **Kenneth Dominguez**, 16, was disciplined by **Gateway East High School** in San Diego County and was prevented from bringing his Bible to campus.

The lawsuit was filed after the **Grossmont Union High School District** refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing, according to **Brad Dacus**, president and founder of **Pacific Justice Institute**, which is representing Dominguez.



HITCHENS TURNS TO CHRISTIAN

By Ethan Cole

Atheist **Christopher Hitchens** has revealed that his former debate opponent, outspoken evangelical scientist **Francis Collins**, is behind a new experimental cancer treatment that he is using.

Collins, formerly the director of the **National Centre for Human Genome Research**, now serves as director of the **National Institutes of Health**.

In an interview with English paper *The Telegraph*, Hitchens said that Collins is partially responsible for developing a new cancer treatment that maps out the patient's entire genetic make-up and targets damaged DNA.

Hitchens, author of *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in June last year. The cancer is at stage 4.

He said he was asked a few weeks after being diagnosed to be a guinea pig for a new genome sequencing treatment that could possibly cure cancer.

"And the thing to note about stage four is that there is no stage five," he said.

Although he was told not to have any expectations about the treatment, he found out earlier this year that there was already medicine out for the genetic mutation expressed by his tumour.

Before falling ill, Hitchens had

debated the existence of God with Collins, author of *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. Hitchens said he and Collins had become good friends despite their religious differences.

"It is a rather wonderful relationship," said Hitchens. "I won't say he doesn't pray for me, because I think he probably does; but he doesn't discuss it with me."

He added, "He agrees that his medical experience does not include anything that could be described as a miracle cure – he's never come across anything."

Hitchens has been polite about the idea of Christians praying for his cancer treatment. But he has remained resolute that his cancer battle will not sway his religious opinion of God.

Hitchens has said that he will not convert on his deathbed unless he is "very ill" or "half demented, either by drugs or pain where I wouldn't have control over what I say".

Christian Today

QUR'AN BURNING 'LIKE CROSS'

by Michelle A Vu

Burning the Qur'an is to Muslims what the crucifixion of Christ is to Christians, evangelical pastor **John Piper** believes.

At least 24 people have died in Afghanistan, including seven United Nations employees, over the burning of the Qur'an by a fringe Florida pastor in March.

To help explain Muslims' violent rage over the Qur'an burning, Piper cited the writing of British scholar **Andrew Walls**, founder of the **Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World**, in his book *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History*.

In the book, Walls highlighted that a difference between Islam and Christianity is that one is readily translatable while the other resists translation.

"Islamic absolutes are fixed in a particular language, and in the conditions of a particular period of human history. The divine Word is the Qur'an, fixed in heaven forever in Arabic, the language of original revelation," wrote Walls. "For Christians, however, the divine Word is translatable, infinitely translatable."

"Much misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims has arisen from the assumption that the Qur'an is for Muslims what the Bible is for Christians," wrote Walls, one of the first scholars to study the global church shift from the West.

"It would be truer to say that the Qur'an is for Muslims what Christ is for Christians," he said.

Piper caught this last line and concluded that the parallel between Christianity and Islam is not of Christ to Muslim prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an to the Bible. Rather, the Qur'an parallels Christ.

"The giving of the Qur'an is in Islam what the incarnation of Christ is to Christianity," asserted Piper in a blog posting on the **Desiring God** website. "If this is so, then Qur'an-burning is parallel to Christ-crucifying."

Violent protests were sparked in Afghanistan when Florida pastor **Terry Jones** and preacher **Wayne Sapp** put the Islamic holy book on a mock trial on March 20 and found it "guilty of causing murder, rape and terrorism". As punishment, the Qur'an was burned.

Christian Post

SCHOLARS DOUBT PLATES

Seventy lead codices – metal plates barely bigger than a credit card, bound

together with lead straps – written in ancient Hebrew and Greek and with Christian and Jewish symbols may not be genuine, according to scholars.

AP reported last month that, if genuine, the codices might be the oldest surviving Christian documents. But the signs are not promising.

The codices are currently in the possession of an Israeli Bedouin who says they've been in his family for 100 years. However the reports also say that they were discovered a few years ago in a cave in a remote area of north-west Jordan, near where first-century Christians fled when Jerusalem was attacked by the Romans.

The Jordanian government is trying to get them back. "They will really match, and perhaps be more significant than, the Dead Sea Scrolls," the director of Jordan's **Department of Antiquities, Ziad al-Saad**, told the BBC.

To which Larry Hurtado, professor of New Testament Language, Literature & Theology and Director of the **Centre for the Study of Christian Origins** at the **University of Edinburgh** replies, hold

St Columba's Presbyterian Church, Peppermint Grove, WA

Minister – Colleague and Successor

St Columba's Presbyterian Church, Peppermint Grove, Perth, wishes to appoint a colleague and successor to the present Minister, the Rev Keith Morris, as his assistant. St Columba's, founded in 1896, is a long-established church with a congregation of 55 members, as well as adherents, young teens and children.

The Session intends to proceed to a call from the congregation to the successful candidate to the position of Minister within twelve months of the appointment.

