

Editorial

Once again another year is rapidly drawing to a close. It is but a mere handful of weeks until we can look forward to summer holidays, to some weeks of rest and recreation after another busy year. During our traditional summer holidays, we commemorate on the 25th of December the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Yes it is Christmas, that joyous and festive season in the year. In the world around us we see many preparations being made for Christmas. These preparations are very elaborate, after all it is a special event that is being celebrated.

But whilst the world is busy preparing itself for an event that has no meaning or significance in the rest of their lives, let us concentrate our thoughts on what Christmas is really about, and examine the way in which it affects our walk and conduct for not just one day but every day of the year.

The events leading up to Jesus' birth are somewhat special. First of all there is the aspect of His conception; He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. When Jesus was born, Joseph and Mary were not at their hometown of Nazareth, but rather in Bethlehem, because of the census that was being taken at the time. Jesus was born into the world in a stable, because there was no room in the inn. For a cradle Mary was forced to use a manger. that is a water or feeding trough for animals

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and His first clothes were swaddling cloths, that is strips of loose cloth that covered Him.

When looking at the overall picture of Jesus' birth we recognise that it is steeped in humbleness and lowliness. First of all there is the surroundings where He was born. He was born in a stable, laid in a manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths. They were very different conditions than Mary would have desired, much different than we ourselves would ever choose. Second, we also know that Jesus' birth was the first step of humbling himself for our sake. He left the place where He was in Heaven to be with sinners on the earth. We confess that He was born, He suffered, He died and was buried. Jesus' humble birth sets the tone for what his whole life represented. Jesus' life was about humility, about doing the will of His Father, and it was motivated by love for His people.

The humbleness and lowliness of Jesus' birth is quite in contrast to the extravagant present giving, decorating, eating and drinking that is associated with Christmas culture today. Christmas Day is indeed special and worthy of celebration because Jesus was born into this world in order to suffer and die for sinners. But the culture of modern Christmas celebrations is so different to the humility and lowliness of Jesus' birth it is a wonder that it is still celebrated as Christmas. Further, the exemplary life of humility and submission that Jesus typified is so far out of sync with worldly thoughts on the way to conduct ourselves, that really it should not be surprising that Christmas celebrations have degenerated into the binge and gluttony sessions that they often are.

It is not unreasonable that those who wish to follow Jesus should also display behavioral traits that are like His. And the Bible calls us to do this as well. We read in 1 Peter 5:5, "*Yes all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility.*" Yes we need to be clothed in humility. This suggests that humility is not one of our natural characteristics; it is an action just like we clothe ourselves for work, for sport or for church. This command is similar language to what Paul uses when he says to clothe ourselves in the armour of God. Humility is an attitude that is produced when the magnitude of sin present in all of us is recognised and then balanced against the grace of God's forgiveness. Of course, it is impossible to apply this to Jesus, for He was

never guilty of sin, and He was the One that provided the forgiveness.

We do however find expressions of humility right throughout His life. It is evident on His compassion for the sick and the dying and even those who had died. It can be further seen in His mercy shown towards an adulteress woman. It can be seen in His love for His disciples, for Mary, Martha and Lazarus and for His own Mother. It is expressed in the attention He gave to Zaccheus in the Sycamore tree, and His patience whilst He taught both the crowds and His disciples. It is probably best expressed when He submitted to the will of His Father, and walked the difficult road to the cross, to suffer and die for those that He loved.

As followers of Jesus Christ we are to imitate the expressions of humility that He demonstrated. In fact the New Testament commands believers to demonstrate humility in tangible ways. In John 13:34, 35 we are commanded to *love one another* whilst Romans 15:7 urges us to *accept one another*. Elsewhere we are commanded to *care for one another* (1 Cor. 12:25), to *forbear one another* (Eph 4:1-3) and to *forgive one another* (Col 3:12, 13). Furthermore we read also to *be kind to one another* (Eph 4:31, 32), to *pray for one another* (James 5:16) and to *exhort one another* (Heb 3:12, 13). All these expressions of goodness towards each other demonstrate an attitude of humility, a spirit of humbleness. When we do these things for one another we emulate the love and humility Jesus displayed in His life. We also then are becoming submissive to each other as Peter commands.

