

Clarion

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*There is no
room for God
in the secular
scientific
enterprise.*

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Science and the Age of the Earth

Scientific theories on origins are speculation, for they cannot be tested

Mainstream scientists estimate that the earth is about 4.5 billion years old. Understanding the plain sense of Scripture leads to an age well below 10,000 years. A defensible estimate is about 6,500 years. What are we to make of this disparity? Many books have been written on this topic. My purpose here is to highlight a couple of the important factors that need to be taken into consideration.

The limitations of science

From the outset it needs to be recognized that scientific knowledge has limitations. In spite of all the wonderful things that science can do, it remains a human enterprise and has boundaries. In its most elementary form, the scientific method involves the following steps. The issue or question that is to be investigated is set out. Evidence is gathered and on the basis of the evidence a theory to explain the evidence is formulated. When possible, experiments are then performed to test the hypothesis. If the results are consistent with the theory, the theory gains credibility; if the results are not consistent, the theory is undermined.

When dealing with the age of our planet, one needs of necessity to deal with its beginning. But science can say very little about what happened at creation. It can theorize and speculate, but it can never check its theoretical models. The creation of the world cannot be duplicated in an experiment. So strictly and scientifically speaking, scientific theories on origins are speculation, for they cannot be tested (see John Baumgardner, "Exploring the Limitations of the Scientific Methods" at <http://www.icr.org/articles/view/3749/218/>).

Science is also limited by the presuppositions that a scientist brings to bear on his questions and experiments. If he is a believer in evolution and an old earth, then his data will be interpreted through an evolutionary lens. There is no such thing as pure objectivity in science. A scientist who accepts the first chapters of Genesis as God's truth will work differently

with the data than the one who rejects this part of Scripture. There will be much overlap in terms of the factual results of experiments, but the interpretation of the data will diverge. Interpretations are influenced by prior assumptions.

The place of presuppositions

The important role of presuppositions is especially obvious in scientific discussions of origins. Secular scientists are often at loggerheads with Christian scientists who believe in a young earth. Those who believe in random evolution quarrel with those who see intelligent design in creation. The conflict is so intense that scientists have had their careers sidelined or ruined simply because they were not on the "consensus" side of an issue, particularly when it concerned origins and intelligent design. Ben Stein has documented some of this in his DVD entitled *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* (2008).

Why this bitterness and struggle? Well, when you speak of intelligent design, you could be implying a designer, that is, a creator. To have such religious ideas infiltrate science is absolutely forbidden. One of the underlying assumptions of secular science is that what we see and can perceive is the sum total of reality. There is no room for God in the scientific enterprise. A secular scientist is a materialist. He consciously excludes the Creator and assumes natural processes through random and chance evolution. A Christian scientist includes the Creator and, if he accepts the plain sense of Scripture, realizes that all things were made by Him in a not too distant past. He accepts that God made all things out of nothing, not because he can understand it, but because he believes what God tells him in Scripture (Heb 11:3).

Let us consider one example to make the above more clear. First we will briefly consider what the Bible says about the age of the earth and then look at a star witness used by science to "prove" that the earth is billions of years old.



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Scripture on the age of the Earth

It is important to consider what Scripture says because the Bible is God’s Word. God is the Creator. He is the only one who can tell us what happened at the beginning when He called the earth and all it contains into being (Ps 33:6-9). What He says needs to be taken into consideration by scientists. This does not make the Bible a scientific textbook. It also does not mean that science can prove the Bible to be true. (The Bible does not need that kind of proof and it is dangerous to link the authority of Scripture to a particular scientific model.) But God’s Word should influence how we interpret his creation and the scientific findings it yields.

Scripture clearly teaches a young earth. The fourth commandment summarizes the creation account. “In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day” (Exod 20:11; 31:17). There was an absolute beginning that included the creation of man. As Christ said: “From the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’” (Mark 10:6). God did not create Adam and Eve billions of years after the beginning, after pre-Adamite primates gradually evolved to homo sapiens. God also did not create man after much death and anguish had taken place, as supposedly witnessed by the fossil record which mainstream science considers millions and billions of years old. No, God created man at the beginning of creation and Eve is the “mother of all the living” (Gen 3:20). After recounting God’s creating work, the book of Genesis continues its historical account by informing us of Adam and Eve’s descendants, focusing on those important for recounting the history of God’s redemptive work. Highlights of that history include the worldwide flood, the tower of Babel, and the call of Abraham.

Reading Genesis leads to the conclusion that the earth has not been around millions, let alone billions of years, but thousands of years. This has also been the understanding of Christianity as a whole until about the eighteenth century (Davis Young, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*, 1982, p. 25). In subsequent centuries it was and is still the view of those who accept Scripture’s testimony on the age of the earth. In the Reformed tradition, the influential name of Herman Bavinck as one of the foremost Reformed dogmatists of his time comes to mind. He affirmed a young earth by insisting that the days of creation not be identified with the periods of geology (*Reformed Dogmatics* 2.499). However, in what seems to be an attempt to neutralize this testimony, a scientist has recently implied that if Bavinck had had more up-to-date information and

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had understood geological principles better he would not have concluded that the earth was young! (Davis A. Young, "The Reception of Geology in the Dutch Reformed Tradition: The Case of Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)" in M. Kolbl-Ebert, ed., *Geology and Religion: A History of Harmony and Hostility*, 2009, 289-300, esp. 295-299.)

Such an approach shows where the problem lies. Scientific discoveries made since the eighteenth century have for many proven to be incompatible with a young earth. Especially geology is a huge stumbling block. As a result, the plain meaning of Scripture, as has been accepted throughout the centuries, is being reinterpreted to allow for an earth billions of years old. However, in my opinion it is exegetically impossible to justify from Scripture that the earth is billions of years old. The sheer volume of diverse and sometimes contradictory material produced in trying to achieve this end illustrates the impossibility of trying to make Scripture say that which it does not say and which it, until fairly recently, has never been understood as saying. We should therefore let the plain testimony of Scripture stand.

