

# *Theodidaktos* Taught by God

Journal for EMC theology and education

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## **A Mennonite View of**



Also:

**Tell All the Truth,  
But Tell It Slant!** p. 7

**A Study on *Hope*,  
to *Hope*** p. 13

**'Hey, Is This For  
Me?'** p. 18

## Don't know him from Adam

In reading a *Christianity Today* article (June 2011), I was reminded of the debate over origins.

This conversation is not between Christians and evolutionists, but between Creationists and Theistic Evolutionists; this debate is within the Church itself.

At the heart of the discussion in this article was the search for the historical Adam and Eve: Was this a literal couple from which the whole population of the world derives its origin? Or were they a metaphor for a spiritual truth the Genesis writer wished to convey? If the latter is true, how does this affect our understanding of original sin?

Francis S. Collins, the Obama-appointed director of the National Institutes of Health, is an evangelical Christian and an evolutionist who believes God is creator. At one time considered a contradiction, this position is gaining ground among Christian thinkers.

Collins is one who has taken on the traditional belief in God literally creating Adam and Eve and slipped it into allegory, while suggesting that humans emerged not from two individuals but from a group numbering 10,000. He and some other theistic evolutionists do not believe the evidence of science corresponds with the biblical record.



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**I love a good theological discussion. Sometimes, though, we need to lift up our heads and look at what God is doing.**

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What we are left with is a critical theological dilemma. If Paul and Jesus believed in a historical Adam, basing a theology of redemption through Christ on this premise, what happens when we allegorize Adam?

Paul taught that just as sin came through the first Adam, redemption came through the second Adam, Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:12–19). But if Adam never existed, then Paul's teaching crumbles at this one point and the theology on original sin erodes.

Christ's genealogy, virgin birth, and numerous other tenets of the faith hang in jeopardy if Adam is merely symbolic. Or so say evangelical Creationists.

John A. Bloom, a physicist at Biola University, said, "The credibility of the Bible when it speaks on these

issues seems to be damaged: If it does not correctly explain the origin of a problem, why should one trust its solutions?"

Our theology will follow an inevitable path if certain historical events on which our theology is based prove to be unverifiable scientifically. That is, if we value science over Scripture. The aforementioned path seems to lead to destruction of Christian beliefs and the faith of many individuals.

Theology tends to act like the microscope of the Evangelical Mind. It is necessary that we have individuals who explore the very intricate depths of our beliefs and help us explain our faith.

At the same time it seems that they are looking too closely and have wet noses from pressing against a fresh canvas. With their gaze so intent on the brush strokes of God they tend to miss the big picture that God wants to convey.

We certainly need reason to give our faith credibility, but we also need faith to give our reason credibility.

In the same issue of *Christianity Today* a story of the power of faith and the work of Christ in one man's life was published. Josh Hamilton is a Major League baseball player for the Texas Rangers. I had never heard of him before—didn't know him from Adam, as they say. (I can't stand baseball myself.)

I am almost positive that Josh has not weighed in on the Adam debate. He is too busy.

Is he hitting home runs? No, trying to stay clean. Josh is a recovering crack addict who is desperately clinging to Jesus as his only hope of survival. In Christ he is finding a way to stave off his addictions, finding a Saviour who forgives him when he falls back into the old habits, and finding a divine solution to the human problem of sin.

I love a good theological discussion. Sometimes, though, we need to lift up our heads and look at what God is doing.

When we have it all figured out theologically and know scientifically where we all come from, we might just discover our God can't be put into a nice tidy little box marked "limited."

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord..." (The Apostles' Creed).

Keep thinking. Keep believing. ☉

Darryl G. Klassen

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## A Mennonite View of Grace

Dr. Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, BA Hons. (History), MDiv, DTh (New Testament), is Professor of Religious Studies (New Testament) at Conrad Grebel University College.<sup>1</sup> This presentation was made on November 26, 2010, at Wilfrid Laurier University during the Dialogue and Conference entitled **Confessing in Faith: Healing between Lutherans and Mennonites**. The event was jointly sponsored and planned by Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and Conrad Grebel University College. It was held partly in response to the July 2010 statement adopted by the Lutheran World Federation, which expressed regret for earlier treatment of Anabaptists by Lutherans.



**I**t is a sign of God's grace that unlike in the 16<sup>th</sup> century we are today not engaging in a disputation, but in a dialogue between sisters and brothers who know themselves to be members of the same body of Christ. In a very real

sense Bob<sup>2</sup> and I are stepping into each other's shoes, addressing an issue dear to the other.

I am eager to discover to what degree we might in the end turn out to be firmly in our own *and* the other's shoes. As I

contemplated Bob and my exchange, it made me wonder how church relations over the years would have gone if one of the tasks would have been to make a case for the gospel from within the other's cherished convictions.

Interestingly, the issue we might variously characterize as “grace versus works,” or “justification by faith versus discipleship,” has apparently not been a part of this most recent round of dialogue culminating in the rite of apology and forgiveness in Stuttgart this past summer. Perhaps the issue is settled. If so, that might well be very

1 Dr. Yoder Neufeld's books include *Ephesians* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Herald Press, 2002), *Recovering Jesus: the Witness of the New Testament* (Brazos, 2007), and *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament* (Baker/SPCK, 2011).

2 Dr. Robert A. Kelly, professor of systematic theology, holds the Bishop William D. Huras Chair in Ecclesiology and Church History, Waterloo Lutheran Seminary. His Nov. 26, 2010, presentation was *A Lutheran on Discipleship*. Dr. Jeremy M. Bergen, assistant professor of religious studies and theology at Conrad Grebel University College, had a Nov. 26, 2010, presentation on *Lutheran-Mennonite Reconciliation in Stuttgart as an Instance of Ecclesial Repentance*. These presentations are on-line at [www.emconference.ca/theodidaktos](http://www.emconference.ca/theodidaktos). There were other presentations.

good news. Lutherans have discovered the importance of discipleship, and Mennonites the importance of grace. Perhaps. Our dialogue today may shed light on whether this issue still has life in it. As my comments will indicate, I think there is much for us Mennonites, at least, to grapple with when it comes to grace.

### Sounds like a Reformation slogan

I am not so much a theologian or a historian as a student of the Bible. And I have spent much time with the letter to the Ephesians. Chapter 2 contains what sounds very much like a slogan straight out of the Reformation. Twice we hear the words: “By grace you have been saved!” In verse 6 the forceful assertion literally interrupts the grand recitation of the drama of salvation (perhaps it’s a Lutheran interpolation?). In verse 8 it sounds very much like a warning (of Lutherans toward Anabaptists?) for those who might be impressed by their own abilities and capacities for good: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

You cannot state the matter more unambiguously. Our salvation, our

liberation, is premised first and last on the grace of God. And what is this grace? It is the sovereign, free, loving, and life-giving exercise of mercy toward errant and lost humanity. The verses leading up to the “Reformation slogan” provide a succinct summary of the gospel. After describing humanity in the grip of the dark “prince of the power of the air” stumbling about in disobedience like zombies, we read this:

“But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved—<sup>6</sup>and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,<sup>7</sup> so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Nowhere will we find a more succinct summary of the gospel. This is the God who shines the sun and pours the rain out on both the just and the unjust, as in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the God whose justice comes to full expression in mercy, as in Romans 3, who loves us while we are still enemies, as in Romans 5. This is the “God-for-us” of Romans 8.

If God is for us, who is against us?...<sup>33</sup>It is God who justifies.<sup>34</sup>Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us....<sup>38</sup>For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor

angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### Not of One Mind

As central as this is the gospel, Mennonites are not of one mind about grace. For one, as I have illustrated, and as any concordance will show, the language of grace comes not so much from the gospels as from Paul, and Mennonites know he was Lutheran, just like they know Jesus was a Mennonite. More seriously, as much as there is sometimes a sense that “grace” is not a “Mennonite” emphasis, there are many among us who feel strongly both the lack of full appreciation in our own tradition about grace and, at the same time, how absolutely central it is to the Christian life. Let me provide some examples.

At the end of his life Jim Reimer,<sup>3</sup> recently taken from us, stressed again and again how central confidence in God’s grace was for him. Grace represented for him the kindness and acceptance by God of flawed human beings, who fail midst the efforts to do the right thing.

Jim knew he was drawing on the deep and wide evangelical and ecumenical horizon of his faith more than on dyed-in-the-wool Anabaptist Mennonitism of recent vintage. In a conversation only this past week a Mennonite leader lamented to me that she did not recall ever hearing a sermon on grace. Even allowing for exaggeration and memory loss, I found it to be an alarming observation.

Almost two decades ago Stephen Dintaman wrote a short article that would ignite a firestorm of reaction, both pro and con. It was entitled “The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision.”<sup>4</sup> In it he argues, perhaps rather one-sidedly, that Mennonites whose faith has been formed in one way or another by Harold Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision,”<sup>5</sup> have been so focused on ethics, on *doing*, that they have had little to

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3 Dr. A. James Reimer, taught religion and theology at Conrad Grebel University, served on the faculty of the Toronto School of Theology, and was director of the Toronto Mennonite Theological Centre. He was author of *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Pandora Press/Herald Press, 2001) and *The Dogmatic Imagination: The Dynamics of Christian Belief* (Herald Press, 2003). He died in 2010 of cancer. Margaret Loewen Reimer, his wife, has co-written with Allen Jorgenson of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, the worship resources for Mennonites and Lutherans in Canada with which to commemorate the historic reconciliation.

4 Stephen F. Dintaman, “The Spiritual Poverty of the Anabaptist Vision,” *Conrad Grebel Review*, 10/2 (Spring, 1992), 205–8.

5 Harold S. Bender, as president of the American Society of Church History, published the “The Anabaptist Vision” in 1944, which in many ways determined the direction; “The Anabaptist Vision,” *Church History* 13 (March 1944): 3–24, reprinted in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 18 (April 1944).

6 Snyder, C. Arnold. “The Relevance of Anabaptist Nonviolence for Nicaragua Today,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 2 (1984-II): 123–38.



say to the brokenness and sinfulness many of us Mennonites struggle with in our own broken lives—a brokenness that marks the lives even of those most committed to peacemaking. What Mennonites need to recover, Dintaman argues in this incendiary article, is grace, and the work of the restoring and transforming Holy Spirit.