This Christmas there will undoubtedly be many people having a merry time. But Santa Claus, Christmas presents, Christmas trees, indulgent family feasts, these do not provide lasting joy nor do they provide happiness for each day of the year. However the humble birth of our Saviour, as a major development in the grace of God toward sinful people, is indeed gospel for Christmas Day. All of us can stand only in that grace (1 Peter 5:12). May the humility that is evident in Jesus' birth, and practiced throughout His entire life, so clothe each and every one of us each day as we walk the path of life together.

Eric Terpstra

FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the last Contender for 2007.

The Lord bestows upon us many blessings. This year we have been allowed to publish 7 magazines, containing articles of various topics. This is not something we take for granted, in fact in our Contender meetings we regularly thank the Lord that He gives us opportunities to publish Christian literature especially aimed for the younger generation.

With Christmas only a few weeks away, this edition also gives some attention to celebrating this special day. Indeed also this event requires our response of reverent praise to Him, as Julian so aptly writes about in His article.

We know that in the last days, Satan intensifies his destroying work. This is obvious in the

ongoing creation / evolution debate. What a blessing to be able to listen to men who are convinced in the faith, and have the knowledge to be able to rebuff the incorrect teachings of evolutionists. To that end too, the aim of the articles you read in this magazine, are to further assist you in standing firm and convinced in your faith. We hope you have enjoyed them.

As editorial team, we would like to take this opportunity, to wish you an enjoyable festive season – Christmas and New year. We wish you all Gods protection over the holiday period as well, and the Lord willing we look forward to keep publishing again in 2008.

The Editors

CREATION / EVOLUTION THE CONTROVERSY

On Thursday the 25th October, a large crowd gathered at the Free Reformed Church of Southern River to hear a presentation from Dr Carl Wieland on the 'Creation/Evolution Controversy'. Dr Wieland is the Managing Director of Creation Ministries International (CMI) - Australia, and was the founding editor of Creation Magazine in 1978. An experienced and engaging speaker, Foundations in Genesis (FiG) and SPYSC were delighted to take up the opportunity to host Dr Wieland as part of his Perth tour.

Dr Wieland started by addressing the sadly popular attempts (in many 'Christian' circles) to reconcile evolutionary origins (millions of years, survival of fittest etc) with the Bible. However, a world 'created' by evolutionary mechanisms implies death and suffering in order to arrive at a world that God called

perfectly good, and implies death BEFORE the fall into sin.

Dr Wieland rightly pointed out that if we can't accept the first few chapters of the Bible, then we may as well throw our Bibles out, because these chapters are foundational to the rest of the Bible. For example, the basis of marriage (Mark 10:6-8) and the headship of man (1 Cor 11:8-9) are found in the first chapters of Genesis. Likewise, the sacrifice of Jesus as the true descendent of the one man, Adam, does not make sense if the first men gradually evolved from an ape-like creature.

Next Dr Wieland went on to address the issue of scientific facts and the role assumptions play in science. Contrary to popular belief, facts don't speak for themselves, especially

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when it comes to events that occurred in the past, which none of us observed. We tend to think that scientists only deal with proven facts – and certainly when it comes to the fact that chemical A + chemical B gives chemical C, then they are. But when we deal with historical or origins science, then all we can do is interpret what we observe based on some starting assumptions.

So, in the crucial issue of the origins of this world and the origins of life, there are no observable facts out there that tell us what happened and when. All we can do, is start with an assumption regarding the past, and then test that assumption against the observable evidence that exists in the present.