Geology and an old Earth

If the attempt to reinterpret the plain sense of Scripture is a failure, it can be expected that Christian scientists endeavour to reinterpret the scientific data that has yielded an earth billions of years old or seek new data. Christian scientists who mention that they unconditionally accept the authority of Scripture are usually for that reason vilified by secular scientists. But starting from a biblical worldview is an excellent basis from which to start a scientific investigation. It is most logical and reasonable for a consistent Christian scientist to study and interpret scientific data in the light of the Word of God and, therefore, to question the theory of a world that is billions of years old.

Geology seems to have been especially influential in prompting the redating of the earth to being very old. Radioisotope dating of rock is considered to be the most reliable method of dating rocks that is known. According to mainstream interpretations of the data, the earth is billions of years old. Christian scientists who hold to a young earth are looking carefully at the evidence and drawing their own conclusions. This is what the ongoing RATE (Radioisotopes and the Age of The Earth) project is all about. The book by Don DeYoung, mentioned at the end of this article, summarizes this research as of 2005.

There is reason for carefully examining this method of dating and its presuppositions. For example, Christian scientists have tested this method of dating rocks by sending samples of rock that had been

formed ten years earlier on Mount St. Helens to a very reputable American laboratory for radioisotope dating without informing them where the samples came from. The results received as a result of the tests was that the age of the rocks ranged from .35 to 2.8 million years. Since the rock was only ten years old, these results were obviously flawed. Similar flawed results of more than a billion years have been obtained from other rock formations known to be recent (Steven A. Austin, "Excess Argon Within Mineral Concentrates from the New Dacite Lava Dome). Surely this raises the question whether the presuppositions on which the interpretations of the radioisotope data are based are reliable. The RATE project has shown that the long-age radioactive methods for dating rocks can be demonstrated often to be faulty, since there are problems with crucial assumptions on which these dating methods are based (Andrew Snelling, "Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth," 2007, available at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/aid/v2/n1/radioisotopes-earth>).

Similar issues are raised with sedimentary rock containing fossils. Mainstream scientists interpret them in an evolutionary manner while the data makes more sense from a catastrophic model with a much shorter time frame. Other methods of dating the earth have similar pitfalls. Please see the literature mentioned below this editorial for more examples. (Also see the discussion in Carl F. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* 6.214-228 in which he notes the limitations of science.)

In conclusion

Science as a discipline is not equipped to deal with origins and scientists have acknowledged this. However, speculations of an earth billions of years old has become viewed as undisputed truth by many. Popular magazines such as the *National Geographic* promote evolution and an old earth as if these are proven facts.

The only witness to the creation of this world and universe is the Lord our God. His Word is true and we do well to take into account what it says, also when we study science. The Scriptures must inform our presuppositions and mould our thinking. They will then enable us to critically examine the basis for theories that are in conflict with the divine Word.

For further reading:

Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1.1-2.4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (1997); John Byl, *God and Cosmos* (2001); and Don DeYoung, *Thousands not Billions: Challenging an Icon of Evolution, Questioning the Age of the Earth* (2005). 



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MATTHEW 13:52

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”

Deuteronomy 29:29

Sometimes we think about the people who don't know the Lord. What would it be like, not having true faith, not knowing Christ? We can't imagine it, yet so many are "without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). When we reflect on this, we should be filled with compassion and eager to spread the Word. It should also make us deeply grateful for what we know.

We know God, because God has revealed Himself to us so abundantly. And yet He hasn't told us everything – secrets remain. In the words of our text: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29).

Moses says this with Israel standing on Canaan's doorstep. The Lord had delivered them from Egypt, had endured their constant rebellion, and had disciplined them with that time of wandering. Now, finally, they're about to cross the Jordan.

And at this occasion, the Israelites must consider what God has revealed to them over the years (vv. 2-3). First was God's miraculous power, redeeming them from slavery. Then was God's faithful guidance, ushering them to this place. And God's great patience, sticking with sinful Israel so long. There was also God's provision, in clothing, food, and water – all those years in the wilderness. And don't forget God's latest triumphs over Sihon and Og. These weren't

irrelevant tales from distant history. This is how God had revealed Himself!

Instead of getting anxious the next time they faced an enemy, or complaining the next time food was running low, or turning to false security when they felt afraid, they needed to remember. What has this God shown about Himself? For those with eyes to see, that reassuring hand was always there, extended from heaven and resting on his children.

And our eyes too must be opened. How has the Lord always taken care of this world, his church, and our own lives? To really know God, this act of recalling is vital. We look back and we see that unwavering pattern of God's faithfulness to us in Christ.

But besides remembering history, God would have us reading Scripture. These are the "things revealed" that speak most loudly, most clearly. Moses says, "The things revealed belong to us. . . that we may follow all the words of this law" (29:29).

"This is what we have," Moses says to the people, holding up God's commandments. "This is your GPS as you navigate the Promised Land. This is the lamp to your feet: God's Word. He's told us the terms of the covenant, what He will do, and what we must do." So it remains for us, who have received the full Scriptures. We have God's Word, able to instruct and equip us in every good thing.

Yet there remains "classified" information. Across some parts

of God's will, it's as if a curtain has been pulled – things we're not allowed to know. For example, as the people of Israel stood outside Canaan, their thoughts turned to the coming years. Just what did the Lord have in store for them? How were things going to turn out, once they crossed the Jordan? Would there be endless war and tribulation in the land? Untold prosperity and increase? This was the future, hidden in God's counsel. These were the "secret things."

But the point is, God's people have to embrace what we know. We can build confidently on what's been revealed. Moses says to Israel, "If in that land you keep the law, if you walk daily with the Lord and put your trust in Him, there's no secret about what'll happen: you'll be richly blessed! You can count on it: God will be with you always."

As pilgrims and wanderers, we too look ahead. There's still so much about tomorrow, and next month, and next year that we do not know. There's so much of life's pathway that's undisclosed, hidden from our view. Yet we can say it with Moses, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God" (v 29).