This is an argument my colleague Arnold Snyder has also been making for decades, both as one who struggled during his time with Witness for Peace in Nicaragua with what is needed if one is to love enemies,<sup>6</sup> and as a historian of Anabaptism, attempting to understand the Anabaptists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century who took it as a given that what marked the life of the believer was the work of grace, and only then the response in action.<sup>7</sup>

Ted Koontz, a colleague at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, echoes this:

I know it is easier to walk as a peacemaker when I know afresh God's graciousness than when I try to do so because I feel I must. For many difficult years I tried to be a good Mennonite pacifist, but with very little personal appropriation of God's graciousness. Even though that graciousness has become far more real to me in the last few years, I routinely slip out of living in awareness of it. The weight of being "good"—especially as extremely and oddly "good" as nonresistance expects us to be—is often more than can be sustained by a sense of duty.<sup>8</sup>

Such an understanding represents



a profound appreciation for divine pardon; but also for the restoring and transforming work of grace in those who attempt to live their faith.

#### Turning From Perfectionism

Others in the Mennonite community come at the theme of grace from a somewhat different if overlapping vantage point. They have a deep suspicion that our forebears in the faith were unrealistic, and perhaps even misguided in their understanding of discipleship as purity and nonconformity to the world, which has often led to disengagement from the world, and a sometimes oppressive communal life as well.

There are varied aspects to how grace relates to this turning from "perfectionism." For one, we've become tired of trying so hard. Even if we try hard, when we do succeed (or think we have) we discover that we've blown it by being proud about it. It's much better, much healthier, to make peace with sin, to state it sarcastically. At such times we love to (mis)quote Luther's counsel to "sin boldly."

Relatedly, the effort to be perfect (even though Jesus demands it explicitly in

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the Sermon on the Mount [Matt 5:48]) is perceived as dangerous in that it renders us blind to the degree to which brokenness and sin has taken root even in our piety. Grace is an implicit acknowledgement of our sinfulness. Grace permits an honest appraisal of ourselves as flawed and broken human beings.

Further, since most of us are no longer living separate from the world, we've developed a kind of Niebuhrian appreciation for the tragic inevitability—even necessity—of getting dirty in this world, especially when we're doing the right thing. It is the tragedy of that reality that provides the need for grace. A recently departed Mennonite leader, J. Lawrence Burkholder, is most often associated with this perspective. His doctoral thesis of the late 50s argued for a kind of "social responsibility" that is not squeamish about getting one's hands dirty in the course of engagement for justice in the world.<sup>9</sup>

For Burkholder it was not only a matter of grace as pardon for broken individuals, but grace for those who have to work within the structures of this world that make sin inevitable, even when—*especially* when—they are engaged in the practice of love for the neighbour. "What I have looked for," he said in some personal reflections, "is a doctrine of grace that would not only have addressed the problem of personal sins, willfully committed, [this is very much Stephen Dintaman's concern mentioned earlier], but also social sins, structurally necessitated."<sup>10</sup>

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7 Idem., *Anabaptist History and Theology, An Introduction* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora, 1995).

8 Ted Koontz, "Grace to You and Peace: Nonresistance as Piety," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, July 1995, pp. 354–368, and in *Refocusing a Vision*, edited by John D. Roth (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1995), pp. 82–96.

9 Burkholder's 1958 Princeton dissertation, *The Problem of Social Responsibility from the Perspective of the Mennonite Church*, was finally published by the Institute of Mennonite Studies (Elkart, IN, 1989).

10 Rodney J. Sawatsky, Scott Holland, eds., *The Limits of Perfection: A Conversation with J. Lawrence Burkholder* (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Grebel College, The Institute of Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies, 1993), 50. Emphasis added.

Today debates rage among us Mennonites on such matters as whether Mennonites can not only support policing, but be involved in it, whether Mennonites should encourage governments to adopt the doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect, what should inform their participation in governmental, business and organizational systems, etc. Whenever there is a sense that such engagement implicates us in sin, an implication not all of us grasp, to be sure, grace is welcomed and embraced. But it is grace largely as pardon for the inevitable sin.

### Suspicious of Grace

That is one rather diverse end of the spectrum regarding grace. At the other end, there are also many, or the same ones at different times, who are suspicious of grace, especially if what is called “grace” can no longer be distinguished from moral and spiritual impunity. The characterization of this as “cheap grace” by the great Lutheran theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his *Nachfolge* (translated into English as *The Cost of Discipleship*) has virtually made him an honorary Mennonite.

We are suspicious of a grace that can too easily provide cover and absolution for unchecked participation in the sinful structures of society, economics, and politics. We are suspicious when grace cuts the prophetic nerve of the church’s witness, when it becomes the back door to *not* following Jesus, to *not* taking up the cross. We are suspicious of a *Gelassenheit*—a favourite word among Anabaptists—that is not so much yieldedness to God and abandonment to costly discipleship as it is a complacent abandonment of the rigors of faithfulness. We see this as presuming upon grace, and thus

devaluing its currency. And on this end of the spectrum of Mennonite opinion on grace we usually invoke not Lawrence Burkholder but John Howard Yoder.

### All Need All Kinds of Grace

Even if some of us do not speak easily of grace for such reasons, I suspect that all of us in the middle of the night, when obfuscations and delusions have run out of steam, know we are in desperate need of grace. We know we need grace as pardon for personal fallenness; too many of us are too fallen to fake it any more. We need grace not only for ourselves, but for our churches who are hardly spotless brides (they never were, of course),

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## Grace comes into its own in rendering us capable of doing the good works God has graciously prepared for us.

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sullied not because we’re getting dirty in the messy messianic business of being Christ in the world, but because we’re not in that business. Such grace is the equivalent of forgiveness, of pardon.

But pardon is not enough. Pardon, if taken as a given for an unchanged life, betrays that grace. If Bonhoeffer knew that, Paul knew it better yet, anticipating the Protestant heresy: “Should we sin that grace might abound? By no means!” (Romans 6:1–2; today we might well translate Paul’s expression of exasperation as “Give me a break!”)

Grace is so much more than forgiveness, as the Anabaptists knew well. Interestingly, Paul himself seldom used the word “forgiveness.” Sixteenth-century Anabaptists emphasized grace much more strongly than their offspring

have, but less as forgiveness than as empowerment, as transformation, as regeneration.<sup>11</sup> Their emphasis on *Nachfolge* (“following after,” their preferred word for what contemporary Mennonites call “discipleship”) was premised on God’s renewing and transforming grace through the work of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is premised on grace. It is the work of grace. And therein might well lie the point at which Mennonites and Lutherans can together both rediscover a deeper and more encompassing understanding of grace.

### Conclusion

To make this point as clear as I can, let me return, in conclusion, to the letter of Ephesians. As I pointed out earlier, in the first instance of “by grace you are saved!” the slogan interrupts a rehearsal of God’s loving and gracious liberation of errant humanity. Notice, it is grace that raises up the walking dead together with Christ. Grace has to do with resurrection, with letting Easter seep into the way we are to live now in the present still fallen age. In Romans 6:4, Paul calls this “newness of life.” In the second instance, the slogan “by grace you have been saved” leads into this sentence:

<sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not the result of works, so that no one may boast <sup>10</sup>For we are God’s work of art [if you will let me translate it], created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in.

Grace is not a guaranteed absolution from failing at good works, nor are good works the devaluing of grace. Just so, “good works”—discipleship, *Nachfolge*—are not a means of earning our own salvation. Rather, grace comes into its own in rendering us capable of doing the good works God has graciously prepared for us. “Works” are the gift of grace.

On Reformation Sunday the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church<sup>12</sup> had this on their sign: “Grace works.” Perfect!

Likewise, justification is not simply

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11 See Finger, Thomas N. “Grace.” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1989. Web. 01 December 2010. <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/G7325ME.html>.

12 One of the remarkable ways Lutheran and Mennonite story lines have intersected in the past; the Mennonite Brethren part of the Mennonite community of denominations owes its beginnings in 1860 in Russia to the work of a Lutheran evangelist, Eduard Wüst.

the *Freispruch*, the pardon of a gracious judge. Justification is God's faithfulness in Jesus at work rendering us capable of *doing* justice (Romans 3:21–26). This is what Paul calls "new creation" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15). Justification is God's restorative justice at work.

Just as Paul was exasperated by those who would split grace from good works

(see Romans 6:11), so Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount knew that to demand the rigors of good works, the righteousness that exceeds even that of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20), required first the beatitudes, the promise of God's favour, the sun of grace and the rain of mercy.

To conclude, Mennonites dare not leave grace to the Lutherans, any more

than Lutherans should leave discipleship to Mennonites. It is a great gift to us as Mennonites to have sisters and brothers to remind us that we don't earn our way, that ultimately whatever good we do, we give thanks to the gracious author and finisher of that work. *e*

# Tell All the Truth, But Tell It Slant!

Brigitte Toews

Brigitte Toews is a part of Heartland Community Church (Landmark, Man.). She serves on the EMC Board of Church Ministries, including on the National Youth Committee.



**H**ow can we communicate the truth of who Jesus is and what he taught to a post-Christian, postmodern, Canadian culture?

How can we do it without using typical *Christianese*—theological rhetoric, old King James English, or first-century idioms that get lost in translation between our 21<sup>st</sup>-century ears? Then, how do we tell these same truths to a willingly deaf (picture fingers in the ears here), blind, biblically illiterate, secularized culture who are suspect of anything religious?

I have read in the Emergent Church dialogue that differing perspectives are sometimes referred to as "tribes." What tribe do you belong to? Or what are your worldviews?

Rick Brown, a Bible scholar and mission strategist, said, "Although the Bible does not endorse any particular culture, it does challenge the worldviews which people hold. It does this by revealing one specific worldview as 'the

truth' and 'the light' and by exposing contrary viewpoints as 'darkness.'"<sup>1</sup>

In the science of photography, light can be imprinted onto a dark surface producing a negative image, but once it is processed correctly, it becomes a positive picture. This is how black and white film is made.

If, however, you mix black and white in varying degrees, you have created a greyscale. You no longer just have a monochrome picture; the greyscale actually enhances it. So, it is with this essay that I tread carefully between the language of religion and the language of the culture. If I add some grey to the mix, I do it with care and respect for the greater picture, and not as an intentional smokescreen for error.

Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) penned the poem *Tell All the Truth, But Tell It Slant*,<sup>2</sup> which is a concept that has set the course for this essay. This idea was first introduced to me at a poetry workshop held at Canadian Mennonite University's

*School of Writing* a few years back.

When the teacher reviewed some of my poems, she gave me some advice which has stuck with me. She basically told me that when we write for a Christian audience, we would use language that is conducive to that group, but if you are writing for a non-religious audience, you should take an indirect approach.