Creation Science starts with the assumption of the truth of the Bible – and then interprets the evidence in creation from that perspective. Note the order here - it starts with the Bible! We don't try to interpret the Bible through scientific theories. Our acceptance of the global flood is not based on first finding evidence of this flood. Rather we start with the Bible, and then look at creation through those Biblical 'glasses'.

For example, based on the Biblical account of the flood, we would expect to find millions of dead things (fossils), laid down by water, all over the earth (including the tops of the highest mountains). And what do we find? Millions of dead things, laid down by water, all over the earth. We expect to find carbon-14 in coal since we expect it only to be thousands of years old (not millions of years old as evolutionists suppose). And indeed we do find carbon-14 in coal, much to the surprise of evolutionists, who do not even consider testing for carbon-14 in coal (since it would not exist in something millions of years old).

When the evidence reinforces our starting assumptions, then we are encouraged, and our starting assumption is reinforced. Likewise, when the evidence overwhelmingly

contradicts the theory, then the theory must be adjusted. Frequently evolutionists are surprised by the latest findings (eg, the recent discovery of the importance of supposedly 'junk' DNA) and are forced to correct their theories accordingly. However, despite the inadequacies of the evolutionary theories, an evolutionist will never change the fundamental starting assumption, namely the insistence on a naturalistic (i.e. no God) explanation for all things. Dr Wieland quoted leading evolutionists who admit major problems and inconsistencies with evolutionary theory, but who yet maintain their faith (for that's what it is!) in naturalistic explanations.

Note that Creation scientists also adjust their theories in light of new evidence, but again, the fundamental starting point, the truth of the Bible, can never be adjusted.

But if the evidence supporting the Biblical worldview is so powerful, how come not everyone is a creationist? The answer we find in 2 Pet 3:5, "For this they wilfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water". And the same would apply to us, were it not for God's gracious work within us, opening our eyes and softening our hearts. Dr Wieland emphasised this point strongly – we cannot conclusively prove a 6-day creation and a global flood, and we cannot by weight of evidence make someone a Christian.

That brings us to another critical element of the talk – why should we care about all this? "I believe the Biblical account of Creation and the Flood based purely on what I read in the Bible – why then should I delve into all this science and hunt for physical evidence to support the Bible and refute evolution when I know they are wrong and I am right?"

There are a number of reasons why we must care about Creation Science including, at

least, the following two which Dr Wieland addressed:

Firstly, we are commanded in 1 Pet 3:15 to always be ready to give an answer to those that ask for a reason for the hope that is in us. Whilst our faith is a miraculous



work of the Spirit in our hearts, our faith is not a blind faith. Evidence in creation that confirms the truth of the Bible is one of the means by which we can provide a reason for the hope that is in us. And note that being able to provide this reason is not an option, it is a command!

Secondly, Creation Science plays a crucial role in modern evangelism. The average person you meet will not share your belief in the Bible. In fact, most have discarded the Bible altogether, based largely on the fact that they believe science has disproved the first chapters of the Bible; and if the Bible is wrong there, then why should the rest of the Bible be regarded as true? Consequently, before you can convince that person of the Biblical truths of sin, the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and the need for repentance; you will need to convince that person that the Bible is in fact a book of truth, that connects with everyday experience and that has not been disproved by science.

Having laid the foundation of what the Creation Science ministry is all about, Dr Wieland went on to show how everyday science confirms the Biblical account of a perfect creation, a young earth and a global flood;



whilst demonstrating the inconsistency between this same evidence and the evolutionary theories.

Dr Wieland addressed topics including adaptation, natural selection, dinosaurs, radiometric dating, the global flood, the ice age, and fossils – including images of stunning fossilised fish captured in the act of eating and giving birth, and of a baby dinosaur breaking out of its egg. In so doing, Dr

Wieland addressed many of the questions that we are likely to meet from our unbelieving neighbour/colleague, such as:

- Where did the waters of the flood come from, and where did they go? (interestingly enough, it is estimated that if the hills and valleys of this earth were completely flattened, the earth would be covered with a layer of water 2.7 km thick!)
- How did the dinosaurs fit on the ark?
- How come the Bible doesn't mention dinosaurs? Or does it in fact?
- Does adaptation and natural selection imply evolution (of the molecules-to-man type)?
- When was the ice age, for how long, and where's the evidence of it?
- Does radiometric dating prove that the world is millions of years old?