The applicant will need to:

- be a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Australia, or willing to become one.
- demonstrate a commitment to godliness and prayer
- be prepared to settle in Perth as a long-term mission
- be a gifted leader who can articulate a clear vision and pastoral strategy for the strengthening of the congregation
- show an obvious passion for evangelism and disciple-making
- be committed to vital expository preaching
- be committed to the Reformed view of congregational worship
- have a demonstrated pastoral concern for people
- have obvious gifts of leadership and team-building

The congregation expects that the person appointed will subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith as an exhibition of his faith and understanding of the Bible.

A Manse, stipend and allowances as set down by the General Assembly of Western Australia will be provided.

Please send your application, addressing the position description and essential attributes, to Rev Keith Morris PO Box 155, Mosman Park, WA 6912.

Email: kmo77658@bigpond.net.au, Tel 08 9384 9186

on a minute.

Hurtado says dangling such discoveries in front of the media, before making them available to scholars, is becoming a tired game. "I'm impatient with people who go to the press and claim that they have something of enormous scholarly value and do not provide the materials for independent scholarly analysis. Controlling access to information is not how we do business in scholarship."

Other Bible scholars and archaeologists contacted by *Christianity Today* were equally skeptical. "Don't get too excited until we know what we have," said **Darrell Bock, Research Professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary**. Archaeologists pointed out that any ancient item discovered out of context faces huge hurdles before it can be authenticated and properly dated.

Then on April 1 an **Oxford lecturer, Peter Thonemann**, claimed one codex was a copy from an tombstone in Jordan that had been on display only half a century.

HISPANICS 'LIFEGUARDS' IN US

By Andrea Marcela Madambashi

With the Hispanic population boom-

ing in the US, one prominent evangelical believes Hispanics will be the "lifeguards for Christianity in America in the 21st century".

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez made the comment to *The Christian Post* last month in response to the latest **US Census Bureau** report, released last month, which revealed that the Hispanic population has grown to 50.5 million, or roughly one in six Americans.

That marks a 43% growth over the last 10 years. The Hispanic population growth accounted for over half of the 27.3 million increase in the total US population.

Rodriguez, president of America's largest Hispanic Christian organisation, **The National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference**, said the massive increase has "two powerful impacts" on the church.

First, it "forces the Anglo-Saxon American churches to expand their outreach in their communities"; they can no longer survive by reaching out only to their own people, he said.

Second, the Hispanic church is experiencing the fastest growth in history in such a way that the largest denominations such as the **Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God,**

Churches of God, and The United Methodist Church, among others, have confirmed that their growth comes largely through Hispanic churches.

"In other words, without the Hispanic population the evangelical church in the US would decline," he observed.

According to the US Census report, the non-Hispanic population grew only about 5% over the decade. And within the non-Hispanic population, the number of people who reported their race as white alone grew by just 1%. When measured against the total population, the non-Hispanic white alone population declined from 69 to 64%.

While most Hispanics in the US are Catholic, the percentage of those who affiliate with evangelical Christianity is growing, with many converting from Catholicism, according to **The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life**.

Rodriguez predicted that Hispanics would help revive the evangelical Christian movement in the United States.

"Hispanics will rise as the lifeguards for Christianity in America in the 21st century," Rodriguez stressed. "They will be the spokesmen for the movement of sanctity and justice."

Christian Post

Church in Melbourne searching for a Pastor

St Andrew's Presbyterian Church Reservoir, a small, but active congregation, is seeking a new Pastor to provide:-

- good preaching and teaching
- Pastoral Care
- assistance with evangelism & outreach into the community

Though they have suffered decline over recent years, they are teachable, open to the outsider, generous and mission conscious.

Reservoir is a northern suburb of Melbourne, traditionally working class, populated by people of multi-ethnic origins, having varied religious persuasions.

If you feel the Lord is giving you an interest in the challenge of this revitalisation era for St Andrew's, then please speak with the Interim Moderator John Wilson on 0418 537 209.

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Why I'm a believer

CLIMATE CHANGE IS REAL, AND A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY.

John Buchanan

Proverbs 18:17 *The person who tells one side of a story seems right, until someone else comes and asks questions.*

I read David Palmer's article in *AP* and while he disputes climate science I find it compelling reasoning.

It is true that the issue of global warming only became public 30 years ago but the research began in 1859 when John Tyndale established that carbon dioxide (CO₂) contributed to atmospheric warming. Then in 1896 Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius researched the consequences of increased CO₂ levels on the earth's temperature. He calculated that a small increase in CO₂ would cause a rise in the earth's temperature. He called it a "glasshouse" effect.

In 1958 the Keeling curve was developed. It measured the precise level of CO₂ in the atmosphere over time and graphed the way the earth's temperature followed the same curve as rising CO₂ levels. Over the past three decades the analysis of glacial ice cores and tree rings enabled a seamless link of CO₂ and temperature from the last ice age to the present day. The Keeling curve, continually verified by repeated experiment, 30 years ago caused a paradigm shift in scientific understanding of how the earth's temperature is related to the atmosphere.

