

# F.A.C.S. REPORT

FOUNDATION for the ADVANCEMENT of CHRISTIAN STUDIES  
P.O. Box 241 Engadine NSW 2233

"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5)

Vol. 13, No. 4,

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April 1994

In this issue of FACS REPORT, we relate correspondence between the Rev. Dr. Gordon G. Powell and our contributor, Mr. Angus R. McGillivray.

Many Christians will remember Dr. Powell as the former Presbyterian minister of Scots Church, Melbourne, who courageously held the high moral ground as he waged battle on radio with the God-hating feminist, Claudia Wright, and other humanistic protagonists and sceptics. Others will remember Dr. Powell for his ecumenical spirit which led him to invite in 1974, the then Roman Catholic Archbishop, Sir Frank Little, to preach in the pulpit of Scots Church.

Yet others will remember him for one of his fourteen popular "positive-thinking", inspirational books, such as his *Happiness is a Habit*, *The Secret of Serenity*, and *The Blessing of Belief*; or for his Scriptural "tonic cards", of which some 4,000,000 were distributed during his ministry years at Scots Church, Collins Street, Melbourne and St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Macquarie Street, Sydney.

Inside each "tonic card" the following well-known words were printed which memorialize Dr. Powell's "positive-thinking" approach to his rich and full life and ministry as a radio broadcaster, preacher, speaker, writer, and foundation supporter of A.A., for all of which services he was awarded membership of the Order of Australia:

Remember that negative, resentful, unkind or impure thoughts sink into the unconscious mind to produce tension and depression. The habit of right thinking produces serenity, health, happiness, power and a new life. Place this card where you can see it often. Repeat the positive thought until it sinks well into the system. Let the card remind you to turn to God for moments of silent prayer. Learn to pray the affirmative way.

However he is remembered, Dr. Powell remains one of Australia's best

## A REPLY TO DR. POWELL WITH A REJOINDER

by Angus R. McGillivray

known and best loved church leaders who has encouraged many thousands of Christians to reconcile Christianity with the claims of humanistic thought by an inspirational appreciation and a subjective, experiential interpretation of God's Word.

Dr. Powell's approach to the Scriptures and to Christian life is well conveyed by his famous "tonic cards" and "positive-thinking" attitude to life, and well exemplified by his response to Mr. McGillivray's series on Open Schooling:

While I agree whole-heartedly that Christian education has to be Bible-based, I feel it is even more important for it to be Christ-centred. Accordingly I feel we must not be too rigid in our interpretation of the Bible. The Truth will prevail and if other sincere people interpret it differently in the light of their own experience I feel we must at least listen to them. One of the greatest saints I ever worked with used to say, "We don't have to take the Bible literally, but we do have to take it seriously."<sup>1</sup>

In this report in which we publish Mr. McGillivray's reply to Dr. Powell, we commence with an extract of Dr. Powell's letter to Mr. McGillivray in order to introduce their interchange of Dr. Noel Weeks' article entitled, "The hermeneutical problem of Genesis 1-11," wherein Dr. Weeks shows that

"Much of the modern discussion of hermeneutics is inconclusive because it involves an interchange between men who differ not at the level of hermeneutics but at the more fundamental level of religious presuppositions."<sup>2</sup> We close our report with Dr. Powell's rejoinder to highlight this reality.

We gratefully acknowledge and thank Dr. Powell for his permission to publish extracts of his personal letters to Mr. McGillivray, and thank him for his interest in Mr. McGillivray's contributions to F.A.C.S.

Dear Angus,

Thank you for what you say about *The Blessing of Belief*. I have just re-read the chapter on the Bible which was written three years before my close association with Billy Graham. It was written out of my training in the Theological Hall in Melbourne and post-graduate work in Glasgow where I studied Aramaic and even a bit of Syriac. From the point of view of the theological professors in Melbourne and Glasgow it was largely what they taught, if a little more on the conservative side. After working with Billy and sitting with him on the platform night after night as he quoted the Bible I was often reminded of his own saying, "When I quote the Bible I feel I have a sword in my hand." It made me realise that however much we may differ on

1. The Rev. Dr. Gordon G. Powell, personal letter to Mr. McGillivray dated November 4, 1989. For Mr. McGillivray's series, see his "Open Schooling and the Impetus for Parental Participation, Part 1," *Probe*, No. 27, July 1989, and "Open Schooling . . . , Part 2," *Probe*, No. 28, September 1989, available from F.A.C.S. for a donation.