Not sure of the answers to these questions? Then its time to do some research. Ask one of those that attended on the evening (test how well they listened!). Alternatively, go the website (www.creationontheweb.com), and look under 'info' – particularly the

CREATION / EVOLUTION (CONTINUED)

'Frequently Asked Questions'. Whilst there, take out a subscription to Creation Magazine to keep you up to date on the latest developments. And if you want to learn a bit more, peruse the many books and DVD's available for purchase.

Finally, on the evening, the Creation Science group within our churches – *Foundations in Genesis* - was also introduced. The primary role of FiG is to better inform ourselves on topics related to Creation and Evolution. FiG aim to meet every 6 weeks or so, and a typical meeting involves watching a DVD followed by some discussion. Please note that there are NO qualifications required to attend these meetings – the whole point is to help each-



other understand the material. It is also never too late to start coming to the meetings, and likewise you are not compelled to attend every meeting – we'd encourage you just to come along whenever you can make it. If you would like to come to these meetings, please contact one of the following 'members' of FiG (Phil and Ruth DeVos, Adrian Hordyk, Amanda Kobes, Owen Mulder, Scott Pleiter, Tarren Reitsema, Emma Tomren).

FiG also hope to host more CMI meetings in the future – hope to see you there!

Owen Mulder

Sources:

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PRAISE THE LORD!!

"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Laud him all you peoples (Ps. 117)!"

The Bible is full of praises to God. The psalms speak endlessly about it and were created especially for that purpose. So why should we praise God anyway? What is the point? The reasons for praising God are countless. However perhaps it is important to first define what praise means. According to the Webster dictionary, praise means to glorify 'expressly by the attribution of perfections' and is synonymous with words such as adore, extol, magnify and laud.

So why praise God? Firstly the Lord is worthy to be praised. Consider the following bible verses. Psalm 96:4, "*Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.*" Psalm 145:3, "*Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no-one can fathom.*" 2 Samuel 22:4, "*I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise and I am saved from my enemies.*" Revelations 4:11 expands and give us some reasons as to why we should praise God. "*You are worthy, our LORD and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*"

The most important reason we should praise God, is for the gift of new life He has given us in Jesus Christ. When God created the first man, He didn't create an autonomous robot to sing praises to Him. If you forced someone to give you praise, would that really make you happy? No, therefore God created a man who could think; who could make decisions (even the wrong ones). Man had a choice to praise God above all other things by doing His will, but he chose otherwise. Through Adam we all share in original sin and therefore we all stand condemned to death. But in His judgement God also provided us with way out; a way in which we could again be accepted by God. Think about if you had big mortgage or loan and the deadline was drawing closer and you had no way to pay it. What if the bank cancelled the loan or a friend cancelled your loan? No more repayments. No more debt. How would you feel? What would you do? Surely you would praise that person and make compliments, perhaps even adore. That's what our heavenly Father has done. No questions asked. God is worthy of our praise.

Secondly praising God is beneficial for us. It's by praising God that we can focus on worshipping Him. By praising we are reminded of His love toward us and of the greatness of His power. Psalm 135 says, *"Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praise to His name, for that is pleasant."*

Another reason to praise God is because God works through it for His benefit. Think about Psalm 8, *"Out of the mouths of babes and infants You have ordained strength, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger."* God uses praise to defeat his enemies. Praising also moves God Himself as we can see in 2 Chronicles 5:13-14 when the ark was brought to the Temple of the Lord. We

read of 120 priests sounding trumpets while the Levites surrounded them with harps, stringed instruments and cymbals and *"indeed it came to pass when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music and praised the Lord, saying, 'For He is good for His mercy endures forever,' that the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."* So powerful was the praising of God that He was moved and came down to his people in the cloud at the dedication of the temple. According to Psalm 22:3 God inhabits the praises of his people.