Astrophysics proved that our universe is extraordinarily finely tuned (if one of the four primary forces was changed by as little as 1×10^{-60} our world would not exist) and now we are discovering that God has also finely tuned the earth. Until the industrial revolution all the carbon that was released into the atmosphere was equal to the amount of carbon reabsorbed. But since the industrial revolution the amount of carbon being released into the air has increasingly exceeded the amount that the planet is able to reabsorb. The Arrhenius' glass house effect is now a global greenhouse effect.

IT WAS THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION THAT STARTED THE PROBLEM AND IT WAS 20TH CENTURY UNCHECKED CONSUMERISM AND MATERIALISM THAT ESCALATED IT.

If that is true then we would expect the earth's temperature to be rising. But isn't our hottest year 1998?

This claim is based on the Hadley Centre UK, but their records do not include the Arctic region, where the fastest warming is occurring. Independent records covering the entire planet from both NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Centre, find the hottest calendar year on record is 2010 then 2005. The hottest 12 months were June 2009 to May 2010. To work out the long-term trend, scientists use linear regression. This shows that surface temperatures have continued to rise since 1998. So while temperatures have hardly increased in the last 15 years, 17 of our warmest years have occurred in the last 20 years.

Could the sun be causing the earth to be heating up?

If the sun were causing global warming then the heat from outer space would cause both the upper atmosphere and the lower atmosphere to warm up. If greenhouse gases were the cause then only the lower atmosphere would heat up. This is exactly what the scientists found.

What evidence is there that global warming is caused by humans?

Here we are looking for the human "fingerprint". There are different types of carbon in the air known as carbon isotopes. The most common type is Carbon-12. A heavier type of carbon is Carbon-13. Fossil fuels like coal or oil are Carbon 12. So if humans are the cause we would

expect to see the ratio of Carbon-13 to Carbon-12 fall. This is just what the scientists have observed, in measurements of the atmosphere and in corals and sea sponges.

It was the industrial revolution that started the problem and it was 20th century unchecked consumerism and rampant materialism that escalated the issue, and behind this is the unsustainable idea that our standard of living must always be improving.

What about the arguments from the science deniers?

Don Carson once wrote, "a text without a context is a pretext for a proof text". As Bible students, we are distressed when God's words are taken out of context and that's the method of the science deniers. They scour the literature and emphasise the few exceptions rather than the overwhelming weight of evidence (this practice is called cherry picking).

Take the claim that the error regarding the melting glaciers in the Himalaya undermines the whole Intergovernmental Panel 2007 report. What the deniers don't tell us is that this "major error" was a one-paragraph reference to a research paper that had no bearing on the final IPCC assessment. The science deniers scoured the three volumes of a 3000-page report and came up with this as their major error. They also fail to mention that while the glaciers are growing on the shaded side of the Himalayas they are declining faster than predicted on the other.

What about the Climategate conspiracy?

In November 2009, the email servers at the University of East Anglia were hacked and emails were stolen. When a selection of emails between climate scientists were published on the Internet, a few quotes were taken out of context and interpreted as revealing global warming was all just a conspiracy.

This has been labeled "Climategate" by

some. To determine if there had been any wrong-doing, five independent enquiries from England and the United States have investigated the stolen emails. Every single investigation cleared the climate scientists of any wrong-doing.

A few suggestive quotes taken out of context are used to distract us from the physical realities of climate change, but they change nothing about our scientific understanding of humanity's role in global warming. Climategate attempts to point the finger at scientists and deflects attention from what matters: the science.

But isn't the scientific consensus disintegrating?

Professor of History and Science Studies Naomi Oreskes, of the University of California wanted to assess the claim that many scientists disagreed with the consensus position. She analysed 11 years of journal papers on climate change, and found none of the authors disagreed with the consensus view. As recently as 2010 Anderegg, Prall, Harold, and Schneider researched environmental scientists who are presently doing field research and publishing papers, and found that 97% agreed with climate change science, while 90 to 95% of other relevant research scientists also agree. The academies of science from 40 nations, including Australia's CSIRO, affirm man-made global warming caused by "greenhouse" gases. Somehow I think the consensus still holds.

Despite being funded by their respective governments, it appears, that all world governments are waiting for others to act first and bowing to the pressure of manipulated public opinion and nothing is being done to significantly reduce green-house gas emissions.

That the science seems beyond some, does not mean it should be ignored. I don't understand how the poisons within a cigarette transfer in a person's lungs and cause cancer but I believe the experts despite the denial of cigarette companies and their scientific spokesmen. From the 1950s to the 1990s the tobacco industry relied heavily on scientists, lawyers and

public relations experts to undermine the real science. They generated doubt in the public's mind and acquired their own friendly "expert" witnesses.

And this is the odd thing: the multi-national billion-dollar petro-chemical company Exxon Mobil uses the same tactics and employs the same scientists as the cigarette companies to spread disinformation. Their aim is to fight science with pseudo science to highlight the gaps and uncertainties, to focus on the few exceptions (cherry picking) and to discredit the environmental scientists



I WONDER IF WE ARE FAILING TO BE A NEIGHBOUR TO THE POOR. WHAT RIGHT DO WE HAVE TO USE MORE THAN OUR SHARE OF RESOURCES?

themselves. For an expose of these key scientists bent on destroying the cause of environmentalism, their link to the tobacco companies and their uses of the media, I recommend *Merchants of Doubt* (2010).