According to missiologist Bruce J. Nicholls, "Every missionary must understand at least three cultures: The culture of scripture, his or her own culture, and third, the culture of the people to whom he wishes to share the Gospel."<sup>3</sup>

## The Colour of Truth in Ancient Near Eastern Culture

Modern Christian theology is a set of systematic beliefs which teach propositional truths using academic language. Ancient Israelite theology is told to us in their stories. Jeff A. Brenner explains the differences between Greek and Hebrew thought. He says:

Greek thought views the world through the mind (abstract thought). Ancient Hebrew thought views the world through the senses (concrete thought). All five of the

1 Rick Brown, "Contextualization Without Syncretism," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* (Fall 2006), 130.

2 Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H Johnson (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1955), 506.

3 Mark R. Kreitzer, review of *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Regent College Publishing, 2003), by Bruce J. Nicholls, *Global Missiology*, Review & Preview (July 2008). (<http://ojs.globalmissiology.org/index.php/english/article/viewFile/45/128>). Accessed Feb. 2011.

senses are used when speaking, hearing, writing, or reading the ancient Hebrew language.<sup>4</sup>

The Bible conveys truth using a spectrum of literary colours: heroic and historical narrative, poetry, symbolic language, vision, dreams, story/parables, laws, and letters. Together they give us a unified message and theme which reveal a God who is intimately involved in people's lives.

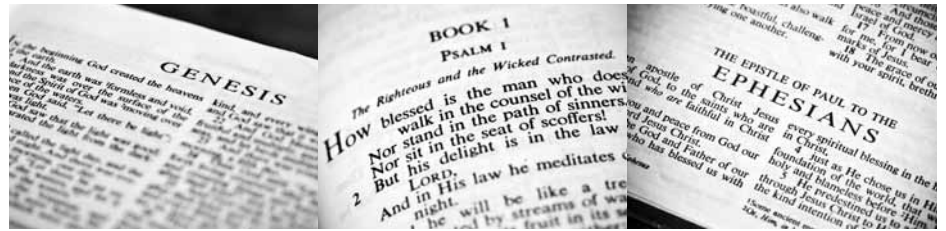
God even used the acting skills of various prophets in order to convey his message. He had some of them performing live plays in the streets, while others told stories in the private courts of kings (2 Samuel 12:1–7).<sup>5</sup> Inspired authors often used shades of hyperbolic and allegoric language which gave their message impact.

According to Brian Godawa, less than 30 percent of the Bible is in the form of “rational propositional truth and laws.”<sup>6</sup> The rest conveys truth through stories, testimonies, signs and wonders, which were all used to point to or confirm a propositional truth (Hebrews 2:4).

### The Colour of Truth in Modern Culture

Today, scientists, historians, philosophers, and theologians alike all seek to know and understand truth. Scientists use theory and empirical methods to establish or disprove truth claims. Historians try to establish, to the best of their ability, what probably happened in the past, using redaction methods.

Modern philosophers use language structure and logic in order to establish or refute truth claims; and theologians



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## The Bible conveys truth using a spectrum of literary colours: heroic and historical narrative, poetry, symbolic language, vision, dreams, story/parables, laws and letters.

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interpret the claims of Scripture (faith seeking understanding)<sup>7</sup> by using a combination of interpretive methods. But all of these groups, without exception, start with beliefs or presuppositions of their own.

Father and son apologists Josh and Sean McDowell give us two models for viewing truth:

*Model 1:* Truth is defined by God for everyone; it is objective and universal. The truth is known through discovering God and his Word.

*Model 2:* What is true is defined by the individual; it is subjective and situational. Truth is known through simply choosing to believe it.<sup>8</sup>

Those who agree with Model 2, the relativistic view of truth, set their own standards of what is right and wrong. According to the McDowells, most people today fit into this category.

Erwin Raphael McManus, a pastor and teacher of the faith community called Mosaic, sums it up:

Contemporary philosophy would propose that all truth is subjective. This position embraces relativism and makes the individual the center of reality. Science and modern Christianity would advocate that truth is objective, standing outside of the individual and empirically or rationally provable. The Scriptures give us a different position. Truth is neither relative nor objective. The biblical view is that truth is personal, relational, and subjective. The critical difference, of course, is that we are not the subject. God is.<sup>9</sup>

### Cultivating Hardened Ground

The first connecting point to a culture is learning its language. I once attended a lecture held at Canadian Mennonite University on October 19, 2010, which featured author Leonard Sweet, Professor of Evangelism at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey. He spoke about the emerging culture and used the acronym EPIC: “Experiential, Participatory, Image rich, and Connective.” He said that the “the church still lives in a Gutenberg world of words, chapters and verses and most people today live in a Google world of story and image.” He calls this “the ‘TGIF’ world of Twitter, Google, iPhone and Facebook.”<sup>10</sup>

In the family I grew up in, it was not our practice to read or study the Bible. In fact, it was not encouraged in those days or in our religious tradition. I grew up in a nominal Christian home where faith in God was not expressed openly. “Keep your religion to yourself”—and the same with your politics and your business

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4 Jeff A. Brenner, *Ancient Hebrew Lexicon of the Bible* (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com Publishing Inc., 2005) 11 (emphasis original).

5 Brian Godawa, *Word Pictures: Knowing God Through Story & Imagination*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 60–65.

6 Godawa, *Word Pictures*, 53. This is a liberal percentage based on his research.

7 Philip Carey, *The History of Christian Theology* (DVD), The Teaching Company, 2008.

8 McDowell, 105–106.

9 Erwin Raphael McManus, “The Global Intersection,” *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed., Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 255–256.

10 Brenda Funk’s general notes reported to Heartland Church, October 19, 2010. See John Longhurst’s column *Faithmatters*, “Does The Church Have a Future?” (*The Carillon*, October 28, 2010).



practices—was the adage in my family. Even today, most of my relatives still do not read the Bible. They would, however, read other books or perhaps watch movies or TV.

Twenty-first century Canadian culture is visually stimulated; most of our media is aimed at this truth. I, too, consider myself a visual person and would rather see a story than read one. Movies are the EPIC stories or parables for our postmodern culture. Screenwriters, directors, and movie producers alike send their messages (worldviews), whether good or evil, across all cultural, sub-cultural, and age demographics. Movie stories strike us on a more personal and emotional level in a shorter period of time.

Though the number of Christian film companies has increased dramatically in the past 20 years, many of these companies produce films that would never be seen in mainstream theatres. There is, however, a growing number of Christians who are quietly influencing the film industry from within.

Andy Crouch, author of the book *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, in a TV interview<sup>11</sup> talked about the Christian's influence from within society as a whole. He gave the example of Pixar Animation Studios. Though it is a secular company, it has many high-level executives who are Christians. To date, the eleven feature films that PIXAR has produced have been extremely

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## **Twenty-first century Canadian culture is visually stimulated; most of our media is aimed at this truth.**

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successful, and PIXAR has become the highest grossing studio in the business. Movies such as *Toy Story 3* (at number 5) and *Up* (at number 39) are listed among the best animated films of all time.

### **Twenty-First Century Parables** *A Parable about Equality and Social Justice*

One of my favourite movies is *Amazing Grace: The William Wilberforce Story* (2006). It is the story of the abolition of slavery in late 18<sup>th</sup> century England. This story, however, was not told from the perspectives of Christian Quakers or even John Newton, a slave ship owner who became a Christian and wrote the famous hymn *Amazing Grace*.

It was told from the perspective of a British merchant's son turned politician. This, I believe, was a wise move on the filmmaker's part because the movie was seen in mainstream theatres and not just in the basement halls of churches. Wilberforce's Christianity is wonderfully portrayed in this movie in his life story.

### *A Parable About Non-Violent Resistance and Sacrifice*

Another interesting movie is *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* (2005), a German film with English subtitles. It is the story of the "White Rose," a student movement in Munich, Germany, during World War Two. Christian students subversively criticized the Nazi Party's immoral policies and the war in particular. This movie teaches non-violent resistance in order to bring about change, even when faced with prison or death.

The film's director Marc Rothmund is a professing atheist. He did, though, set aside his own personal beliefs in order to tell this story. He said in an interview that "I believed in God the whole time I was making Sophie Scholl."<sup>12</sup>

### *A Parable about the Value and Purpose of a Life*

Another inspiring movie is the fictional story called *Simon Birch* (1998), based on the book *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. It is the story of the friendship between two boys who were coming of age. Their lives, families, and even the church folk are not whitewashed. Simon was a boy affected by dwarfism who believed that God had made him for a divine purpose. Visiting Simon's grave, a now adult Joe Wentworth (played by Jim Carrey) narrates:

I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice, not because of his voice or because he was the smallest person I ever knew, or even because he was the instrument of my mother's death, but because he is the reason I believe in God. What faith I have, I owe it to Simon Birch, a boy I grew up with in Gravestown, Maine.

### *A Parable about 'The Law' Versus Grace*

The movie *Les Miserables* (1998), starring Liam Neeson as Jean Valjean, is a parable about the "Letter of the Law" and the "Spirit of Grace." Valjean's freedom is purchased with the silverware from a cleric, who then said he must now live his life differently. The Law, however, is personified in the character of Javert (Geoffrey Rush), who pursues him until the end. When he finally catches Valjean, Javert realizes, "I've tried to live my life without breaking a single rule. You're free."

This parable is what the Apostle Paul describes in Roman 8:1–2: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (RSV).

Eugene H. Peterson, in his book *Tell It Slant*, writes, "Storytellers invite participation. Storytellers make us aware of the way things are, not just aware as spectators...."<sup>13</sup> He says,

Jesus does not tell stories in order to illustrate large "truths" about God and

11 Andy Crouch, interview by Moira Brown, *100 Huntley Street*, January 5, 2011, CTS.

12 Steven D. Greydanus, blog. <http://www.decentfilms.com/blog/is-hollywood-re-discovering-religion>. Accessed November 2011. Rothmund won the Berlin International Film Festival's award for best director. This film was also nominated for an Oscar in 2005 for best foreign film.