So when should we praise God? David says in Psalm 34:1, *"I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth."* We are temples of the Holy Spirit and therefore in everything we do and everywhere we go we are to praise God. So if we are to praise God continually, how should we do it?

We are able to praise God in many ways. By doing God's will, we praise Him. Doing our daily work, working for our Father in heaven, glorifies Him. We can praise God by singing, dancing, clapping hands and the list goes on. We can praise God with our bodies, hearts, minds and deeds. No matter how you praise God, it should result in reverent awe and wonder for what He has done for us first.



*"Oh, praise the Lord all you Gentiles!
Laud Him, all you people!
For his merciful kindness is great towards us,
And the truth of the Lord endures forever.
Praise the Lord! (Psalm 117)*

Julian Slobe

THE GIFT

*A quiet night
A starry sky
A Father's love
A tiny cry*

*A perfect God
His fallen nation
A sacrifice
To cleanse creation*

*From robes of white
To linen cloth
The Saviour sent
To bear God's wrath*

*A helpless baby
God and man
Christ fulfilled
God's master plan*

*A heavenly present
From God above
His life for ours
A gift of love*

Heidi Muilenburg

PATIENT IN ADVERSITY, THANKFUL IN PROSPERITY?

*“And you shall remember
the LORD your God,
for it is He who
gives you power to get wealth...”
(Deuteronomy 8:18)*

It's a pattern I'm sure you're familiar with. As the all-important exam, job interview or medical procedure approaches your spiritual life suddenly 'picks up'. Prayers become longer, deeper, and more frequent. Bible passages, read in light of the impending make-or-break situation, take on new meaning. But once the results of the exam are in, the new job won, or the recovery complete an old, much less sincere pattern sets back in. In bed each night, a quick flit of the eyes over the day's verses (or were they yesterday's?) precedes an equally perfunctory prayer, which in turn is terminated not by a heartfelt "Amen" but by rapid entrance into the land of nod.

This cycle doesn't just apply to you and me as individuals; it applies equally to nations and churches. From the moment they left Egypt, Old Testament Israel continually rotated between being dependant on God during times of trial to being disobedient and forsaking God once the trial was over, only to be sent fresh hardship by God to turn Israel back to Him again. Are we really any different? Our forefathers depended on God's providence when they left post-war Europe to settle in Australia and establish churches and schools. But do we, as young people enjoying the fruits of

their hard work and an unprecedented period of peace and economic prosperity, remember to thank the God who gave us these blessings? What does it really mean to be thankful?

Basically, being thankful for the Lord's blessings means continuing to remember the Lord and serve Him faithfully. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses addresses the Israelites on this topic just before their entry into the Promised Land. Having reminded them that it was God who provided them with continual food and durable clothing throughout their forty years in the wilderness, Moses tells the Israelites: "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God *by not keeping His commandments...*" (Deut 6:11). Being thankful and keeping the Lord's commandments goes hand in hand.

Conversely, unthankfully forgetting the Lord inevitably results in serving other gods. This is implied by the warning in Deuteronomy 8:19: "... if you by any means forget the Lord your God, *and follow other gods*, and serve them... you shall surely perish." Israel's history confirms this pattern. When Old

PATIENT IN ADVERSITY, THANKFUL IN PROSPERITY? (CONTINUED)

Testament Israel time and again forsook the Lord they didn't just go from serving the Lord to becoming a neutral 'religion-free' nation. No, forsaking the Lord was always part and parcel of assimilating with the nations around them and worshipping their idols.