That's an immensely comforting thing to confess: they *belong* to God. It's not as if He doesn't know. It's not as if the future is out of his hands. No, this is a knowledge that's completely his! He has seen behind the curtain and He's directing it all. We gladly leave the secret things to our God, because He's revealed that we can trust Him always.





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Facebooking Before God's Face

There seems little doubt about it: Facebook is here to stay. Like cell phones, emailing, texting, and twittering, Facebook is part of a new social networking reality. This of course is not news for the well-connected, but for those just getting accustomed to cell phones and email, Facebook may catch you off guard. In the first quarter of 2009 alone, five million people joined Facebook every week! By March of that year there were over 200 million users with no sign of things slowing down.¹ You don't have to go far to find church members who are among those millions. It includes teenagers, adults, parents and even grand-parents.

What is Facebook? Think of it as a massive meeting place on the Internet (www.facebook.com). Individuals set up a Facebook identity (for free!) and announce their arrival simply by signing up. Just as in person, certain parts of your profile are public and other parts you may keep private. You give permission for "friends" to view your private stuff, things like pictures, videos, updates or personal musings. You can then become "friends" with other people and view their stuff. People can find you and ask to be your "friend" to which you have the freedom to say "yes" or "no."

The attraction of Facebook is not hard to see. It gives you a chance to communicate with distant friends and close friends all at once. You can let everyone know what is happening in your life in one posting to your "wall" (think of it as your personal bulletin board). You, in turn, can keep track of developments in the lives of others. Facebook gives opportunity to reconnect with old friends, long lost relatives, and long-forgotten acquaintances from all over the world. As Facebook attracts more users, the opportunity for more connections with friends old and new grows.

Relating in a Christian way

As with most technology, Facebook is neither good nor bad in itself. Rather, its value depends on how you use it. Further, Internet relationships are not

necessarily "fake" while in-person relationships are the "real" thing. You can be a hypocrite in both spheres easily enough and you can be genuine in both too. Facebook simply provides another location and means to carry on relationships and experience a form of community. The challenge we face is in adapting to this technology in a Christian way. Much as we are called to conduct face-to-face relationships in a God-pleasing manner, so we must also Facebook before the face of God.

One-stringed guitar

One of the key challenges of relating to others on Facebook is understanding what it *doesn't* offer: in-the-flesh communion. It has less dimensions to it than person-to-person. You can't look into the person's eyes, give a handshake or a hug. You can't see the expressions on his face or hear the tone of her voice. You miss her laugh or sigh, his wink and smile. It is largely a relationship conducted brain-to-brain, through the means of the computer. As someone recently wrote, it is like trying to play the guitar with one string. "You can make music; it's just not as interesting or as good on a guitar with six strings."²

That doesn't mean Facebook relations are useless or meaningless. They're just not full-orbed. You can't get to know a person's total personality unless you spend time together face-to-face and live life in the same space for a time. For that reason, Facebook can be a great tool to renew old friendships or carry-on current ones, but it is very risky to begin new relationships. Without a history of shared experiences and in-person dialogue, you will never really know the person you think is your friend on-line. You don't have to search far to find people stung by relationships begun on-line only to discover later (and often at some cost) that the friend was totally different in person. Be careful who you let in as your friend.

Who's a friend?

Friendship itself is at risk of being redefined on Facebook in an unbiblical way. Suddenly your parents or children are let in as "friends" or people who are in authority over you (e.g. teachers, elders, bosses). There is no other category to connect through so all relationships are levelled to that of "friendship." Of course, friendship is a beautiful thing, but is your Dad really your "friend?" Certainly not in the same way that your classmate or peer or co-worker is your friend. So we should be careful on how we think about the concept of "friends" and be sure in our postings and emails that we give respect and honour where it is due (Rom 13:7 and Eph 6:2).

The attraction of Facebook is not hard to see

Even more concerning is the tendency to "one-way" friendship that Facebook offers. In that forum it is easy to let friends in and easy to be a friend to someone. It's not uncommon to have over a hundred "friends" and sometimes many more. There is no obligation. There is no expectation from you. This makes it easy to cave in to our natural tendency toward self-centredness. You post things for people to read or see what kind of reaction you'll get from the group. Meanwhile, you are free to catch glimpses of the happenings in the lives of your friends without needing to get involved. It is easy to become a friendship "voyeur" – always looking on but rarely if ever participating in a two-way relationship of care and concern.

True friendship

Friendship, we know, involves these things. Real friendship requires not only sharing ourselves but giving love to others in actions as well as words. The Bible says that a friend is one who sticks closer than a brother (Prov 18:24). Friendship involves loving your neighbour as yourself, looking out for the interests of others (Phil 2:4). In your Facebooking, resolve to be a genuine friend. Don't just post about yourself but also inquire of your friends. Pray for them, take some responsibility for their well-being.

Perhaps you cannot do this with every contact called a "friend" but for those you really consider a friend, show that you care with a two-relationship

of words and deeds. Wherever possible, meet with them in person from time to time. Consider limiting your friends to persons you can actually maintain a genuine two-way relationship of care with. Facebook friendship can be a wonderful complement to in-person friendships but it cannot be a replacement.

The real you

Hypocrisy is quite possible person-to-person but it's even more of a risk in on-line relationships. When you create your profile or put up photos it is easy to cherry-pick information. It can be out rightly false or partly false. It may even all be true but incomplete, presenting a much rosier picture of your life than it really is. More than in-person, we are able to control and manipulate our Facebook personalities and make people think a certain way about us that simply isn't true – for example, that we are successful, humorous, have lots of friends, popular, intellectual, emotional, sensitive, or whatever. A person's life can be filled with problems but not a word of it gets on to their Facebook profile.