13 Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation On The Language Of Jesus In His Stories And Prayers* (Eerdmans, 2008), 134.

salvation, the devil and damnation. There are, of course, truths to know and understand: the truth about God, the truth about right and wrong, the truth about the past. But Jesus doesn't seem to care much about telling us an abstract truth. He intends to get us involved, our feet in the mud and our hands in the bread dough, with the living God who is at work in this world. This is why Jesus tells stories, not to inform or explain or define, but to get us actively in on the ways and will of God in the homes and neighbourhoods and workplaces where we spend our time.<sup>14</sup>

According to Brian Godawa, "...storytelling from its inception was expected to be more than just entertainment."<sup>15</sup> He cites what the late Joseph Campbell, a legend to writers in Hollywood, thought about screenwriters' "thoughtless irresponsible movie narratives." Campbell's call to writers was to rediscover the impact of their craft on the viewer and to tell the story in such a way as to teach people how to live their lives under any circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

#### Contextualization and Syncretism

According to Eungye Chang, "Contextualization may be defined as the process by which the gospel takes root in a specific socio-cultural context."<sup>17</sup>

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### According to missiologist Gailyn Van Rheenen, "...what is considered contextualization by some may be interpreted as syncretism by others."

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Dan Story quotes the late Paul G. Hiebert who said,

Too often missionaries focus their attention on the message they bring [theology], and ignore the context in which they communicate it. Consequently, the gospel remains incomprehensible, fragmented, foreign, and irrelevant.... The Christian message must be presented within the context of the culture. This means that missionaries and evangelists must learn to see the world through the eyes of the people they serve.<sup>18</sup>

But, according to missiologist Gailyn Van Rheenen, "...what is considered contextualization by some may be interpreted as syncretism by others."<sup>19</sup>

Van Rheenen describes syncretism as a mixing and matching of various religious beliefs and worldviews, including Christianity. Van Rheenen's concerns about syncretism came from the experience he had with his Christian parents' involvement in the alternative healing ministry, which began to

include the manifestations of "spirits" in their congregational experience. He felt that their medical practices had animistic similarities (for example, Medical Intuits = Shamans, medical healing or mood-altering bracelets = charms).<sup>19</sup>

An example of syncretism can also be found in the popular movie *Avatar*. In this postmodern pagan myth, a scientist named Dr. Grace Augustine (a play on the early Christian church father)<sup>20</sup> joins in the cult worship of the universal spirit of Pandora called *Mother Eywa*. This movie portrays a mixture of beliefs from the Navi race:

*Pantheism*, the belief that all things, animate and inanimate, are manifestations of God, God in all;

*Animism*, the belief that everything has a soul, even trees;

*Polytheism*, the belief that many gods rule in life and nature;

*Christianity*, albeit a universalistic type.<sup>21</sup>

#### Subversion versus Syncretism

Brian Godawa said, "Subversion [for our purposes] is a strategy of engaging oneself in an opponent's story, retelling the story through a new paradigm and, in the end, taking the opponent's story captive."<sup>22</sup>

Godawa gives many examples of how the New Testament writers "redefine pagan imagery." His argument is that "it redeems culture through subversion, which is radical reinterpretation or undermining of commonly understood images, words, concepts or narratives."<sup>23</sup>

Godawa makes this case in his essay *Storytelling as Subversive Apologetics: A New View from the Hill in Acts 17*.<sup>24</sup> In his studies, he found that although scholars, evangelists, and apologists have not come to any definitive agreement on whether Paul's discourse was a "culturally Greek sermon" or "antithetical to Hellenism,"<sup>25</sup> he noticed that many of them were looking through a common lens: "their emphasis on Paul's

14 Peterson, 134.

15 Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews*, 76.

16 Cited in Godawa, *Hollywood*, 77.

17 Eungye Chang, J. Rupert Morgan, Timothy Nyasulu, and Robert J. Priest, *Paul G. Hiebert and Critical Contextualization* (Trinity Journal, Fall 2009, Volume 30NS, No 2, 199–207).

18 Dan Story, "Witnessing to Animists" *Christian Research Journal* 33, no. 2 (2010), 49–51.

19 Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Contextualization And Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 2.

20 Gailyn Van Rheenen, "'Christian' New Agers: A Growing Phenomena," *Monthly Missiological Reflections* no. 41 (May, 2008). [www.missiology.org/mmr/mmr41.htm](http://www.missiology.org/mmr/mmr41.htm).

21 Brian Godawa, "Avatar, A Postmodern Pagan Myth," *Christian Research Journal* 33, No. 2 (2010): 8.

22 Godawa, *Avatar*, 8.

23 Brian Godawa, "Storytelling as Subversive Apologetics: A New View from the Hill in Acts 17," *Christian Research Journal*, 30, no. 2 (2007), 1. (<http://journal.equip-org/articles/storytelling-as-subversive-apologetics>). Accessed February 2, 2011.

24 Brian Godawa, *Word Pictures: Knowing God Through Story & Imagination*, 115.

25 Godawa, "Storytelling," 1–10.

discourse as rational debate or empirical proof.”<sup>26</sup>

Godawa believes they are missing a vital point of interpretation in this passage. He succeeds, in my opinion, in showing how Paul first engaged then subverted the Greco-Roman philosophical beliefs by using “Stoic narrative structure” as part of his argument.<sup>27</sup> He writes,

Luke, the narrator, attempts to cast Paul in Athenian narrative metaphor to Socrates, someone with whom the Athenians would be both familiar and uncomfortable. It was Socrates who Xenophon said was condemned and executed for being ‘guilty of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in new divinities’ (Acts 17:18). Luke depicts Paul from the start as a heroically defiant Socrates, a philosopher of truth against the mob.<sup>28</sup>

In Athens at the Areopagus (Mars Hill), Paul carefully takes his Epicurean and Stoic listeners through a minefield of platonic logic. Here, Godawa says, Paul avoids naming Adam (Acts 17:26a) as the “one” from whom all men come; and at the end of his discourse, Paul does not mention the name Jesus (Acts 17:30) as the “one,” the “logos” in Platonic philosophy.

Godawa suggests that not quoting scripture directly was “instructive of how to preach and defend the gospel to Pagans” or to “those who were hostile or opposed to faith.”<sup>29</sup> He also points out

that Paul does not tell his listeners that he was *not* talking about Zeus.<sup>30</sup> He says, “The Stoics themselves had redefined Zeus to be the impersonal pantheistic force, also called the “logos,” as opposed to a personal deity in the pantheon of Greek gods. This *logos* was still not anything like the personal God of the Hebrew scriptures.”<sup>31</sup>

When Paul used commonly known first-century images or language to engage the Hellenized culture, he wasn’t incorporating their meaning into his own theology (syncretism). Instead, he found connecting points with which to engage those cultures (ideas that were compatible with his Judeo/Christian worldview). Then, by adding the Christian view of “judgement and resurrection” (Acts 17:30–32) at the end of his speech (concepts the Stoics were opposed to), Paul subverts their story and calls his hearers to repent (change *their* mind). Some did and became followers of Jesus (verses 33–34 ).<sup>32</sup>

According to Brian Godawa, “This appropriation of cultural images... illustrates a redemptive interaction with those thought forms, and a certain amount of involvement in and affirmation of the prevailing culture, in service to the gospel.”<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusion

There will always be a struggle within the Body of Christ, the Church, on how we present the gospel message. Leonard Sweet likens the different views to

particular landscapes: a garden, a park, a glen, and a meadow.<sup>34</sup> Even within these particular ecosystems, he compares the debate to “the relative roles that hydrogen and oxygen play in the very air we breathe.”<sup>35</sup> Sweet also makes an analogy that even in “the garden,” for instance, there can be a number of different vines growing:

The honeysuckle climbing vine always grows clockwise. The jasmine vine always entwines itself counter clockwise. The world’s best gardeners are unable to make the honeysuckle grow to the left or the jasmine to the right. In the Chilean mountains, however, the climbing vine *scyphambus elegans* starts its journey in one direction, then, after a few loops, reverses and climbs in the opposite direction. No amount of pruning or tending can change its zigzaggery.<sup>36</sup>

But even though the vines may take different directions, Sweet says, “Each seeks the same thing: The light of Christ.”<sup>37</sup>

I have come to believe that this approach, used in our own unique contexts, will be much more beneficial in reaching a generation that is already predisposed to distrust religion and Christians in particular. To learn the language of science, philosophy, and history in our modern/postmodern context is a way to engage each discipline in order to communicate the truth within those fields of study.

But theology has helped me understand what is at stake in losing our cumulative knowledge of and authentic historical Christian perspective on truth. Rational argument or quoting chapters and verses, however, to a “postmodern” image-oriented culture is what Ben Witherington says is “only persuasive if they work within the plausibility structure existing in the minds of the hearers.”<sup>38</sup>

On a practical social level people can be creative. Some have started a family friendly movie ministry in their communities; others have used film clips

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26 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 2 (referring to Marten Dibelius, Cornelius Van Til, and F. F. Bruce).

27 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 2.

28 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 2.

29 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 2.

30 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 2.

31 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 5.

32 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 5. He quotes Xenophon. See his references to Plato and Euthyphro.

33 Godawa, “Storytelling,” 6-7.

34 Sweet, 13–26.

35 Sweet, 13–26.

36 Sweet, 18.

37 Sweet, 18.

38 Cited in Godawa, “Storytelling,” 2

to enhance sermon topics or used them as illustrations to engage their youth groups.<sup>39</sup> Some have started Facebook communities to connect with local youth.

People can start a movie or book club in our homes and introduce discussions about the worldviews found in them. Depending on our willingness to engage

those around us, we can find connecting points that are unique to our context.

Scripture says that we are to be potash<sup>40</sup> (Matthew 5:13; Luke 14:34), yeast (Luke 13:20–21; Matthew 13:33), and light (Matthew 5:14) in our own sphere of influence. Though it is impossible to remove the yeast from the lump of dough or sift the fertilizer from

the soil once it has been worked into it (even though Christians do not always agree on the *methods* used), if we add too much “water” to the message, it dilutes and makes ineffective both the fertilizer and the yeast.

If we simply withdraw from our culture and stay in the safety of our own Christian subcultures, then we will lose our influence in growing *Kingdom* culture. God is present in our culture; we just need to help others find him in their daily lives. **Θ**

39 Wing clips and similar web sites offer this service.

40 Tim Rogalsky, “Who adds salt to earth?” *The Messenger*, December 1, 2004, 3.

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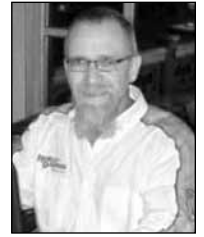
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# A Study on *Hope, to Hope*

Chuck Friesen



Chuck Friesen was a minister at Pleasant Valley EMC (near Rosenort, Man.). He held BRS and BA Hon. (Psych.) degrees, had taken some master's studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and was a part-time student at Providence Theological Seminary (MA, Biblical Studies, NT). He died of cancer on July 27, 2011. He was 52.