Thus it is no surprise to find that scripture teaches that times of material prosperity are also the times that we are in the gravest spiritual danger. In times of prosperity, when our livelihood seems secure, we are less likely to realise our material need for God as the provider of our daily bread. Like the Israelites of old, who soon associated the prosperity of the Promised Land with the blessing of the Canaanite gods, we also with equal ease often put our trust for material security in our own gods: our money, our possessions, our jobs, the economy or even ourselves.

But do material things really represent our greatest need for God? Did God take Israel out of oppressive Egypt only so that they could live happily ever after in the material richness of Canaan? Did God send His Son to earth to die on the cross only so that you and I might receive earthly blessings: food, clothing and a nice car? Hardly! Scripture teaches us that we have a far greater and much more urgent need, irrespective of our wealth or status. That need is the forgiveness of our sins! When we study God's Word we realise the depths to which we, and the whole human race, have fallen. And consequently, we also learn what a wonder it is that God, for no reason other than His good pleasure, chooses to save some of the fallen human race and adopt them as His children. Even if we should

take our material blessings for granted, our spiritual blessings at least should still make us deeply thankful.

If we are indeed thankful to God for both His spiritual and material blessings, how then should we show our thankfulness? In the same way that Israel had to: by continuing to serve God faithfully and not going after other gods! By being obedient to the Lord's commandments, not because we expect to earn our salvation but, as we read in Lord's Day 24, as "fruits of thankfulness" worked by the Holy Spirit. In this regard it is noteworthy that the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism did not place the Ten Commandments under the section about 'our sin and misery' or even under the section about 'our deliverance.' No, they are under the section detailing our thankfulness! Like the psalmist in Psalm 119:35 we too may ask God, "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it."

There is also a second way in which we show our thankfulness to God – prayer! God does not just communicate his rule of thankfulness down to us, but we – as part of that thankfulness – are also allowed to communicate with Him! In fact, Lord's Day 45 calls prayer the "*most important* part of the thankfulness which God requires of us." Lots more could be said about prayer, but in the context of being thankful for spiritual and material blessings let's remember that in prayer it is the spiritual that comes before the material. In the Lord's Prayer Christ certainly prayed for daily bread, but He did so after first asking God to hallow His Name, make His kingdom to come, and make His will be done.

Indeed, God gives us many blessings to be thankful for: religious freedom, faithful churches, Reformed schools, Bible study societies, study clubs, magazines, missions, and even sports associations within our communion of saints. Do we thank the Lord for these organisations and, remembering that being thankful means serving the Lord faithfully, do we make use of them and put time and energy into them? Or are we too busy feathering our nests; focussing on our cars, mp3 players, sports and houses? Why is it that after a drama performance we easily chat about the cast and plot, but after a church service we talk about house prices and cars or, if we do talk about the service, can only critique the minister's delivery style? How come we sometimes find it hard to discuss and analyse a chapter in Bible study club, but afterwards have no problem tipping who'll win footy? True, we don't always have to be talking about spiritual things all the time, but could we also be in the slow process of unthankfully forgetting about the Lord?

Yes, we have to admit that during times of prosperity – when in theory we have more time to pray and more things to be thankful for – in practice we tend to become more unfaithful in our lives as Christians. But since we are fighting a spiritual battle, let's never forget that the success of an army in wartime depends a great deal on how it has made use of the preceding time of peace. Did it use the time of peace wisely to recruit, train and practise, or did it waste the time of peace by hosting drunken parties and lazing around? Likewise, if we remain unthankful and unfaithful during times of prosperity, will we really be able to

depend on God when the going gets tough?

Being thankful to God for His blessings means nothing more than remaining faithful in serving Him. Scripture teaches that unthankfully forgetting God's blessings in the end only results in actively turning away from God. Let us therefore remember, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to show our thankfulness by striving to live holy and obedient lives and also by praying regularly and faithfully to God always, not just on the night before an exam! *“For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them... Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober...”* (1 Thessalonians 5:2-6).



Picture:
<http://www.uelcsa.org.za/cape/st%20Peters%20komga/church%20from%20the%20entrance.jpg>

Laurence VanderPlas