Consider limiting your friends to persons you can actually maintain a genuine two-way relationship of care with

As we should be in person, let us equally be on-line – genuine and true. The Lord hates deceit and hypocrisy. Those things belong to the devil who is the father of lies (John 8:44). If we put up a show for people and an act for their benefit, not only are we in danger of God's judgment but it brings no benefit to our friendships. People can't help us if they don't know we struggle or have issues. People can't really know us either if we are pretending to be something we're not (e.g. humorous, intellectual, successful). I'm not saying you should air your dirty laundry to everyone, but your friendship profile should be an accurate reflection of who God has made you to be. And with certain close friends you should endeavour to both share in their struggles and let them share in yours.

Electronic slavery

Facebook shares a danger with those other forms of electronic communication, namely that we are always



partly "on-line" even when we are not connected. We put cell-phones on our hips and Black Berrys in our palms and lap-tops anywhere in the house, all with communication access. If that cell phone rings, we answer it – it doesn't matter if we're in the middle of a person-to-person conversation! We will interrupt whatever we're doing to check email, take a call or a text, or take a peek at Facebook because our mind is always eager to see what the "latest" is.

Your friendship profile should be an accurate reflection of who God has made you to be

The technology which opens the world to us can also make us a slave to the world. The on-line community is always calling for our attention, always demanding our interest, and we are easily sucked into it. It's not uncommon to hear of people addicted to checking email or Facebook. If they are somewhere without access for a few days, they exhibit symptoms of withdrawal. Before we know it, instead of mastering the technology we find that it has mastered us.

Finding balance

As Christians, we should let nothing be our master except Christ alone (Gal 5:1). Facebook can be a *part* of our day but it should not *rule* our day. A good way to help keep Facebook use in balance is to limit the number of times you check it each day and limit the time you spend on it. For example, allow yourself to check it twice a day for a 15 minute period each time. Consider giving it a rest for a day (why not on the Lord's

Day?) and focus on other things. Also, get the message across to yourself that Facebook is not "everything" by putting a priority on other things. For instance, don't check Facebook till mid-morning or even after lunch (or after school), until some chores and other obligations have been completed. Give yourself space at the beginning and end of the day to commune with God. Let not the last thing you think about when you go to sleep be Facebook but the "Good Book."

To see whether Facebook is out of proportion in your life, stop yourself in the middle of using it and ask, "How is this making me feel? Am I getting anxious? Am I second-guessing myself? Am I nervous? Thrilled? Excited? Is Facebook influencing me too much? Do I seek friendship more through the computer than in real life? Am I neglecting relationships with people physically close to me in order to enjoy the friendships I have on-line?" These questions can help us analyze whether our Facebooking is healthy or not. If Facebook has become too dominant a force in your life and you can't imagine living without it, consider taking a "Facebook Fast" for a whole month. That disconnection can help you put things in perspective again.

Before the face of God

It is tempting to think of Facebooking as something we do in our own little world. On Facebook, we control the environment, the persons who are in it and how we relate to them. But let's remember that all we do is done before the face of God. The one face we must always think of when we post or profile is the face of our Saviour who died to restore us to communion with Himself and with each other in God's covenant of love. Then our friendships will be true and honourable and God will be pleased.

Speaking of friendship, next time I hope to write about something called, "Friends with Benefits."

(Endnotes)

¹ Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook* (Colorado Springs, David C. Cook, 2009) p.50. This article is indebted to Mr. Rice for some of its analysis.

² Shane Higgs as quoted in *ibid*, p.167.



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Fighting the “Contraceptive Mentality”

In October 2009, the BBC News on the Internet ran an interesting article about the so-called “Quiverfull movement.” This movement derives its name from Psalm 127:3-5, where many children are metaphorically referred to as a quiver full of arrows. This loose, decentralized movement was sparked mostly through the 1985 publication of Mary Pride’s book *The Way Home: Beyond Feminism, Back to Reality*. In this book, Mary Pride described her journey to conservative evangelical Christianity in 1977 and to her discovery of happiness surrounding what she said was the biblically mandated role of wives and mothers as bearers of children and workers in the home under the authority of a husband. As the basis for her arguments, Pride selected numerous Bible verses to lay out what she felt was the biblical role of women. These included verses she saw as containing her ideas of childbearing and non-usage of birth control, which she argued were opposed to what she called “the feminist agenda.” Pride’s explanations became the general basis of the Quiverfull movement. The movement has gathered momentum throughout the 1990s and gained adherents in various churches and groups, notably Reformed churches and homeschooling groups. Quite a few books have been published promoting the tenets of the movement, such as *A Full Quiver* by well-known Christian authors Rick and Jan Hess, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* by Nancy Campbell, and *The Bible and Birth Control* by Charles D. Provan. There are numerous Internet sites which advocate for the movement too, the most obvious one being www.quiverfull.com. The movement also has its critics and there are books and websites which purport to show its evils. The most recent critical publication is *Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement*, by Kathryn Joyce (2009).

The BBC article was written by the BBC’s religious affairs correspondent Robert Pigott. He went to Illinois to meet some Quiverfull families. He writes about his experiences as follows:

Rev. James McDonald has 10 children, aged between four and 26 – an extraordinary fertility

motivated by obedience to the Bible. “We believe that they are blessings... to be raised up in the worship of the Lord and they will be used by him in whatever way God will call them, to fulfill the Great Commission which we find in Matthew Chapter 28,” he said. The “Great Commission” – the duty to spread the Christian message throughout the world – is among a number of challenges Mr. McDonald sees facing his family. Among others, he cites divorce, adultery, abortion and Internet pornography. “The societal ills that we have, the challenges we have. . . we have rampant disease and bankrupt health systems because we don’t know the truth of the Bible. But as these truths are lived out in the lives of God’s people, society changes,” he said.

The McDonalds are being joined in the battle by a growing number of very large traditionalist Christian families equally committed to promoting Biblical values. When the Sanfords came to lunch, it was to celebrate the departure overseas of Garrison, one of their 13 offspring, to serve with the US marines. They say his Christian example has already led his comrades to behave better. When Garrison and the rest of his family drew up in a 15-seat minibus to be greeted by the McDonalds, a crowd was instantly created on the gravel outside the McDonalds’ house.