Perhaps one of the strongest motivational forces is hope. Romans 15:13 teaches that God is the source of hope, and the believers in God are the beneficiaries of this hope.

To the Greeks, it was the sole enterprise of man to fabricate his hopes, and since “only a god did not err in his expectations, and men’s hopes are uncertain” (Bultmann, 1964, p. 519-529), hope was dangerous and easily deceived.

The Greeks had no experience of the transference of hope from the god who has hope to the laity whose hopes were ill-founded. Paul’s teaching confirmed just the opposite: God gives hope to the faithful.

In the Old Testament hope is not an individual’s projection into the future, but always a reference to what God will do. Hope was expressed by a “general confidence in God’s protection and help” (Bultmann, p. 523). Therefore, the Psalmist can rejoice in the “Lord God [Who is] my confidence from my youth” (71:5).

In Rabbinic Judaism there was “no word corresponding to [*elpis* {hope}] in either form or content” (Rengstorf, 1964, p. 523). Their Messianic hope was contingent on man’s adherence to the Torah. Even though various efforts were initiated in the attempt to overcome their lack of hope, Rabbinic Judaism did not achieve that goal.

Hellenistic Judaism was replete with hope. “The *elpis* of the righteous is fixed on God their savior” (Bultmann, p. 529). Philo’s view of hope was influenced by

Greek psychology. Hope had to do with “man’s projection of the future [and] without such hope life is not worth living” (p. 530). He thought of *elpis* as the antithesis of *phobos* [fear] and affinity with *pistis* [faith], but an “eschatological hope play[ed] no part in Philo” (p. 530).

The purpose of this paper is not an exhaustive word study of *elpis/elpizo* [hope/to hope], but to conduct an investigation into the range of meanings of the terms in the New Testament (NT). Specific meanings of the terms will be analyzed in selected passages most pertinent to the issue with careful attention being exerted in seeking greater specificity within the realm of meanings as established by Louw and Nida (1988).

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**The Greeks had no experience of the transference of hope from the god who has hope to the laity from the god who has hope to laity whose hopes were ill-founded. Paul’s teaching confirmed just the opposite: God gives hope to the faithful.**

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## Future tense

The most obvious sense of *elpis/elpizo* is the futuristic tense of the terms. Paul clearly affirms this truth when he writes “but hope that is seen is not hope, for why does one also hope for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24). Nobody hopes in what has already become reality, but what is actualized currently may not survive tomorrow.

It is true that the masters of the slave-girl with the spirit of divination daily experienced the profits from her

fortune-telling, but their present reality did not negate the dynamic of their future expectation for income from this girl (Acts 16:16ff) if their fortune was to continue. Even though this revenue source was temporary, her masters were certainly expecting some duration of this industry.

As will be displayed in this paper, and as is evidenced by this account in Acts 16, *elpis/elpizo* does not unanimously negate the present presence of what is continued to be anticipated in the future, just as the terms do not always void the future sense of what already exists in the present.

## Now/Not Yet

It is very evident that *elpis/elpizo* has a now/not yet dynamic. Yes, the farmer is enjoying a plentiful harvest, but he is not certain if the forecasted hail will wipe out the remainder of his crop. What is always sustained, however, in spite of the present presence of a phenomenon or event, is the resilience in every situation of occurrence of

the futuristic orientation of *elpis/elpizo*.

According to Louw and Nida, the semantic domain of *elpis* consists of three senses: [1] “hope,” or “to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial,” [2] “what is hoped for,” and [3] “that which constitutes the cause or reason for hoping—the basis for hope [or] the reason for hoping” (p. 296). The semantic domain for *elpizo* includes the sense of [1] as in *elpis* (p. 296), and [2] “to expect something to happen, often implying waiting” (p. 357).

In the preceding bevy of domains for *elpis/elpizo*, there is an obfuscation which weakens the preponderant biblical sense of these terms. In their analysis of *hope*, Louw and Nida make no inference of the element of absolute certainty that absolves any affinity with doubt or uncertainty. And yet this sense of certainty in *elpis/elpizo* is a key defining essence of the terms.

Mayer (1990) addresses this aspect of absolute certainty by referring to Romans 4:18: “Hope is based on the divine promise and *leaves behind it any uncertainty*” (p. 438, emphasis added). Regarding 1 Thessalonians 5:9, Mayer writes “this hope is supported by the divine predestination of the believer to salvation and thus receives the *greatest possible basis for security*” (p. 438, emphasis added).

#### Assurance of Fulfillment

Hope must inherently, for the Christian, when it comes to matters of faith, include the absolute, uncompromising assurance of complete certainty of fulfillment of whatever faith issue is addressed.

Of the fifty-three times *elpis* is used in the NT, in all cases the NASB translates it as *hope*. The NLT thirty-one times

translates *elpis* as *hope, hopes* or *hoping*. In other cases, the NLT translates it as: *has promised* (Gal. 5:5), *confident hope* (Rom. 5:4; 12:12; 15:13; Eph. 1:18; Col. 1:5), *enduring hope* (1 Thess. 1:3), *glorious hope* (Eph. 4:4), *confidently, confident* or *confidence* (Rom. 5:2; 2 Cor. 1:7; 2 Cor. 3:12; 1 Thess. 5:8; Titus 1:2; 3:7), *assurance* (Col. 1:23, 27), and *expect* or *expectation* (1 Cor. 9:10; 1 Pet. 1:3; 1 Jn 3:3). In three cases (Rom. 8:24, 24; 1 Cor. 9:10) the term is not translated.

Of all the citations of *elpis*, there are ten references (Acts 16:19; 27:20; 1 Cor. 9:10, 10; 2 Cor. 1:7; 10:15; Eph. 1:18; 2:12; Phil. 1:20; 1 Thess. 4:13) where the context indicates a hope that is without the sense of absolute certainty, and in each case *elpis* is in Louw and Nida’s domain (2), namely, what is hoped for. The best example of this is Acts 27:20 where Paul confesses “from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.”

At one time Paul had hope of surviving the potential shipwreck, but the situation became so grave that what was hoped for seemingly disappeared. But then the story takes an abrupt shift. Paul receives a visitation from “an angel of God” (v. 23) who informs Paul that “God has granted you all those who are sailing with you” (v. 24). Subsequent to the angel’s message, Paul says “for I believe [pisteuo] God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told” (v. 25, emphases added).

It is of noteworthy interest that Paul chooses *pisteuo* over *elpis* to denote a trust, a confidence, and a hope that is absolutely certain without any affinity

with doubt or uncertainty. Why would Paul not here insert, as he does in 1 Timothy 4:10, the construct “we have fixed our hope [*elpikamen*] on the living God,” where emphasis of this hope is accentuated with the use of the perfect tense of *elpizo*?

Would the substitution of *pistis* [I believe] for *elpikamen* [fixed our hope] in 1 Timothy 4 make this hope more emphatic as what seems is portrayed by the reversal in Acts 27? This does not mean that *elpis* cannot have the sense of absolute certainty that Paul expresses by the use of *pisteuo*. Perhaps the distinctions of the two terms are more complementary than antagonistic since both in the respective contexts express a definite certainty.

#### Certainty/Uncertainty

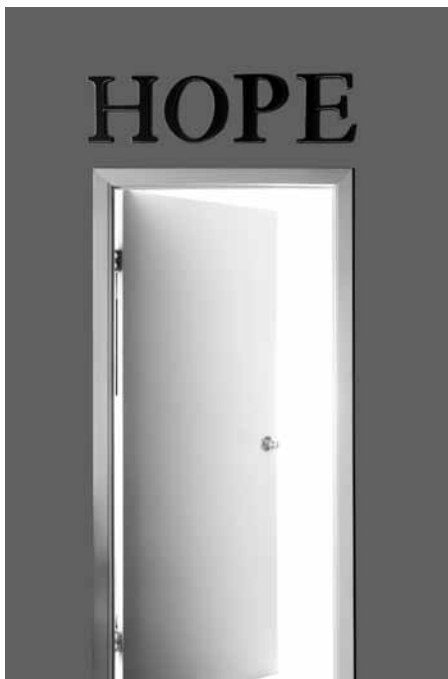
What merits a further study, one beyond the scope of this project, is the attribution of the degree of certainty to *pisteuo* and if there is an expressed affinity with uncertainty, doubt or skepticism which has an occasional audience with *elpis/elpizo*. Without knowledge of such an investigation’s findings, it becomes pure speculation as to whether the terms evidence sense relations.

An initial hypothesis could surmise that a holistic meaning of the terms *pisteuo* and *elpis* would be more influenced by “their individual relations to other words” (Silva, 1994, p. 112) compared to more referential words like *paidion* (young child) and *teknon* (child).

A more difficult passage where the sense of uncertain hope is evident is 2 Corinthians 1:7.

There are two possible interpretations of the phrase “and our hope for you is firmly grounded” as it relates to the context.

First, Paul realizes that any participation in Christ’s sufferings always involves the concomitant comforting by God. This comfort which God brings




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**Hope must inherently, for the Christian, when it comes to matters of faith, include the absolute, uncompromising assurance of complete certainty of fulfillment of whatever faith issue is addressed.**

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in times of trial is the basis for Paul's hope. The focus of "our hope" rests on God's comfort. That hope is absolutely certain (Mare and Harris, 1995).

Second, Hughes (1962) places the emphasis of "our hope" on more uncertain terms. Paul knows not all is right with the Corinthians, and that many have been misled by false teachers. However, "he has confidence that the appeal which this epistle constitutes will call forth a true and loving response" (15).

These two interpretations of this verse present quite a different understanding of the text. One is full of absolute certainty of hope, while the other is uncertain. The distinguishing sense lies in what "our hope" is based upon.

At times the sense of certainty is explicitly stated by an accompanying term that specifically connotes "certainty." In Acts 24:14–15 Paul confesses "believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets" and this conceives in him "having a hope in God...that there shall *certainly* [*mellein esesthai*] be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (emphasis added).

The NASB brings out the point of the certainty of *elpis*, and the basis for this exegesis is that with the future infinitive, in this case *esesthai*, *mellein* "denotes certainty that an event will occur in the future" (Bauer, 1979, p. 500). Interestingly, the RSV, ESV, NIV, NLT, and TEV, and paraphrases like Phillips and Williams, all do not apply this exegesis in their translations opting for a rather incondite reading such as "that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust" (ESV).