Sir John Houghton a past president of the IPCC, is a leading environmental scientist, Nobel laureate in 2007, and winner of the Albert Einstein World Award Medal for Science in 2009. He is an elder at Aberdovey Presbyterian Church, Wales, he's a reformed evangelical, holds to penal substitution, TULIP and the five solas – he's one of us. He writes: "Climate change is a moral issue. It's a matter of social justice, since those who would pay the highest price would be among the world's poorest people."

When Lord Shaftesbury fought

against slavery the doomsayers predicted that to end slavery would bring economic disaster to Britain and most of the Christian population believed them. But Shaftesbury was right and England survived. When Dr Martin Luther King was protesting for civil rights for all Americans, the other Christian leaders were saying that now is not the time. Dr King was also right. And I'm convinced that Sir John Houghton is right, and we Christians need to take the lead.

Some wonder about higher economic costs for Australians as a result of the carbon tax. I wonder if we are failing to be a neighbour to the poor. What right do we have to use more than our share of resources? If we include exported carbon products, per person, Australia has the third highest carbon footprint in the world, after Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. It may only be 3% but do we have the right to produce 1000 times more CO₂ than the average Chinese? If everyone had the same carbon footprint as us we would need three earths. We need to share our great wealth with the poor and not use resources that belong to our children. We need sustainable development. The ethical imperative of stewardship must underlie all environmental policies.

2010 was the world's hottest year and with it came catastrophic fires in Russia, floods displaced 20 million people in Pakistan, floods and a cyclone wreaked havoc in Australia, Europe and America experienced unprecedented cold weather and now there are tornadoes in the US and New Zealand. Climate change theory predicts that we will experience the same types of weather but with greater intensity and duration. The "magic thinking" is to think that we can dump 30 billion tons a year of sulfates and not expect some consequences. ap



John Buchanan is minister of St Peter's, North Sydney.

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The problem of pain

DOES SUFFERING RENDER BELIEF IN GOD ABSURD?

Barney Zwartz

Acts of God”, as natural disasters are known in arcane insurance language, ensured Stefan and Erika Swanstrom had a memorable honeymoon earlier this year. First, the Swedish couple found themselves in Germany amid one of Europe’s nastiest snowstorms, then they were caught up in the Brisbane floods, and next in the extremities of cyclone Yasi in Cairns. After narrowly avoiding bushfires in Perth, they arrived in Christchurch before the earthquake that devastated the New Zealand city. Then they flew to Tokyo, just in time for Japan’s biggest recorded earthquake and the catastrophic tsunami.

Was God trying to get their attention? Certainly the first part of this year has had more than the usual number of natural disasters. Irrespective of the insurance terminology, are they really the handiwork of God? And if so, do they render belief in God absurd, as many non-believers would contend? If God is all good and all powerful, why does He allow so much suffering?

It is not new for humans to grapple with the meaning of disaster. Much of the Old Testament is reflection upon, and explanation of, this challenge. It is the main theme of Job, who concludes that “man is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward” and that the lesson is to endure and trust.

The early Christians, who suffered their share of persecution, disaster, and disease, would have been puzzled at the idea that suffering was a reason not to believe in God. For them, disasters were a practical challenge – strengthened by their faith, they should roll up their sleeves and respond. It wasn’t until the 18th century Enlightenment that suffering began to be widely seen to pose a threat to faith in God.

On November 1, 1755, an earthquake believed to be about nine on the Richter scale struck Lisbon. Thousands were



THE EARLY CHRISTIANS
WOULD HAVE BEEN PUZZLED
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engulfed, great fires killed thousands more. The harbour emptied, then the water returned in a huge tsunami, drowning the lower part of the city. About a third of the population, 100,000 people, were killed, and Europe was stunned.

Voltaire, much moved, wrote:

*One-hundred thousand unfortunates
devoured by the earth*

*Who, bleeding, lacerated, and still alive,
Buried under their roofs without aid in
their anguish,*

End their sad days!

*In answer to the half-formed cries of
their dying voices,*

*At the frightful sight of their smoking
ashes,*

*Will you say: “This is a result of eternal
laws*

*Directing the acts of a free and good
God!”*

Voltaire includes the earthquake in his 1759 satire *Candide*, which mocks the idea that this is the best of all possible worlds. People began to discern a contradiction between God’s goodness and power though – because Christians have never believed this is the best of all possible worlds – it also had a seismic effect on Enlightenment thinkers, who had seen nature as a benign and intelligible force.

American historian Rob Zaretsky says this is the moment God was exiled from public affairs. “Portugal’s prime minister responded to the quake by saying ‘we will bury the dead and take care of the living’. We have largely followed his example – we no longer turn inward in awe and turn outward with questions.

“Instead we turn to computer models for practical solutions, and to the television for narrative resolutions. We mourn the thousands of lives lost. We also wonder if something has been lost in the technological gains that show us human torment in full and unremitting colour.”

The term “acts of God” entered the language of insurance not long after Lisbon. According to Reuben Aitchison, corporate affairs manager of insurance giant AAMI, the first reference was in *The Times* of London in July 1803, reporting the judgment in a court case: “By common law, owners are insured against any loss of property entrusted to their care except losses arising from the act of God or the king’s enemies.”