The Sanfords – who have no television at home, and who all join in the household chores – give an impression of moderation and discipline. The siblings address their father as “sir,” and their esprit de corps is enhanced by wearing similar clothes.

Quiverfull families tend to believe in male headship – the principle, also derived from the Bible, that men should lead households. Feminists are perhaps the fiercest critics of the budding Quiverfull movement. They accuse it of trying to undo the equality and freedom won for women over decades of struggle, and claim that the idea of automatic male leadership is anachronistic.

But Robert Sanford sees his approach to family life both as authentically Christian, and as the best training for children to take on what he sees as the moral decay afflicting American society.

"I think we should as Christians lead in that way, and we can teach that character and teach those morals," he said. "To me the Bible is the best way of doing it. In my estimation, the Bible is the only way of doing it."

At Providence Church in Morton, Illinois, the Sanfords occupy two full pews, uniformly dressed in black shirts and beige trousers or skirts. There are several very large families here, their 15-seat mini-vans scattered across the car park. James McDonald, the pastor here, uses the service to baptize a boy, immersing him bodily in a bath-type pool set up on the raised floor at the front of the church. The boy's parents watch and wrap a towel around him as he emerges. Pastor McDonald looks out on a sea of children, mostly conservatively dressed, many of the girls with their hair covered. But, given what he sees in other churches, he is not complacent about their numbers. "In denomination after denomination their children are leaving in mass exodus, and this is a major, major problem especially when most families only have two or three children," he said. "Who's going to fill those pews in the next generation?" There is a wider concern too that going beyond the United States to traditionally Christian regions such as Europe, Christianity seems to be dying out.

Simply filling the world with white Christians is not what motivated either the Sanfords or the McDonalds – for them having large families was a matter of faith. The Sanfords have adopted children from around the world. But many of the traditionalist Christians who make up the Quiverfull movement are perplexed by the low birth rate of their co-religionists.

Allan Carlson favours larger families of any background, even though he says he is, as he puts it, a "radical secularist." Dr. Carlson heads the Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society in Rockford, Illinois, a research group arguing that a shortage of children threatens the world economy. He says many Quiverfull families want to undermine what they regard as a "contraceptive mentality" in the West. "The historic Christian view, Protestant and Catholic, prior to 1930, was that both contraception and abortion were incompatible with Christian faith," he said. "We're starting to see some sense among conservative Protestants in America that that was the correct view, and I think that plays into the movement for larger families."

Many of those families are linked into the wider population of traditionalist Christians by the home-schooling movement, by which it is estimated that more than two million American children are taught at home. They share concerns particularly about "life" issues – such as abortion and stem-cell research, but about promoting other traditionalist Christian values too, in areas such as marriage. Mr. Carlson – who advocates a reversal of the industrial revolution and a return to home-based businesses centred on the family – says there is a strategic motivation behind the Quiverfull movement. "There is a sense in which these intentionally created large families are seeing themselves as the. . . foundation of a counter-culture, which could grow, and should grow," he said.

This counter-culture is still small, in the thousands or tens of thousands perhaps, but it does seem to be emerging as a determined force. Quiverfull families insist that the government cannot fix America's problems, but that their children could.

What to think of a movement like this? I'm afraid that in my opinion this movement has a serious negative side. From my reading about "Quiverfullers," it appears to be a kind of Puritan movement which tends to legalism and pressure to conform to certain codes of behaviour and dress in families, based on a literalistic reading of the Bible. In that regard I also question whether the concept of male headship among many Quiverfull families truly reflects the biblical description of headship. It seems to tend more to patriarchal authoritarian headship than the loving and sacrificial headship of Ephesians 5:25-29. I also fear that the emphasis on the insular family as also reflected in inclination to homeschooling in these large families takes away from the importance of the church and the communion of saints.

On the other hand, there is also something positive to say about the Quiverfull movement. The Lord wants his church to grow in particular also through the birth of covenant children, and there is no doubt that that should be encouraged. When talking to couples before marriage and they tell me that they want to delay having children and then only two or possibly three, I get uncomfortable. For one thing, they talk as if they have everything in their control, for what if God decides not to give them any children at all? And when they talk about two, maybe three children, I wonder if they haven't placed their own pleasure above seeking God's kingdom. We need to watch out that we don't get caught up in the "contraceptive mentality" of the world which lives without God, a mentality promoted in large part by the feminist movement. That's what we can learn from the Quiverfull movement.





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Canticles

The Desert and the Flower

This song is a versification of Isaiah 35. In this chapter, nature is personified. All of creation joins in exultation to praise the Lord for his work in redeeming his chosen people. God is the redeemer of all of life: the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap like a deer.

Those who know the Psalter will recognize that many of the themes and motifs of Isaiah 35 are also found in Psalms 65 and 72. The tune for this new song seemed inevitable.

The Desert and the Flower

1. The des-ert and the bar-ren coun-try
 with glad-ness will re-joice.
 The wil-der-ness, so dry and dust-y,
 will raise a cheer-ful voice.
 As cro-cus-es burst forth in flow-er,
 as ros-es bloom and bud,
 our land will see the LORD'S great splen-dour,
 the glo-ry of our God.

2. Like Lebanon's majestic cedars
 so will our forests grow.
 As Sharon's roses, lush and glorious,
 thus will our flowers show.
 Our pastures will be rich and verdant
 like Carmel's mountain fields.
 The land will flourish and be fragrant
 as it brings forth great yields.



Quiet Time, Anyone?

Renaë Witten

Think about the most important relationship in your life. Your boyfriend? Girlfriend? Friends? A family member? Hard to pick? I hope not. Remember, Jesus said, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:37). The most important relationship each of us has in our lives is our relationship with God. The first and greatest commandment says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind" (Matt 22:37). How very personal and how very overwhelming!