### Certainty More Prevalent

A review of *elpis* reveals that the sense of certainty is far more prevalent than the nuance of uncertainty. Forty-two times the context attributes a definite sense of absolute certainty to *elpis*. Few passages rival Hebrews 6:17–19 for this

sense of absolute certainty void of any hint of doubt or uncertainty in this term. The passage reads as follows:

<sup>17</sup>In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup>in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup>This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil.

This hope is founded on the following textual evidence: (1) *en ho* [in the same way, or in which] is a method of appeal that removes "all doubt and gainsaying" (Rienecker, 1980, p. 683), (2) this is a promise made by God, (3) this promise is something God has purposed, (4) this purpose is like a *ametatheton* [unchangeable], or a contract that is incapable of being removed and it is completely unchangeable, (5) *emesiteusen horko* [interposed with an oath] means that this purpose He has pledged as a surety with an oath, and (6) *adunaton pseusasthai [ton] theon* [impossible for God to lie] describes the trustworthiness of the God Who purposed all this and made all these promises and oaths (Rienecker, 1980).

These grammatical techniques and the meanings of key words coupled with the stunning catalog of the brilliant attributes of God form the prepotent, gree and sovereign basis for this hope—Louw and Nida's third domain of meaning of *elpis*.

### Absolute Certainty

This basis then becomes the security for "laying hold of the hope set before us" (v. 18), which is the second domain of *elpis*. The unequivocal basis of *elpis* and the expressed absolute certainty of its futuristic fulfillment is celebrated with highest affirmation that this hope (1) "we have as an anchor of the soul," (2) it is "both sure" and (3) "steadfast,"

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## It is difficult to imagine how the writer of Hebrews could have made more resoundingly emphatic the absolute certainty of *elpis*.

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and (4) "one which enters within the veil." It is difficult to imagine how the writer of Hebrews could have made more resoundingly emphatic the absolute certainty of *elpis*.

One further observation of this passage reveals the presence of the now/not yet reality of *elpis* in the Christian pilgrimage. The phrase *kratesae tes prokeimenes elpidos* [laying hold of the hope set before us] denotes the *now* in *kratesai* as that hope which Christians seized hold of already in the past. The *not yet* sense of *elpis* is accentuated by *prokeimenes*. The hope is still before us; it is a reality we can see in the future, but one not yet fully actualized in the present.

A careful reading of Hebrews 6:17–19 reveals some concept of concinnity between *tes epaggelias* [of the promise], *tes boules autou* [of His promise], and *tes elpidos* [of the hope] (all genitive singular cases). Each construct builds for the subsequent term, and the progression culminates with *tes elpidos*.

Therefore, when the writer of this epistle coined the phrase "this hope we have as an anchor of the soul," the implication is brilliantly evidenced that *tes elpidos* functions as a metonymy of that which consolidates the entirety of "things that accompany salvation" (6:9 NASB). The suggestion of this metonymic denotation finds textual hegemony through the subsequent utilization of a parallelism in the phrase "so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end" (6:11).

A progression similar to the one in 6:17–19 is introduced, and this sequence consummates with *kleronomounton tas epaggelias* [inherit the promises] (6:12).

This culmination initiates the topic of a new superior hope that is the discussion of 6:17–19. The progression that follows reverses the sequence so that *tes elpidos* (the hope) and not *tes epaggelias* (the promise) is the climatic resonance corresponding to the supremacy of *elpidos* by virtue of it being a metonymy of all that precedes it.

A study of the verb *elpizo* [to hope] shows a much greater frequency of the sense of uncertainty than attributed to the noun *elpis*. Of the thirty-one citations of *elpizo* in the NT, the NASB translates the verb only three times (Lk 6:34 – expect; 2 Cor. 8:5 – had expected; 2 Cor. 13:6 – trust) with a word different than *hope*. The NLT translates *elpizo* six times (Rom. 8:25; 1 Pet. 1:3 – look forward to; Rom. 15:24 – planning to; 1 Cor. 16:7 – want to come; 2 Cor. 1:10 – our confidence; 1 Tim. 6:17 – trust) with an alternative word for *hope*.

In each case where both NASB and NLT choose a variant reading for *hope*, neither translation agrees with the other in word selection. Whenever the two versions do have the same reading, it is always when *elpizo* is translated as *hope* or one of its cognates.

It is strikingly interesting how much more prevalent the sense of uncertainty is with *elpizo* compared to *elpis*. Of the thirty-one times *elpizo* is used, seventeen references have the sense of uncertainty. In all but three citations (Lk 6:34; Acts 24:26; 2 Cor. 8:5), the uncertainty of hope is in the Louw and Nida domain (1), namely, “to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial” (p. 296). The most frequently sense of uncertainty is in the context of Paul’s (Rom. 15:24; 1 Cor. 16:7; Phil. 2:19; 2:23; 1 Tim. 3:14) and John’s (2 Jn 12; 3 Jn 14) desire for the fulfillment of some plans.

In each of these verses the present tense of the verb is used indicating a continual on-going hope in something that has no certainty. Furthermore, in all but four of the uncertainty passages (Lk 23:8 – imperfect; 2 Cor. 8:5 – aorist; Jn 5:45 and 1 Tim. 6:17 – perfect tense) the present tense is dominant. In all of these

verses the NASB translates *elpizo* as *hope* while in only two references (Romans 15:24 – I am planning to; 1 Corinthians 16:7 – I want to come) the NLT uses a different word than *hope*.

#### Optional Form?

This preceding analysis begs the question whether an optional term for *elpizo* would not be more suitable. Do the above references describing Paul’s and John’s hopes not merely express their

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### **There is simply no foundation to construct a hope to the point where its construal is void of any affinity with doubt or uncertainty if that hope is based on any temporal, earthly or wordly essence.**

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heartfelt wishes? Does 1 Corinthians 16:7 lend support for the potential—pending the context—overlapping relations of *elpizo* and *thelo* (to wish)?

In this text Paul again shares his desire with the Corinthian believers: “For I do not wish [*thelo*] to see you now just in passing; for I hope [*elpizo*] to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits.” Paul expresses a wish that is subsequently mimicked by a hope. The two literary units are an example of “synthetic parallelism [which] refers to a development of thought in which the second line adds ideas to the first” (Osborne, 2006, p. 227).

The substitution of *elpizo* for *thelo* does not by itself contribute any new sense of the phrase, but the addition of “to remain with you for some time” provides the development of thought. Again, concomitant with these terms is the reality of the uncertainty of the fulfillment of Paul’s wish and hope as expressed by the Third Class Conditional

Clause (Dana and Mantey, 1955) “if the Lord permits.”

As was explained in the discussion of Acts 24:14f, the writer used a specific word (*mellein*) to emphasize certainty. Likewise, in 1 Timothy 6:17, a particular term is used to explicitly highlight uncertainty by the inclusion of *adeloteti* (only occurs here in NT) which simply means *uncertainty*.

The verse is of interest because while uncertain hope is stressed concerning money, absolute certain hope is emphasized when referring to God. A perfectly plausible translation, which highlights the perfect tense of *elpizo*, of *mede elpikanai epi ploutou adeloteti*, *all epi theo to parechoonti hemin panta plousios eis apolausin* reads as follows: neither place your hope upon nor continue to hope upon the uncertainty of riches, but place your hope upon and continue to hope upon God who continually and richly supplies us with all things to enjoy (author’s translation based on Rienecker and Rogers, 1980).

One hope is uncertain; the other hope is absolutely certain void of any hint of doubt or uncertainty. And again the basis for this certainty/uncertainty is the object/person that hope is placed upon. This type of hope is somewhat akin to the Greek notion of hope.

While *elpizo* may be dominated by the sense of uncertainty, there are splendid references of its sense of absolute certainty. 1 Peter 1:13 encourages believers in Christ to “fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” In three other texts (1 Tim. 4:10; 5:5; 6:17) the NASB attributes great certainty to what is hoped for by using the construct “fix your hope on.”

#### In Didactic Materials

Given the dual nature of the terms *elpis/elpizo* as applied to the sense of certainty/uncertainty, how are these terms employed by the NT writers in the didactic material of the NT corpus? There are only seven instances (Lk 6:34; Jn 5:45; 1 Cor. 9:10, 10; Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess.



4:13; 1 Tim. 6:17) where the uncertain sense of *elpis/elpizo* occur in the didactic material. Two of these references (Lk 6:34; 1 Cor. 9:10, 10) are secondary, illustrative teaching devices utilized for emphasis of a primary instruction that is the focus of the discourse.

In three passages the writer either describes how a current hope in an OT figure is in need of correction in order that the hope will be centered on Christ (Jn 5:45), how the readers' former state of unbelief left them without hope (Eph. 2:12), and how the recipients' of the epistle can avoid grieving for their dead kin as those grieve who have no hope of a resurrection (1 Thess. 4:13). In only one verse is there a clear, unmistakable and uncompromising instruction for the people to not put their hope in something uncertain (1 Tim. 6:17).

What is poignantly missing is any dogmatic referent exhorting the believer to place their hope in anything uncertain. There simply is no foundation, based on this study of the terms, for a believer, or non-believer, to construct a hope to the point where its construal is void of any affinity with doubt or uncertainty, if that hope is based on any temporal, earthly or worldly essence.

#### More Issues

The size of this paper has far exceeded its intentioned parameters, and yet more issues have been mined that must be relegated to some other study. For example, of tremendous interest is the affinity of *elpizo* (to hope) with *thelo* (to wish) and *elpizo* with *pisteuo* (to believe).

#### Concluding Summary

The following points summarize the observations accrued from this study.

1. *Elpis/elpizo* do not inherently possess any quality of goodness (Rom. 15:13) or character of error (Jn 5:45). The context, or what is hoped for and what is the basis of this hope, determines the value of hope. It is therefore possible to have a sense of hope that is as the Greeks

would have said—easily deceived and dangerous (Bultmann, 1964).

2. *Elpis/elpizo* is dominated by a futuristic orientation.

3. This futuristic sense is in turn governed by a degree in the sense of certainty and uncertainty as ordained by the context. When a type of hope, as it relates to certainty/uncertainty, receives chastisement (1 Tim. 6:17a), it is not the object's/person's type of hope that is rebuked, but the harmony of that basis with the veracity of NT dogma (1 Thess. 4:13). Paul is never corrected in his hoping for things that were not in harmony with certainty (Phil. 2:23).

4. The Christian hope is an eschatological expectation upon which present confidence is based (Bultmann, p. 532).

5. Hope periodically clearly functions as a metonymy for all that which encompasses the entirety of the elements which constitute the eschatological expectation (Rom. 8:18–25).