Although the concept survives in some countries, “acts of God” have disappeared from the insurance industry in Australia, which now covers many natural disasters it once did not.

But, as leading Australian philosopher Tony Coady points out, talking about “acts of God” this way is independent of belief in God. He says it is a shorthand way of suggesting no human caused a particular disaster, such as an earthquake, so no one can be blamed. The only result is that God gets a bad press: He gets blamed for tsunamis, but no one calls a marvellous growing season for farmers an act of God.

Coady says disasters raise a serious philosophical, theological and religious question about the presence of evil. “For the religious person this is a deep and fundamental mystery.”

The way a believer – which Coady is –

responds to shocking events such as the Japanese tsunami is part of the whole package of faith, which is both troubling and sustaining, he says. "You have to take the perspective of the whole into account."

Whether God is responsible for natural events has been hotly debated by theologians, who distinguish between what He actively wills and what He merely allows.

Melbourne philosopher Bruce Langtry, an evangelical Christian, believes he has found a formula (described in his book, *God the Best, and Evil*) that renders this distinction unnecessary, and avoids the supposed contradiction between God's goodness and power exposed by suffering.

His argument, greatly simplified, goes like this. God is under no particular or absolute duty to prevent earthquakes. It is not the earthquake that matters but the suffering it causes.

If the question is suffering, then that includes any cause, not just earthquakes. But if God ruled out all suffering He would also destroy human freedom and responsibility.

For example, we can cause suffering to our children by malice, insensitivity or stupidity. If God ruled out suffering, we could not do that, and we could also have no moral responsibility for our children.

But we actually value moral responsibility for each other very highly; it is part of the good of being a parent or a partner. Part of marriage is being vulnerable to the partner, but if nothing we did could harm them, there would be no vulnerability. Such considerations, Langtry says, provide good reason why God might allow considerable suffering.

He says: "There's an obvious response: Bruce, there's too much suffering and dysfunction in the world. Can't He tone it down a bit? To which I say that's a good and important point." But, he claims, it does not refute his argument.

"If you are going to construct a philosophical argument against the existence of God, you have to make it rigorous. It's

easy to make a few sloppy hand-wringing gestures. I want to deny that the existence of great evils constitutes a strong objection to the existence of God."

Theologian Peter Adam, principal of the Anglican Ridley College, suggests that sometimes we blame God for our own lack of wisdom. "Clearly God lets these things happen. They are part of the natural world, and we are well aware



SUFFERING IS THE MEANING
OF OUR WORLD.
FOR LOVE IS THE MEANING.
AND LOVE SUFFERS.
THE TEARS OF GOD ARE THE
MEANING OF HISTORY.

that they happen. We have the information and ability to live wisely. To build nuclear reactors on an earthquake fault line seems unwise."

Melbourne University philosopher Christopher Cordner is another who sees no reason why suffering should be an intellectual challenge to faith in God. Cordner recalls that when he was a boy, a family friend's wife suffered a protracted and unpleasant illness.

"He said this had caused him to lose his faith. I remember thinking at the time, did it not occur to him that people fall ill like that? Did he think he would be protected? Why?"

"If your faith is a genuine faith, it's not dependent on how things go for you. I've always thought it a dullness of imagination that someone's faith could be dependent on that not happening to them."

Nor is Cordner, himself an agnostic, especially sympathetic to the atheist who rejects God because of suffering. "What's such a person saying – if we live like Hansel and Gretel in a house we could bite bits off and eat, or in the Garden of Eden, then we'll believe?"

As an intellectual argument, he dismisses it, though as a visceral response to someone's own suffering he can understand it.

American philosopher Stanley Hauerwas takes a different tack. He is suspicious of books that purport to explain how a good God permits suffering, and suggests the real issue is why humans want to ask such a question.

At one level, they ask it because they think that being Christian puts them on the winning side of history, that God is there to make their lives more comfortable, satisfying and prosperous. This is a modern thought rather than a biblical one – in the Gospel of John, Jesus promises his followers they will surely face tribulation.

At a deeper level, people need to make sense of suffering, they need to fit it into the broader narrative of their lives. If suffering cannot be brought into this wider context, it can seem to render our existence as well as God's existence absurd. It is important to give suffering a meaning, even though that is far from the same as an explanation.

Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, who lost his son in a mountaineering accident, wrote in *Lament for a Son* that he could not "fit it all together" with either of two common attempts to do that, either by saying God did it or by saying there was nothing God could do about it. "I cannot fit it together at all. I can only, with Job, endure. I do not know why God did not prevent Eric's death. To live without the answer is precarious."

Wolterstorff concludes that suffering is "deep down at the centre of things, deep down where the meaning is. Suffering is the meaning of our world. For Love is the meaning. And Love suffers. The tears of God are the meaning of history."

That is the message of Easter, the ultimate act of God – that God took on human form to die for humans, and be resurrected. Ridley's Peter Adam says: "The act of God in Jesus Christ is not that of a remote and uncaring god. God is personally present in Jesus Christ, in his humble birth, life of service, atoning death and resurrection, and present to rescue and help us."