How can I love God? By nature I am inclined to hate God and I sure understand where the Heidelberg Catechism was coming from when that was written in Lord's Day 2. How often doesn't a boyfriend/girlfriend, friend, sibling, or parent become more important to each of us than God Himself? Praise be to God who provides us with sufficient means to love Him daily. He has given us his Word and Spirit so that we can grow in our love and devotion to Him.

Which brings me to "quiet time." You may not have heard of this term, but I'm sure you know the idea behind it. The primary objective of a daily quiet time is to develop the most important relationship in your life: you with your God. A daily quiet time is a time that you set apart every day to spend time in God's Word, meditate on it, and spend time in prayer to God.

Quiet time is *necessary* for Christians. It isn't optional. We cannot expect to grow in our devotion to God and to walk obediently before Him if we do not actively pursue our relationship with God every day. Each day we need to prepare our hearts to listen to God's Word and search ourselves so that, in dependence on the strength of the Holy Spirit, we are equipped to work hard to bring glory to God with our lives.

Aim to give God the best part of your day in quiet time. Satan and our own weak flesh will convince us that in the morning we are too sleepy, during the day we are too busy, and at night we are too tired.¹ If you are thinking it is all sounding a bit demanding, just remember the Israelites in the Old Testament and how they had to give God the unblemished animals for their sacrifices and the first fruits of their produce. God is a holy God and demands and deserves our best.

So what aspects make up quiet time? There is no single answer or formula for quiet time; each person needs to consider this for themselves, but here are some ideas:

- *Begin by looking up a text in the Bible that describes God's awesome power, holiness, or majesty. Read it over a few times and praise God for what you read there.* This prepares your heart and mind to focus on your relationship to God. An example of a text that a friend shared with me is the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 8, "O Lord, our Lord how majestic is your name in all the earth."
- *Each day, take a chapter or two of a Bible book to read over a few times and pray to God about what you have read.* This is an aspect of having communion with God. Listen to God's Word, turn it over in your mind, and prayerfully respond to God.
- *Memorize the main thoughts of the chapter so that you can reflect on them later during the day.* This gives you an opportunity to "get even more" out of your quiet time with God. This will also help you to retain the words and lessons given in God's Word. Memorizing God's Word equips us to fight sin. We need to be armed with the Word of God all day every day, so that the Holy Spirit can be working through us, giving us the strength to put our sins to death.

- *Ask yourself what these pages of God's Word reveal to you about God and his redemptive work in Jesus Christ.* Remember that you are studying God's Word to learn more about your covenant God, that you may be more and more devoted to loving and obeying Him.
- *In prayer, humbly confess your dependence on the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, and express your need for Christ's saving work.* While we understand that we are completely responsible for our lives before God, we must always keep in mind that we can do nothing without the Holy Spirit. We can confess our dependence on the Holy Spirit through prayer.
- *In prayer, lay your requests and petitions before God.* Bringing our needs and petitions to God after

we praised his holy name and contemplated who He is prevents us from rushing into his presence casually and demandingly.²

This may sound daunting, but remember that God gives his grace and Holy Spirit to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them (LD 45, Q&A 116). So pray for the strength you need to grow in your relationship with your God and commit yourself to a daily quiet time.

¹ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978), 98.

² Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1983), 52.



Press Release of Classis Contracta for Classis Pacific West, held December 14, 2009, in Houston, BC

1. On behalf of the convening church Houston, BC, Rev. Hendrik Alkema opened the meeting with reading of Romans 10, invited delegates to sing from Hymn 29:1, 2, and then led in prayer.
2. The credentials from the delegates were examined by the delegates from Smithers. From Houston CanRC, the consistory delegated Rev. Hendrik Alkema and Elder Henry Dykstra. From Smithers CanRC, the council delegated Pastor James Slaa and Elder Ed Wierenga. The credentials were found to be in order.
3. Classis was declared constituted.
4. The consensus was that the chairman would be Rev. Hendrik Alkema and the clerk would be Pastor James Slaa.
5. After a few changes to the provisional agenda, the agenda was adopted.
6. Correspondence:
 - a. Request from Maranatha CanRC of Surrey, BC to approbate the call extended to Rev. T. VanRaalte.
 - b. Documents required from Maranatha CanRC of Surrey, BC.
 1. Letter of Call to Rev. VanRaalte, dated October 4, 2009, complete with the Provisions for the Minister and his family.
 2. The Acceptance of the Letter of Call, dated October 24, 2009.
3. Notice that December 1, 2009 at 12:00 AM PST was the agreed upon date and time for the transfer of responsibility for Rev. VanRaalte and his family.
4. Certificate of Release and Ecclesiastical Attestation from the Consistory with the Deacons of the Redeemer CanRC of Winnipeg, MB, dated November 12, 2009.
5. Certificate of Release from Classis Contracta Manitoba of December 4, 2009.
6. A letter from Maranatha Surrey indicating that the congregation was fully involved in the calling process and that proper announcements were made.
7. Since it was determined that all the required documents were in order, Classis approved the call.
8. The Church of Cloverdale was appointed to represent Classis at the installation or welcome evening of Rev. T. VanRaalte, set for December 20, 2009, D.V. and January, 2010, D.V. respectively.
9. Personal Question Period was held.
10. The Chairman ruled that Censure Art. 34 of the C.O. was not necessary.
11. The Acts and Press Release were adopted.
12. Rev. Alkema gave thanks in prayer and closed the meeting.

*For Classis Pacific West,
December 14, 2009
Pastor James Slaa (clerk, at that time)*



A New Pastor for Langley!

Thanksgiving is a time of year to reflect on all of the blessings received in the past year, gather with family and friends, and enjoy the autumn colours. In Langley, BC we were especially grateful to witness the ordination of our new co-pastor, Rev. Ryan deJonge.