6. The NT never instructs one to hope in what is uncertain, no matter how pious the substance hoped for is.

7. Most of all, for the believer in Jesus Christ is the hope which we have as an anchor for our souls (Heb. 6:19). **Θ**

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## Chuck Friesen

July 25, 1959–July 27, 2011

God blessed me incredibly by allowing me to run a significant leg of my life and ministry race alongside my close friend and colleague Chuck Friesen. His full legal name was Charles John Friesen, but everyone called him and knew him as Chuck.

He was my safe and trusted sounding board in matters of life, church leadership, theology, and now more recently also in matters of death.

Chuck was well known as an individual with personality and he was never afraid to show it. Chuck decided early in life that if it was worth doing, it was worth doing well and with a little flair.

From his early weight-lifting pursuits, to his truck driving and ownership style, to his pursuit of everything “Harley,” to the way he studied and preached

and prayed, Chuck was not afraid to allow everyone to see his God-given personality.

Chuck took great care of everything he owned, but there was no “object” in his life that captivated his attention the way his Bible did. He loved his Bible; he read it, he prayed it, he taught it, he studied it, he worked it, and he tried to faithfully live it.

Nearly every page of his Bible was marked with highlighters, arrows, notes, dates, and questions. He believed that God reveals himself to us humans most clearly in His Word. He believed the Word of God to be *alive*, and he believed that it held the key to abundant life here and eternal life hereafter!

Upon his request, this was the “object” that was placed on his casket at his funeral. He wanted no flowers there—only his Bible.

Chuck’s sincere interest in people and open, honest style of communication helped him gain a large circle of close friends. From his nieces and nephews and in-laws to the truck driver or bike rider who met him for the first time, people quickly felt close to him.

For nearly anyone, an encounter with

Chuck would include a good laugh, honest sharing of feelings, an invitation to talk about Jesus, and an offer for prayer.

When Chuck received his cancer diagnosis in August of 2009 he was quick to ask for the anointing and healing prayer written about in James 5. During this time of prayer and anointing with Chuck and his wife Julia, and a few other close friends, God gave us Galatians 4:13, “As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.”

That scripture connected with Chuck’s spirit. He began to take advantage of every opportunity to preach and he began to preach with authority and conviction like never before. There are many inside and outside of our church family that sincerely miss Chuck’s candid style of preaching the truth of God’s Word.

Chuck Friesen fully realized the reality of his faith when he was relieved of his suffering here on Earth on July 27, 2011.

I, together with the whole Pleasant Valley Church family, miss Chuck incredibly, but we also consider it a huge blessing to have had the opportunity to do church with him and to be inspired by his love for the Bible and his love for Jesus.

Pastor Darren Plett  
Pleasant Valley EMC

## Feature Sermon

### Revelation 1:1–8

# ‘Hey, Is This For Me?’

Darryl G. Klassen

Rev. Darryl G. Klassen, BRS, MA (Christian Studies), is senior pastor of Kleefeld EMC (Man.) and editor of this journal. The sermon series he introduces here ran from September 2010 to April 2011.



This is a natural question we all ask when it comes to the book of Revelation: “Is this for me?” There has been a predominantly futuristic emphasis given to Revelation so that we tend *not* to think of it as practical for our present life.

With the images of beasts, dragons, and heavenly warfare, what clue do we have that it could be of any use for us? It is a scary book that we find hard to read. How could this book be meant for you and me?

One writer went so far as to say that it is an unnecessary book for Christians. What he meant was, if we have the gospels and believe in Jesus, we have salvation. Nothing more is needed for Christian life and discipleship.

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**With the images of beasts, dragons, and heavenly warfare, what clue do we have that the book of Revelation could be of any use for us?**

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If that were entirely true, then why did God put this book in the Bible? How can Revelation be helpful for us today in our present struggles? That all depends on your view of the book.

There are four ways to look at Revelation:

*The Preterist View:* this view believes that John wrote Revelation as a message to believers in his own time. Everything that is written here happened in the past.

*The Futurist View:* believes it is largely a prophecy of events still to come. Everything is still in the future.

*The Historicist View:* believes it is a chart of the whole history of the church from Christ's first coming to his second.

*The Idealist View:* believes that the messages that John gave to the first century church and the prophecies of the future are principles which are always true for Christians of any age. These are timeless truths of ongoing spiritual conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The approach I will share with you over the next few months is a combination of the Preterist and Idealist views with a hint of the Futurist view. I believe that John wrote to churches in his day about things that mattered to them in their times (Preterist). I also believe that we can learn those same lessons (Idealist). And we can't ignore that there

are some things that will still come in the future (Futurist).

I realize that there are many views of Revelation and the End Times. Some of you believe in Premillennial or dispensational views, much like the *Left Behind* series. So you may disagree with my views, and that's okay. My goal is twofold: that you will see Jesus revealed, and that you will study this book for yourself.

As we begin with the first eight verses of this book we will see that this book is for us.

### 1. What God Has Done in Christ

The word *Apocalypse* has been thrown around in movies and popular culture as signifying the End of the world. *Apocalypse* has come to mean nuclear holocaust or some kind of pandemic that wipes out major portions of the population. But the word *apocalypse* actually means "to reveal." So Revelation begins:

"The revelation (apocalypse) of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1:1–2).

So what is it that is revealed? First of all, note the chain of communication: God gave this revelation to Jesus, who gave it to an angel, who then gave it to John, who wrote it down for the first century church, whom he calls God's servants. And now we are reading it.

Are we not servants of God? Then it is for us too by virtue of this service. That's quite a progression. But first and foremost it is a revelation of Jesus Christ. It is God's explanation of what God has done in Christ. It is from God and Jesus about Jesus.

Already we have a hint here of why we would want to read Revelation. It's about Jesus, and if you love Jesus, you want to know everything about him.

Another hint is in the wording John uses. He wrote that this revelation is about "what must soon take place." This is a phrase borrowed and modified from Daniel. There are a lot of Old Testament references in Revelation and we must read them to correctly understand this book.

Daniel 2:28-29 says, "...but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown king Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these: As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen."

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened: The Message of Revelation* (IVP, 1975), 23.

Daniel uses the expression “in days to come” or “latter days” to imply that what Nebuchadnezzar saw was a distant reality that would be fulfilled in the future. These were disturbing visions but the comfort for Nebuchadnezzar was that they were a long way off.

John now writes centuries later “what must soon take place.” John’s wording suggest that he expected the final tribulation, the defeat of evil, and the coming kingdom of God, which Daniel expected in the “latter days,” would begin in his own generation. In fact, John believed that it had already begun to happen.<sup>2</sup>

One of my favourite lines from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the movie, is where Elizabeth Swan finds herself trapped on the pirate ship with the undead pirates. Captain Barbossa says to her, “I hope you like ghost stories, because you’re in one.” That is the feeling we get with Revelation 1:1–2. The Tribulation is not something future; it’s now; you’re in it. And if we’re in it, then this book is more practical than you know. We’ll see why as we continue to study this book.

For now, we are charged with reading this book because it is the Word of God, the testimony of Jesus Christ. That alone makes it relevant for us as servants of God.

## 2. So That You Would Be Blessed

There is another reason we need to read Revelation. The opening words promise that we will be blessed if we read this prophecy.

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are

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## John saw the death and resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of the end. The kingdom of God has come, the battle has begun, tribulation is imminent and Jesus is coming.

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those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near” (1:3).

I thought recently about the meaning of being blessed. You know how we say, “Oh, you are such a blessing to me.” What do we mean? I think we mean that this person is a benefit to us. We have an advantage or an encouragement from knowing this person. They bless us with their attitude or graciousness.

If you read Revelation you will be benefited. You will have an advantage in life. This is what I believe it means to be blessed if you read or hear the words of this book.

This revelation was given so that believers who read these words would be blessed by having a heavenly perspective on Christ’s work in history and, as a result, obey his commands.

You see, we tend to look at the problems and troubles of life through human lenses. Depending on how we view the book of Revelation, I believe that we can have spiritual lenses to see

what’s really going on.

What *is* going on? We are in the midst of a great spiritual battle. The conflict we see in Juarez, Mexico, is to the human mind, a drug war. From a heavenly perspective, it is a battle for the souls of men and women. That is why we need a blessing such as this, to see as God sees.

John says, “...because the time is near,” suggesting that a time of trouble is coming. Many have wondered if John spoke figuratively about the Second Coming of Jesus. They then quote that with God a day is as a thousand years, and that “near” doesn’t mean now.

John had no such thought. Jesus said, “The time has come...The kingdom of God is near” (Mark 1:15). When Jesus said, “near” he meant “here.” These words carry the same meaning as in an invasion. If someone said an invading army is near, he means they’re on the beaches, not miles away—they’re here. John saw the death and resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of the end. The kingdom of God has come, the battle has begun, tribulation is imminent and Jesus is coming. That is the blessing of reading Revelation in these beastly times.

## 3. Our Need for Grace and Peace

John recognized that his original readers would be under stress and feeling anxiety with the present conflict. So he takes on a letter style of greeting to encourage the churches. He writes:

“John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia...” (1:4). John gives no further identification so we assume that the churches know who he is—we also assume that this is the John who wrote the gospel.

These seven churches were real churches in the first century. There were

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2 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1999), 182.



more than seven churches but John chooses these. Does that mean that this letter is only for them? Does it also mean that it isn't for us since it is so specific? No to both of those questions.

"Seven" in the Old Testament was a number signifying fullness or completeness. So the seven churches represent the whole church. Later, in chapters two and three, there is a charge for all churches to hear and obey the words of the letter.

John then breaks out in a doxology or hymn of praise to God: "Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:4–5a). Masked in praise of God the Father, the Holy Spirit (the seven spirits), and Jesus Christ, is the encouragement to the churches.

This encouragement comes in the threefold description of Jesus. John calls him *the faithful witness*, a reference to the fact that Jesus persevered as a faithful witness to the Father in the face of persecution and even death. Standing before Pilate he held to the Father's mission for him to usher in the kingdom of God (John 18:36).

John calls him the *firstborn from the dead*, referring to how Jesus overcame death to introduce the New Creation. And John calls him the *ruler of the kings of the earth*, telling how Jesus defeated his enemies on the cross and subjected all satanic forces.<sup>3</sup>

How is this an encouragement? These believers were about to enter into severe

persecution for their faith, as we will see in coming chapters. They would be tempted to compromise their faith and give up their witness of Jesus in the face of death.