Many people certainly find that belief absurd. But it is not so clear that human suffering makes it so. ap

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This article is reprinted from *The Age*, for whom **Barney Zwartz** is religion editor.



letters

OLD EARTH NOT HERESY

While God in His mercy and love *could* have created the world and everything in it in six 24-hour days within the last 10,000 years, the overwhelming evidence available to virtually each and every citizen of this planet from both science and history is that He did not. To try to claim that the only possible correct interpretation of Genesis 1-3 is a literal recent six 24-hour day creation or that such an interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 is indeed foundational to the Gospel is mischievous in the extreme.

That God created, that God created mankind, that our ultimate progenitors disobeyed, is indeed foundational to the Gospel and to faith in Christ Jesus. But whether that was achieved in the twinkling of an eye or over eons is not, and indeed the more I see and learn about God's creation, the more I marvel at the depth of His love of me and His creation of this tiny insignificant planet orbiting an insignificant Star in a small galaxy.

That so much of Genesis 1 and 2 has been found to be supported by scientific discoveries is to many (especially non-Christians) remarkable (and, to many, extremely irritating) especially for a document that had its origins, at least in written form, some 3500 years ago.

So again, as I have been suggesting for more than 20 years now, let us get back to proclaiming the true foundations of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen which do not include the foolish claim that we have to believe in a recent six 24-hour day creation.

*Rev. Peter R Dunstan,
Annandale Leichhardt Presbyterian
Church, NSW*

GOD CONTROLS CLIMATE

I have been a keen follower of the debate regarding the responsibility human activity bears in the alleged threat of climate change, and the generation of carbon dioxide by industrial activity, and its effect on the earth's atmosphere, to the future welfare/dangers of us all.

The proponents of the climate change threat, such as Canadian Professor Suzuki and American Al Gore, who

received a Nobel Peace Prize for his work, have done their utmost to promote the threat. But since then, eminent physicists like Lord Monckton, the former Chancellor of the British Exchequer and co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize with Al Gore, and many more have denied the threat. They say scientific basis for it is at best flawed; but at worst it is a fraudulent attempt to deceive people for profit.

Psalm 14 begins "The fool has said in his heart 'There is no God'." And I believe it is the out-working of this fools' philosophy that drives the climate change scare.

The philosophy that "there is no God" – that He does not exist, and should be ignored in our thinking – is the driver of most of the climate threat, for arrogant fools (God's description, not mine) believe they have solved the mystery of our origins with their "primeval sludge" and Big Bang theories, while ignoring the sublime declaration of Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth! This declaration, made without hesitation or apology, remains the definitive explanation of our origins, and can never be replaced nor disproved.

God has further said (2 Peter 3:10-12), He in His Sovereign right, will one day, dissolve the world as we know it, in fervent heat; and He will replace it with a new Heaven, and a New Earth "wherein dwells righteousness". No amount of human activity can proof the planet from this event – we are powerless to prevent it happening.

But the Bible tells us that God, our Creator, has Himself proofed those who believe and love Him, by sending His Son

Jesus to Calvary to be crucified for their salvation. I do not deny that the climate changes. It always has done, in an order controlled by the Creator, Himself. And He, and not any puffed-up fool has control of it.

*Laurie Miller elder emeritus,
St Andrews', Townsville, Qld*

MORE WILBERFORCES

Catching up on my reading backlog I was delighted to see the articles on Wilberforce (AP, November). If anyone were to ask me what is wrong with today's church I would have to say, most bluntly, that we have lost interest in and given up on this world, and are concerned almost exclusively with the next.

Today's church badly needs a Wilberforce, or if this is too much to expect, a large number of mini-Wilberforces, to make the Christian world-view heard in our sick secular society.

To this end I would like to make a couple of suggestions. Have a Wilberforce day each year in which ministers are encouraged to reflect on his life and personal philosophy from the pulpit. Second, have a social issues page in AP each month in which important issues of the day are discussed, and possible action suggested.

*R.B. (Bob) Dewar,
Samson, WA*

The opinions published in AP letters are not necessarily endorsed by the editorial committee.



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MAY 2011

- 21** Tregear charge western Sydney with about 100 c&a (communicants and adherents) and 3 e (elders).
- 22** Presbytery of Ballarat – 6 charges and 5 home mission stations, 5 appointment charges.
- 23** Annandale-Leichhardt charge inner Sydney with about 30 c&a, 10 yf (younger folk – Sunday School and Youth) and 7 e. Peter Dunstan.
- 24** Just relations between the original, newer and the most recently arrived Australians.
- 25** The effective countering of all philosophies based on the premise “there is no God”.
- 26** Gavin Henderson in his exit appointment, Ayr Home Hill charge with about 95 c&a and 5 e.
- 27** Pray that the Lord of the harvest will give your congregation and presbytery a vision to plant new churches.
- 28** Ask God to show us the opportunity for the Gospel provided by the presence of so many Muslims among us.
- 29** Darryl & Kath Spriggs in his exit appointment in Nambucca River charge NSW north coast including Macksville with about 120 c&a, 21 yf and 3 e.
- 30** Allan & Bronwyn Lihou *MP (mission partners* – the Australian Presbyterian

World Mission) workers from Bonnyrigg, western Sydney with OMF International involved in evangelism, church planting and leadership training in Taichung, Taiwan.