2. In *themelios*, Vol. 4, No. 1, September 1978, pp. 12-19, at p. 13.



F.A.C.S. REPORT is published monthly by the FOUNDATION for the ADVANCEMENT of CHRISTIAN STUDIES, a non-denominational educational organization. A free six month subscription is available upon request. Donations are invited, and those who send a donation of \$15 or more will receive a full year's subscription. Foreign subscriptions: a minimum donation of \$30, payable in Australian currency, is required for a year's subscription. Cheques should be made payable to F.A.C.S.

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Editor: Ian Hodge

pened to the Holy Spirit?" (John 14:26).

Thanks again for your letter and fascinating enclosures.

Sincerely,

Gordon.

Dear Gordon,

Thankyou for your letter and enclosures of July which I found most thought-provoking.

In regard to your comment that "To me the doctrine of 'progressive revelation' fits the facts", you might be interested to know that the 'facts' are throwing more and more doubt on such a perspective.

Consider Dr. Michael Denton's work as a molecular biologist, and in particular, his book, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* which clearly indicates the growing crisis in biology for the standard theories of evolution.<sup>6</sup> Denton's work especially questions and threatens the whole framework of Darwinian evolution and its principle of progressive continuity.<sup>7</sup>

Denton's work also highlights the Biblical truth that the processes of nature are not in control of man nor man's destiny. The Bible places man and the covenant above nature and well indicates, as Dr. Gary North has well stated, that "nature fights man or cooperates with man in terms of mankind's ethical battle against God or cooperation with God. This is the neglected lesson of Genesis 3. If mankind rebels against God, then nature will rebel against mankind."<sup>8</sup>

Because the Bible teaches the uniformitarianism of God's being and character, we do not need to look to nature to find unchanging principles or laws, for nature is cursed; we need to look instead to God and His Word which verbalizes and reveals His ethically fixed laws.

Hence, when Professor Birch suggested that you should title your March 1959 address as 'Genesis and Evolution' he seriously erred as a Christian and failed to see that the two sequences are antithetical. Because general revelation is a revelation of

## Losing the Battle

by Ian Hodge

Gun ownership, like education, has been a contentious issue over the past decade or more. The advocates of gun control persist in attempting to remove the right of self-defense with the mistaken belief that somehow disarming innocent and law-abiding citizens is the way in which to eliminate crime.

In Australia, as in the United States, the battle has been fought over a number of issues. There are some, such as this newsletter, that have argued from biblical principles. There are others, such as the various sporting shooters groups, who, lacking the biblical principles, have attempted to argue on pragmatic grounds against gun control.

The recent passing of the Brady Bill in the United States, however, is a clear indication that unless battles are fought on established and firm moral principles taken from the Bible, those opposing increasing government control over the lives of ordinary citizens cannot win the battle. This Bill provides for government checking before a person may own a handgun. It creates a national database of gun owners, and governments, even in the modern era, have not been known to use this information for the betterment of mankind. They use this kind of information for control — not the control of wicked men but the control of the ordinary citizen.

The passage of the Brady Bill is evidence of what happens when a battle is waged on pragmatic grounds rather than on the grounds of first principles. The American National Rifle Association (NRA), a very large lobby group on the gun ownership issue, fought the battle on pragmatic grounds. However, under its recent leadership, the NRA had softened its stand on the ownership issue. It compromised its position on the ownership issue and subsequently was unable to maintain political pressure on members of Congress and the Senate to vote to maintain gun freedom.

Unfortunately, the NRA has received some publicity in Australia in recent months, since it has been willing

the details in some powerful way it is the Word of God. Our own minister often introduces the Scripture on Sunday morning by saying, "Listen for the Word of God in. . ."<sup>3</sup>

During the 1959 Crusade in Sydney the book quoted by Noel Weeks on the last page [of his article] came out and made a great impression on a certain bookseller in that city. . .<sup>4</sup> He asked me to read it and if I saw fit to write a letter commending it. He wanted to send the book and the letter as a gift to several hundred ministers. I was impressed by it, especially its emphasis on the truth Weeks repeats several times that the Bible is its own interpreter. I had no difficulty in writing a positive letter about it. I hope others were helped as I was. At the same time I hope it did not encourage them in a rigid literalism. To me the doctrine of 'progressive revelation' fits the facts.

I sent the enclosed summary of a sermon of mine (entitled, *Genesis or Evolution!*)<sup>5</sup> to Prof. Charles Birch, committed Christian and Challis Professor of Biology in the University of Sydney. He replied saying he liked everything except the title which should have been "Genesis and Evolution."