But Jesus was faithful to death; and in his death he overcame his enemies and became a conqueror. God would empower them to do the same—to be a witness of Jesus Christ through all kinds of suffering and trial, even death. Jesus had been where they were and overcame; they should be able to do the same in his name.

This is the meaning of grace and peace in tough times. Because of God's sending Jesus to die we can look beyond suffering and even death and be at peace. This principle is as true today as it was for the first century church.

"To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (1:5b–6). I remember years ago a pastor once said that the Bible never said Jesus loves us. It was implied but never said.

Well, look here. Jesus loves us and has freed us from the bondage of sin. As well, he has made us to be kings and priests in his kingdom. Note, not "*will* make us" but "*has* made us." Now put it all together.

God sent Jesus to die for us and conquer death; he broke the power of Satan and set up his kingdom and is reigning now; while we wallowed in our sin like pigs in a sty, unable to get out, he freed us from sin; then he lifted us up really high and made us royalty in his

kingdom—we are priests and kings—all for the Glory of God!

Where Israel failed to obey God and be those kings and priests he planned for them to be (Exodus 19:6), he chose the church to be the True Israel. If we want to enjoy these incredible blessings in God, then we must look to Jesus' example and endure Satan's hatred of us in all its forms. This is the theme of the book: enduring all things in Christ and for Christ.

#### 4. Our Need for a Saviour

The conclusion of this greeting brings us one final encouragement. We read, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen" (1:7).

This verse is the combination of two Old Testament verses. The first is Daniel 7:13, which says, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven..." This verse foretold of a king that God would send to rule over all the nations. John's use of it applies the kingship to Jesus to show that he is the fulfillment of this prophecy.

The second verse comes from Zechariah 12:10: "They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son." This refers to an end-time period when God will defeat his enemies and Israel would be rescued.

John's use of it suggests that when Jesus comes, not only for the second and final time, he comes into a situation and reveals himself to people and they will grieve his presence. For some, that means they will turn to him and believe in him as Saviour and Lord. For others, grief takes a strange form and can become anger, bitterness, and even rage. When these meet Jesus, the one they have rejected, they will weep as only lost people can weep.

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**If we want to enjoy these incredible blessings in God, then we must look to Jesus' example and endure Satan's hatred of us in all its form. This is the theme of the book: enduring all things in Christ and for Christ.**

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3 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Eerdmans, 1997).

For believers, God is the God of history. Into history, God has inserted himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus come grace and peace to those who believe; mourning for those who reject him, but hope for those facing tough times, because we believe that suffering and death are not the end. Jesus is proof that there is more beyond the temporary pains that Satan inflicts on us.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty’ (1:8). There is no one like our God, no one at all. Apart from him there is no

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## Jesus is proof that there is more beyond the temporary pains that Satan inflicts on us.

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God. Apart from him there is no Saviour (Isaiah 44:6).

This book is for you and for me. One writer said, “The book of Revelation repeatedly states that its contents relate to the time at hand (1:1, 3; 22:6, 10). It informs the readers that its message is applicable to the time in which they living: the conflict between God and Satan, Christ and the Antichrist, the

Holy Spirit and false prophets, the church and immorality is occurring in their lifetime.”<sup>4</sup>

As we comb through the images and scenes of Revelation, I encourage you to pray for understanding. Here are some suggestions for prayer:

1. Pray for Jesus to be revealed to you as the author intended.
2. Where you struggle with something that is preached or something that you read in the text, pray for God to give you a discerning heart to eventually grasp God’s truth.
3. Pray for the excitement you feel in approaching this series to be translated into an excitement for Jesus Christ himself.

The truth of these pages is relevant for your life today. Let us prayerfully receive the message of Revelation. Amen.  $\Theta$

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4 Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation* (Baker, 2001).

## Book Review

***Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament***, Willem A. VanGemeran (Zondervan, 1990), 390 pp., \$30, ISBN 9780310211389. Reviewed by Michael Doerksen (La Crete), Diploma in Biblical Studies (NBC), Diploma in Business Administration (GPRC), MA in Leadership and Management (Briercrest Seminary).

Willem A. VanGemeran, PhD, is a professor of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Perhaps his most significant work was that of being the senior editor of *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology*. He has not limited himself to academic endeavours, but has taken the opportunity to preach in Reformed churches, resulting in the pastoral concern evident in this book.

VanGemeran starts with an overview of prophecy. The role of prophet is developed as shown in the Old Testament; interaction between the human and divine was the focus as “the prophets viewed human activities

from God’s vantage point” (28) and communicated this to Israel. Emerging out of the picture is the difference between the true and false prophets.

The first section of the book creates a contrast between religion and revelation. Either God or man is the foundational source of activity; man’s religion ends up being manipulative whereas revelation seeks to be submissive to God.

VanGemeran uses *realpolitik* and *vox populi* to express the systematization of revelation into religion. “*Realpolitik* gives coherence to all human structures (power, society, economics, and cult)” (26) while “*Vox populi* rewards all who support the common ideals but punishes anyone who challenges them” (26).

At this point the book moves into contents of the prophetic books, focusing on the thrust of the messages given rather than a systematic exegetic breakdown. For each book VanGemeran has a short section on the prophet and his time as well as a section dealing with the literary form and structure of the book.

After going through the Minor Prophets, VanGemeran develops some of the motifs that were unveiled. In doing this, he prepares the reader for the use of motifs in the Major Prophets.

Instead of keeping motifs as the focus, the variety of motifs is used to develop the more complex messages of the Major Prophets. Thus there are threads that tie

all of the prophetic books together. They speak to each other and together bring out more fully the message of God.

VanGemerens ends the book trying to bring Christ to the forefront and how faith in Him can influence our application of what was written earlier. Three ways VanGemerens suggests this can be done include: that the Holy Spirit “would involve the Christian community in the progress of transformation” (355);

*Tota Scriptura*, that the whole of Scripture be heard; and that the “people of God be rooted in the *progress of redemption*” (355). Including these aspects in one’s faith allows God to move individuals in ways He wants instead of being confined by the structures set out by humankind.

It needs to be applauded that the theme evolving out of the book is God free to act in any way He desires. Not only that, but God is acting in a way to bring people to reliance on Him. There is no room left for humans to limit God—a case in point being, prophecies are not fulfilled at only one point in history, but are being fulfilled progressively. All of this points to the redemptive history of the world; the way God has acted in the past does not limit how He acts in the future.

As an Old Testament scholar, VanGemerens shows how the Old Testament is necessary study in today’s context. To a large extent Old Testament prophecy has come to pass, but still points to a fuller future fulfilment. This may be a result of his covenantal theology as well.

He also shows concern for “modern revival of Marcionism” (376) and the possibility of denial of the Old Testament as Scripture. Traditionally, Anabaptist readings of Scripture focus largely on

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**Traditionally, Anabaptist readings of Scripture focus largely on Christ and the Gospels and have the potential to deny the Old Testament out of neglect. The author’s voice reminds us that without the Prophets our understanding of Christ’s ministry would lose richness and potency.**

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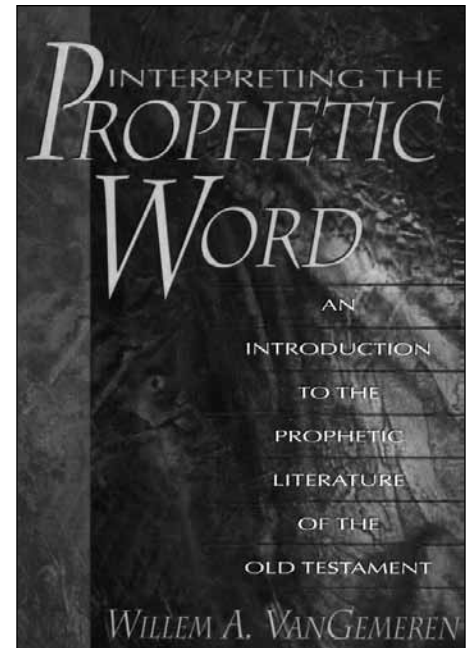
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Christ and the Gospels and have the potential to deny the Old Testament out of neglect. The author’s voice reminds us that without the Prophets our understanding of Christ’s ministry would lose richness and potency.

Throughout the book readers hear the call “not to depend on cultural, social, political, religious, or economic structures for their identity” (13). VanGemerens is standing against the perceived mindset that Christians today have things in perfect order and thus can be complacent in their programs; we have not arrived. Here his voice joins Anabaptists in the pursuit of discipleship and championing it above human structures.

It is disappointing that only limited space is given to the outward expression of service because service moves a relationship from private to public. For example, Christ’s personal relationship with the Father showed itself in his actions toward the paralyzed man in Mark 2:9–12.

VanGemerens’s treatment of the Day of the Lord is helpful for those who want insight into Christ’s return. It is also a good book to help bring depth of knowledge in regards to eschatological theology of the prophets without committal to a specific chronological



model. By approaching the topic thoughtfully VanGemerens avoids contentious arguments while developing the reader’s understanding of God’s will.

Overall, VanGemerens’s voice joins Evangelical Anabaptists as we strive to walk with God in greater obedience and fellowship. Anabaptist practical theology would sharpen aspects in the book relating to application of the prophetic message because centuries of radical discipleship have taught important lessons.

As mentioned earlier, this book reminds us of the need to study all of Scripture for a full understanding of who God is and how He desires us to relate to both fellow believers and non-believers.

This book is intended to be an introduction for those applying the Word in ministry settings. As difficult as the prophets may seem, VanGemerens shows them to have common concepts that help the reader see the applicability today.

Pastors and small group leaders would benefit from this book. Questions are provided at the end of the chapters to help prime Bible study discussions.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in learning how the Old and New Testaments relate to each other. ☺

# The Final Word

**H**ere it is proper to recall how the righteous died for the unrighteous, when we were yet sinners and enemies; how the spotless Lamb in the fire of affliction on the tree of the cross was sacrificed as an eternal propitiation for us. The Creator of all, through whom all things were made, was completely broken for our sakes. He who was above all the children of men became the most unworthy of all and was counted with evildoers. The innocent One bore the burden of the whole world, blotted out and made atonement with His crimson blood for the guilt of all, as the Scriptures declare, I restored that which I had not taken. In a word we should recall how that Jesus Christ through His obedience undid the disobedience of Adam and all his seed and by His painful death restored life.

– Menno Simons, 1539/1558

From the “Foundation of Christian Doctrine,” *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*. Translated by Leonard Verduin. Edited by J. C. Wenger. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956/1984, 145.

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