- 31** Honest and effective presentation of biblical truth in tertiary educational communities this year.

JUNE 2011

- 1** Presbytery of Brisbane – 14 charges 6 retired ministers, 3 ministers under jurisdiction, 1 defence chaplain, 2 theological teachers.
- 2** Keep praying that none in retirement residences will be forgotten or neglected.
- 3** Matt Purnell Coorparoo, Brisbane including Mcgregor with about 100 c&a, 22 yf and 10 e, assisting Ross Wilson and Phil Case.
- 4** Peter & Ayumi Tamsett *MP* workers from Granville, Sydney raising a team of prayer and financial supporters so they can move to Chiba, eastern Tokyo with to be involved in evangelism church planting with the Presbyterian Church of Japan.
- 5** Praise God for the amazing growth of the church in China and pray that it may continue.
- 6** Peace in world trouble spots such as the Middle East, South Asia and Korea.
- 7** For Christians to demonstrate the love of Jesus in acts of mercy.
- 8** Help for all affected by earthquakes,

- eruptions, tsunamis and mining disasters.
- 9** Gungahlin North Belconnen charge with about 85 c&a, 40 yf and 3 e. Mark Adams.
- 10** Presbytery of The Hawkesbury, western Sydney – 12 charges and 3 home mission stations, 10 retired ministers, 3 workers among koories, 3 hospital chaplains, 1 theological teacher.
- 11** Shoalhaven charge (3 congregations) with about 310 c&a, 35 yf and 1 e. Fred Monckton.
- 12** Brett & Ruth Richardson in his exit appt Wollongong charge with about 250 c&a, 20 yf and 13 e.
- 13** Gordonvale charge with about 45 c&a, 20 yf and 4 e. Bruce Harrison.
- 14** Plead with God to keep open ways children may hear the Gospel.
- 15** Ken & Lisa Gray in his exit appointment Temora charge southern NSW with about 70 c&a, 6 yf and 7 e.
- 16** Real help for all caught up in alcohol and other substance abuse.
- 17** Those involved in Christian ministry among workers, police officers and prisoners.
- 18** All involved in the decades-long work of translating God’s written Word into new languages.
- 19** Kristian & Kylie Hartberg in his exit appointment, Coonabarabran charge, NW NSW, with about 5 c&a, 80 yf and 3 e.
- 20** A hunger of all church members to understand Christian doctrine.



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books

**Voices from the Past:
Puritan Devotional Readings**

Richard Rushing (ed.)
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009.
Reviewed by Peter Barnes

Daily readings are becoming more popular with Christians, and there is good reason for this. Richard Rushing has produced a most worthwhile addition to the number of such books on the market. It should not be read as a substitute for Bible study but a stimulus to it. Each day has a Bible reading, then an extract from a Puritan author.

They are all well-chosen, and it is difficult to pick and choose. But here is Thomas Brooks' comment from March 15: "Weak saints set their minds upon their blessings more than their works. Their minds are more interested in joy, peace, comfort, and assurance than their responsibilities of waiting on God, believing in God, walking with God, and acting for God ... The high way to comfort is to seek comfort less, and duty more. Set your mind on what you should do more than on what you would like to have."

There are plenty of challenging insights from the Puritans, as well as some memorable sayings and illustrations. Richard Rushing has done us all a favour through his labours in putting this together. It has much indeed to commend it.

Peter Barnes is books editor of AP.

The Life of Charles Hodge

A. A. Hodge
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010
Reviewed by Greg Goswell

This monumental biography of more than 600 pages was written by his son and successor as professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, and was first published two years after his death (1880). Thanks to Banner, it is again available to instruct and inspire those who love the doctrines of the Word of

God. Hodge is the man behind a valuable three-volume *Systematic Theology* (still in print) as well as the author of commentaries on Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians.

In the providence of God Hodge was born into a gifted and godly family. He studied at the new theological college in Princeton (1816-19) and never left it for the rest of his life, due to his appointment as a junior lecturer on graduation. He was elected to be a professor in 1822 and continued in that role for more than 50 years, in time becoming the world's leading Reformed theologian.

Hodge lived according to unchanging daily habits, nor was he ever tempted to adopt new doctrines. At the 50th anniversary of his professorship at Princeton in 1872, he said, "I am not afraid to say that a new idea never originated in this seminary." Hodge was immune from the tendency of theological teachers to seek novelty or to try to appear a clever and original thinker. Instead he strove to faithfully teach the system of doctrine he found in the Bible, and to make that truth clear, fresh and related to life.

In 1840 he transferred from teaching Bible to teaching systematic theology (a change unsought by him). The providential result was that his understanding of theology always had a sound biblical grounding. Here, then, is the life of a man who is worth remembering and emulating.

Greg Goswell lectures at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.

Wait till you see the butterfly

Doreen Taminga
Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2010.
Reviewed by Mignon Goswell

Reading stories with children is surely one of the great pleasures of family life. Here are 43 short stories that the author

tells us are not only for pleasure but aim to teach definite biblical truths. They certainly do that. A helpful index tells us the particular truth conveyed in each story. The title story makes a worthy introduction and straight away points us to the saving work of Jesus. Stories are a traditional way of teaching truth. Our Lord Himself, of course, is the master storyteller.