Ordination

After successfully passing his classis exam, Ryan deJonge was ordained as a Minister of the Word during the morning service of October 11, 2009. Langley's other pastor, Rev. J. Visscher, reminded the congregation that the precious gift of a pastor was also well known to the apostle Paul. In 2 Timothy 4, Paul gave Timothy the charge to "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction ... keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry." Pastor deJonge's main task as a Herald of the Truth will need to include times of correction, of rebuke, and of encouragement. This full-time charge – in season and out of season – will require a boat load of patience and will need to be done with careful instruction. Pastor deJonge was encouraged to keep his head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, and to discharge all the duties



of his ministry as a co-pastor here in Langley. He was reminded that all of this is possible as it will be done in the "presence of God and of Christ Jesus."

After reading the form for the Ordination of Ministers of the Word, and hearing Br. deJonge answer "I do" to the questions asked, Rev. Visscher and a number of the elders laid their hands on the new co-pastor and he was officially ordained.

Inaugural service

In the afternoon service Rev. Ryan deJonge used 1 Peter 1: 22-25 as the text for his inaugural sermon. Peter's readers faced struggles, troubles, and hardships but were told to respond to this with love, a love that comes from God. We were reminded that we have been called out of our old life, that we have been purified by obeying the truth, that we have been born again through the living and enduring word of God. Now that we have been purified by the Word we need to love one another deeply, from the heart. This love will come to us by the preaching of the Word. We will be evangelized by the Word – the same Word that brought about the great reformation that brought the gospel to this continent, and is now spreading all over the world.



Welcome!

On Sunday, October 25 the congregation met in the evening to officially welcome the deJonge family. The evening began with the reading of 1 Thessalonians 5 and the singing of Psalm 21. The Masters of Ceremony for the evening were Burke Vanderhorst and Colin VanDelft.

Tako VanPopta led us through a look back at the history of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church. Keith and Jan Broersma presented the deJonges with a book of area attractions and, of course, a coupon book to keep the costs down. We were then led in singing by the Praise and Worship Team, after which our MCs entertained us with a skit using many hockey analogies including discussion on a salary cap that is preventing us from calling a third pastor.

Letters were read from the churches at Smithers, Brampton, and Rev. Wes Bredenhof, all of them wishing Rev. deJonge the strength and wisdom he will need to fulfill his new calling. Local church representatives also spoke briefly. Br. Simon Faber spoke on behalf of the church at Surrey. He gave us a little of the history of the first churches in the Fraser Valley. Rev. Souman spoke on behalf of Willoughby, Rev. Lodder for Cloverdale, and Rev. Schouten for Aldergrove. Rev. Schouten playfully recounted the time he was flying to Vancouver with a stopover in Calgary. The police entered the plane and escorted a tall man and not-so-tall woman and their small child (the deJonge family) off of the plane. Eventually they returned and again took their seats as if nothing had happened. (They had actually been questioned about the need to have a pair of vice-grip pliers in their carry-on luggage.) Humorous, indeed!



The Gems and Cadets had the pastor and his wife Ruth try match up a number of fathers with their sons and mothers with their daughters. They managed to match all of the fathers and sons but only one of the daughters was matched with her mother. The others were not sure if they should exit with their new mothers or... The Young Peoples entertained us by making rain so that the deJonges would not be startled by the sound that they will be hearing every now and then during the fall and winter. They also sang for us.

A PowerPoint of the random thought of a variety of members was presented. Rev. Visscher was thinking that "He will want to preach just like me." Rev. Dong was apparently thinking that the new pastor's task is not difficult; try preaching in Chinese! During video presentation of words of welcome from the members living at Manoah Manor, pastor deJonge had a difficult time writing names of all who were expecting visits. The Laudate Choir sang a song based on words found in the form for ordination: "How beautiful are the feet of him who brings good tidings!" They also sang "The Lord is my Shepherd." The Committee of Administration presented pastor deJonge with the keys to the church building. They were also told that the C of A does not intend to mow the lawn for the deJonges, so they were given a lawn mower.

Rev. deJonge responded to the congregation by saying that after being in the congregation for five weeks it was nice to be finally welcomed. He expressed appreciation for the great reception they have received. Their hope is that the Lord will bless them in this congregation since they recognize that it is all done with strength from above.

Rev. Visscher spoke words of welcome to Rev. deJonge and his family and wished them God's help as we work towards the common goal of the promise of salvation. It was a beautiful conclusion to a very special day. Praise to our Lord in heaven for his mercy and goodness!



Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Manoah Manor

The day of the twenty-fifth anniversary party of Manoah Manor was very similar to the one of the grand opening – wet, windy, and blustery. But today, as the day progressed, the weather improved. We were warmly welcomed to an open house in the afternoon by the residents and the volunteers of Manoah Manor and were treated to coffee and cake. Some major renovations had occurred resulting in some very attractive suites. Some of the older, smaller suites had been joined and completely renovated into double-sized suites. The residents of these new suites allowed us to view them which we did with great admiration.

The official program was held that evening in the Langley Canadian Reformed Church building. The MC for the evening was Br. Wim Kanis. Br. Peter Van Seters, the chairman of the Board, was given the floor to open the meeting. We sang Psalm 84:2, 6 led by Br. Ari Jansen on the wonderful new Casavant organ. After a few words of welcome, he gave the floor to Rev. W.W.J. VanOene, who spoke of God's goodness over the years. Even though the doors of Manoah Manor opened on October 27, 1984, it had been in the planning stages for many years. In 1965 several people saw a need for a home for their generation for when they would reach retirement years. They had looked after the immediate need of building churches and schools and now were looking into the future. A committee was formed to try and set something in motion. The initial plan was to build a rest home, but there would be too much government involvement, so the decision was to start with a retirement home. On September 11, 1967 the first board was elected and consisted of the Revs. W.W.J. VanOene, J.T. van Popta, and Brs. D. Teitsma, P. Van Egmond, A.W. De Leeuw. To find support within the church community was an uphill battle, but finally the doors opened on October 27, 1984.

On Monday evenings the residents all get together in the lounge and sing the Psalms and the old Dutch hymns with Br. Arie Jansen leading them on the organ.