I could write an article just as long in comments on Week's article. Much of it appeals to me, but I would like to ask him one question, "What hap-

3. See further, Gordon Powell, *The Blessing of Belief* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1957), especially chapter 4: "Why Believe in the Bible?" Dr. Powell, in his personal letter to Mr. McGillivray dated November 4, 1989 said concerning this book and this chapter, "I wrote that over 30 years ago and while I would modify some paras (from a more conservative point of view) I stand by the main thesis."

4. See Noel Weeks, *art. cit.*, p. 19 at note 18: J. I. Packer, *'Fundamentalism' and the Word of God* (London: IVP, 1958).

5. Extract from an address by Rev. Gordon Powell, M.A., B.D., broadcast by the A.B.C. from St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Macquarie Street, Sydney, 15th March, 1959.

6. London: Burnett Books, 1985.

7. See, for example, *ibid.*, pages 271 and 353.

8. See Gary North, *Is the World Running Down? Crisis in the Christian Worldview* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1988) at p. 186.



God, general and special revelation are revelational of the same sequence. Denton's and other scientists' work indicates this. The divergence between the revelation of God and the theories of current, anti-theistic science are well illustrated by Professor Rendle-Short's table which I have enclosed herewith.<sup>9</sup>

Since the Bible teaches the primacy of faith, consistent, Bible-believing Christians must affirm that the Bible is the foundation of all human thought. Indeed, as I argued in my paper on Liberation Theology,<sup>10</sup> we must, as creatures who are subordinately dependant on our Creator and Redeemer, reason analogically: our interpretations must be reinterpretations of God's revealed interpretation.

Hence, "The truths of science, if they are to be accepted, must be in conformity to biblical revelation. There are not two truths - 'natural science' and biblical revelation but rather one truth: science in conformity to biblical revelation. And what is true of natural science — the maninterpreted regularities of the observed universe — must also be true of man's speculation in other areas of life."<sup>11</sup>

I was interested to note that you refer to Professor Birch as a "committed Christian," for in my reading for an article on Biblical agriculture, I find Birch's ideas to be otherwise. At best I have to the conclusion that Birch baptizes humanism and promotes a secularized counterfeit of a victory oriented faith. He wants the fruits, but not the roots of Christianity.

Birch's revolutionary transformation of society is to be conducted by an elite of people — "the first citizens of the Fourth World" — "who have a vision of the transformation through which we must pass." One such visionary and fourthworld citizen that Birch promotes is the homosexual pervert, J.M. Keynes who espoused the repudiation of "all versions of the doctrine of original sin, of there being insane and irrational springs of wickedness in most men."<sup>12</sup>

Keynes gave the Western world a large dose of intellectual AIDS. Ideas have consequences. Birch's promotion of ideas associated with apostate, perverted men clearly indicates that he, like Professor Douglas Vickers, a self-appointed Christian prophet of Keynes, have sold their spiritual birth-

rights for a mess of academic pottage and a desire to enslave men to a statist tyranny in the name of Christ.

As consistent, Bible-believing Christians we must affirm, as Ian Hodge has superbly demonstrated in his critique of Professor Vickers and Christianized keynesian economics, "To the extent that Christians adopt the conclusions of humanist man . . . they have thereby adopted the presuppositions of humanist man."<sup>13</sup>

By God's grace, we are not flying blind nor walking in the dark. God has given us His Holy Spirit to enable us to comprehend and obey His revealed standards and stipulations for godly living. Such a consideration brings me to your question concerning Noel Weeks: "What happened to the Holy Spirit? (John 14:26)."

Here it is important to see the work of the Holy Spirit as a ministry that is carried out in conjunction with the already given Word of God. The Holy Spirit is always faithful to the Word of the Son and witnesses to the Son. Hence, the Holy Spirit does not oppose God's law, but rather, empowers obedience to it.

Since we are ethically regenerated as Christians and have God's law in our hearts and minds, as Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 8:10 and 10:16 affirm, we can, therefore, progressively discipline ourselves, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, to think, to speak, and to act in accordance with God's law.