The stories are divided into three age groups, from four to 12. Thus the book will be helpful for the spread of family members. These are definitely Christian stories and are useful within the Christian family, Christian school or Sunday school context. The family life portrayed in the stories tends to be idealised and traditional, with parents who take each opportunity presented to teach a biblical truth. In many of the stories the child makes a mistake, which is then rectified and a lesson is abstracted. Some are like parables. One or two are like a fairy tale. Sometimes the conversation between the children in the story is just a little too ideal.

The stories are short. They are comforting in that the children are allowed to make mistakes and taught that we learn through that. This is an important lesson of life to communicate to children. Mistakes and disobedience can bring us closer to God if we recognise our wrongdoing and turn from it.

Children like formulas and familiarity in stories. That is one of the strengths of this book. Christian families will always appreciate a storybook to add to their store of books to read together. Certainly we need to encourage families we know to do that regularly.

Mignon Goswell is bookshop manager at the Presbyterian Theological College, Melbourne.

All books reviewed are available from the Reformers Bookshop - Phone: (02) 9569 9857 or visit www.reformers.com.au

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No time to despair

IT'S NOT THE TIME TO WITHDRAW FROM POLITICS.

Chuck Colson with Catherine Larson

The evidence is clear: Many Christians have grown weary of the culture wars. Compared with prior years, Christians had little visible presence in last year's US election campaign, and certainly younger evangelicals see the conservative religious agenda as strident and often offensive. What's more, prominent Christian leaders are telling us to take a sabbatical from politics — a seductively appealing message for so many fatigued by our 30-year-long uphill struggle.

At the same time, secularists berate Christians for the culture wars, claiming that we are trying to impose our bigoted agenda on them. Often intimidated, Christians fear raising controversial questions.

But someone should ask: Who started the divisive culture wars in the first place? Far from being the aggressors — as the press would have us believe — religious conservatives have simply been responding to the relentless secularisation of American life.

There was a time when Christianity's positive influence on society was applauded. US Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, a strong civil libertarian, stated in the 1952 *Zorach v. Clauson* case: "We are a religious people whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being ... When the state encourages religious instruction or cooperates with religious authorities ... it follows the best of our traditions. For it then respects the religious nature of our people and accommodates the public service to their spiritual needs."

Scarcely a decade later, the Supreme Court, in an astonishing reversal, declared in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and *Abington v. Schempp* (1963) that prayer and Bible reading in public schools were to be outlawed — and thus opened Pandora's Box. In case after case, justices decided against the traditional values of our country, culminating in 1973 with

FAR FROM SEEKING TO IMPOSE THEIR BELIEFS UPON THE NATION, CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVES WERE MANNING THE RAMPARTS.

Roe v. Wade, when the Court ruled that killing human life at its earliest stages was now a constitutionally protected practice — leading to an unbroken string of such cases since.

The changes in American life weren't limited to the law. School boards discovered programs like values clarification that were far from neutral and were clear assaults on Christian values. Condoms were made available in schools, while many religious materials were forbidden.

This was part of an unprecedented assault on the traditional moral fabric of the country. People of Christian conscience could sit still no longer. What followed was what Harvard professor Nathan Glazer called a "defensive reaction of the conservative heartland".

Far from seeking to impose their beliefs upon the nation, Christian conservatives were manning the ramparts, protecting the moral foundations of society.

Today is no different. As other Christian leaders and I wrote in the Manhattan Declaration, "Because the sanctity of human life, the dignity of marriage as a union of husband and wife, and the freedom of conscience and religion are foundational principles of justice and the common good, we are compelled by our Christian faith to speak and act in their defence."

On each of these fronts, the forces of secularism have assaulted foundational principles necessary for true human flourishing and the preservation of moral order. We defend them not for parochial interests but for the good of

society.

It was under somewhat similar conditions that Augustine wrote *The City of God*. As buildings smoldered in Rome, accusations flew that Christians, by seeking to replace the pagan gods, had caused the fall of the city. But Rome's demise, as Augustine explained, could not be laid at the feet of Christians. Compelled by love of God and neighbor, Christians, he argued, make the best of citizens, working to create the kind of society where all can live peaceable and godly lives. His classic work has served for 1600 years as an apologetic for the wholehearted participation of the citizens of the city of God in the city of man.

So is now the time to back away? Is "faithful presence" enough for Christians even as the forces of secularisation grow stronger and more militant? Do we say nothing when, for perhaps the first time in our nation's history, the administration seeks, as a matter of policy, to redefine "freedom of religion"? From the very beginning of our republic, freedom of religion has meant free exercise of religion — the right to live out one's religious beliefs. Instead, our Secretary of State and the administration speak of nothing more than "freedom of worship" — the right to worship privately as one pleases. And we are to disengage from politics?

Absolutely not. We cannot do so and remain faithful to the command to love God with our whole being and our neighbors as ourselves.

This is no time for despair. And it is no time for retreat. Instead, it is time, in the tradition of Augustine, to work for justice and the common good — not just for ourselves, but for all who are made in God's image. ap



Charles Colson is founder of Prison Fellowship. This article is reprinted from *Christianity Today*.