They now treated us to three songs, many singing them from memory. A poignant moment.

Brs. Wim Kanis and Bob Horstman presented a power-point of life in Manoah Manor over the years. We saw photos of many who now live with the Lord, their faithful Saviour, but who also continue to live in our hearts here on earth.

Br. Harold Leyenhorst, the original builder, was given the floor to take us on a walk down memory lane. After much discussion, the final decision was to

buy a piece of property in downtown Langley within walking distance of shopping, doctor's offices, the library, etc. The original suites were built quite small in order to keep them affordable. The first residents were six widows and two couples. Mrs. J. Vriend, who was one of those first residents, just passed away recently. Mrs. Wendt is now the longest living resident of Manoah Manor and at age ninety-five is still living independently.

After singing Psalm 65:1, 2, 3 during which there was a collection for audio/visual equipment for the home, a past chairman, Br. Bill Vanderpol, was given the floor for some closing remarks and final prayer. He mentioned the unique character of the home. Here, under one roof, we can accommodate a couple where one needs an intermediate care setting and the other can still live independently as has happened. They do not need to be separated over two locales. Another unique thing about our home is its Christian home-like atmosphere. The residents get together for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, for Sinterklaas, for Canada Day, birthday parties, sing-a-longs, Bible study, Sunday church services on video for those who can't go to church, for coffee every morning, tea in the afternoons, games and puzzles in the evenings,



to name but some of the events. There is the annual bazaar and summer outings. Over the years the Lord has blessed Manoah Manor abundantly with hard-working Boards, faithful volunteers, and staff who desire to fulfill their God-given duties by taking such excellent care of the residents. To Him alone be the praise. C



Ray of Sunshine

Patricia Gelms and
Corinne Gelms

*"Cast your cares on the LORD and He will sustain you;
He will never let the righteous fall."
Psalm 55:22*

We have included a poem this month to encourage you in your walk before the Lord. When we look over the past year, we can see God's care for us. Psalm 55:22 tells us that the Lord will carry our burdens when we cast them on his shoulders. He will not let his children fall. We hope, as you celebrate your festive day, that you will be thankful for the care God has shown you during the past year. We wish you a great day celebrating with family and friends. Take a minute to consider how the Lord has sustained you in this past year and know that He will continue to care for you in your new year.

Casting My Care

Lord I continually set before you
My requests and all my needs
With thanksgiving I come unto you
My concerns unburdened to thee

I wait for your intervention Lord
In quietness of soul and mind
And worship at your footstool
Leaving my cares behind

And Lord I express my thanks for you
For all you are to me
I thank you Lord that I matter to you
Though at times I cannot see

Because of the circumstances in life
The things that I go through
I find my eyes are on the storm
When they should be looking to you

So help me Lord each precious day
No matter what life brings me
To carry on with hope and faith
And to rest in you with peace.

Birthdays in March

- 3 **TREVOR HOFKINK** will be 32
C106 8920 165th Street,
Edmonton, AB T5R 2R9
- 10 **JAMES BOONE** will be 14
20B Coral Reef Close, NE,
Calgary, AB T3J 3Y6
- 12 **GERRY EELHART** will be 48
C/O Mr. & Mrs. Peter Eelhart
#305, 10041-149 Street, Summit Village
Edmonton, AB T5P 4V7
- 14 **LISA ALKEMA** will be 29
6528 1st Line, RR 3,
Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 15 **JIM VANDERHEIDEN** will be 51
653 Broad Street West,
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 18 **ROSALYN KUIK** will be 36
68 Lynn Lake Drive,
Winnipeg, MB R2C 4N7

A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

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Wes Bredenhof



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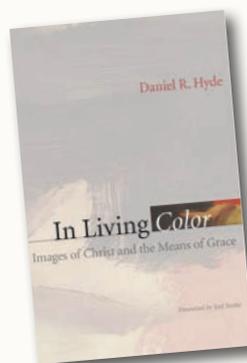
In Living Color: Images of Christ and the Means of Grace, Daniel R. Hyde, Grandville: Reformed Fellowship Inc., 2009

Additional Information: Paperback, 192 pages, \$13.00 USD.

It's fair to say that the lawfulness of pictures of Christ is virtually taken for granted in many Reformed communities. Especially when it comes to the teaching and discipling of children, almost everyone assumes that a story Bible with pictures (including pictures of the Lord Jesus) is a given. The status quo is that, while we would perhaps never dream of having pictures of the Son of God in our worship services, it is quite acceptable to have them elsewhere especially for educational or evangelistic purposes.

In this book, Daniel Hyde (United Reformed minister in Oceanside, California) challenges the status quo on images of Christ. He does so first of all using the Word of God, but he also brings in the witness of the Reformed confessions and church history. According to Hyde, images of Christ are not lawful and have no place in either our worship services or our daily lives. While God can certainly use crooked means to accomplish his purposes, his will is that we use *his* means in propagating the Christian faith, whether with our children or with adults.

In the introduction, the author gives the rationale for the book. It emerges from discussions with his parishioners about the evangelistic potential of Mel Gibson's 2004 movie, *The Passion of the Christ*. In the first chapter, Hyde surveys what the Scriptures teach about "Man's Media." Here he also helpfully interacts



with authors who argue for the use of images, such as Jeffrey J. Meyers. The Reformed confessions are also explicated on this point and Hyde concludes that their message is unanimous: "They forbid *all images of God*, whether they were intended for worship, education, or artistic expression" (86). In the two other chapters, Hyde makes the positive case for "God's Media": the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. He urges Reformed believers to learn contentment with the means of grace that God has appointed.

In Living Color is not long and it's written at a level which should be accessible to most readers. Speaking personally, I came to this book convinced of its position beforehand. Nevertheless, I do think that Hyde presents the best case against images of Christ that we've heard in a long time. This is an excellent book on a neglected subject and I recommend it highly. May it be a tool in God's hand to create a new status quo! C