Furthermore, because the law of God is a revelation of God's character, and because restitution has been made by Christ, Christians are delivered from the curse or condemnation of the law, but not the obligations of the law. Hence, the canon of Christian ethics and the doctrine of the presence of the living Spirit of Christ in the ongoing church is only open-ended to the extent that our sanctification is an ongoing process of maturity in Christ: the progressive working out in all areas of our life and belief of the comprehensive implications of the completed work of Christ imputed to us at the moment of our justification. See further the chapter entitled, "The Spirit's Dynamic for Living" in Dr. Greg Bahnsen's book, *By This Standard. The Authority of God's Law Today*.<sup>14</sup> I would also encourage you to read the

to support shooters in this country on the gun ownership questions. It might well be a possibility that the NRA was influenced by Australian shooters groups, since in this country, the sporting shooters have not been at the forefront to maintain the freedom to own and bear firearms. Like so many groups that get involved in government legislation, they have gained for themselves a special privilege. For example, shooting clubs have lobbied for gun ownership only after people have passed instruction from one of these officially recognised gun clubs. This amounts to asking the government to grant a legislated monopoly in favour of existing gun clubs.

This shows that whenever ordinary people who do not acknowledge the moral principles of the Bible get mixed up in political affairs we get more legislative control rather than less. This should not surprise us, since man, in sin, is looking for a saviour and a means to appease his guilty conscience. When people reject Christ as Saviour they seek an alternative, and this almost always winds up being the political state.

It is also a lesson that we cannot trust our future to the pragmatists of this world, even when they say they agree with our position. Ultimately, they have no reason to maintain their position, and they will sell out for a perceived advantage somewhere. Without the Bible as a firm guide, men will always shift their position and make bad judgements, no matter how well-meaning and well-educated they might be.

But we are told in the Bible we should put our trust in Him and not in men. We should place our complete and unshaking faith in His Word and its moral principles, not the pragmatic arguments of men and women who happen to mean well. Anything less than this is a denial of the faith.

At the same time, this indicates just how poorly the Christians are faring. There are few distinctively Christian groups who have firmly fixed principles taken from the Bible. They often have ideas that cannot be justified, such as a recent publication which wants the government to put more money into helping families. (Where does it think the government gets the money in the first place?) To call for wealth redistribution, even for

9. See Prof. John Rendle-Short, *Man: Ape or Image. The Christian Dilemma* (San Diego, California: Master Books), 1984, 2nd edn., Fig. 24/1 at p. 223.

10. See further, Angus R. McGillivray, "Liberation Theology, Nicaragua and the Politics of Slavery, Part 1," *F.A.C.S. REPORT*, Vol. 9, No. 4, April 1990, and "Liberation Theology . . . , Part 2," *F.A.C.S. REPORT*, Vol. 9, No. 5, May 1990, available from F.A.C.S. for a donation.

11. See Gary North, *Moses and Pharaoh. Dominion Religion Versus Power Religion* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985), at p. 242.

12. See Charles Birch, *Confronting the Future. Australia and the World: the next hundred years* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), at p. 53.

13. See further, Ian Hodge, *Baptized Inflation. A Critique of "Christian" Keynesianism* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986), at p. 255.



chapter by Professor John Frame entitled, "The Spirit and the Scriptures" in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, editors., *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*<sup>15</sup> which deals with the Holy Spirit's work in revelation, inspiration, and internal testimony.

I trust that you in turn will find my comments thought-provoking as I did yours.

Thank you for writing.

Yours in the service of our Creator and Redeemer King,

Angus.

Dear Angus,

I read your much-appreciated letter . . . and most of the enclosed pages which you so kindly photo-statted for me. Since then I have re-read your letter and the rest of the printed material. It is all very convincing and yet when I sit down to think it over some-how I can't say, "Yes, that's the reality." It does not square with my view of the universe or my personal experience at the level of faith. I would need to write a small book to explain that and to discuss a hundred points that you have raised and also the writers you quote who are unknown to me and are not quoted by the theologians I have read. (I must confess I haven't read much theology in recent years — I prefer books of sermons by the great preachers and Christian biography. Philosophy, metaphysics and theology I always found hard work. A devotional book from which I received a blessing in the last month or two was Scott Peck's *What Return Shall I Make?* Knowing him personally I was astonished at his spiritual pilgrimage. Scott is the son of one of the four judges in our [Christ Church, Pawling] New York congregation. You will recall he wrote the best-seller *The Road Less Travelled* being the road of religion as against psychology.)

When I described Charles Birch as a 'committed Christian' I was describing the man I knew personally in our Sydney days which, of course, came to an end 25 years ago. We honoured him because he was a respected scientist standing up for religion in

Sydney University which in those days was aggressively anti-Christian. Since then Charles has taken a stand on some issues which has puzzled me and, if he is reported correctly, disappointed me. e.g. he defended Barbara Thiering. He may have been defending her right to freedom of speech, not her views of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

As for the suggestion that God's unchangeable law is to be found in the Old Testament I just cannot accept. The New Testament is the *New Testament*. There are many parts of the Old Testament that worry me if I am told to believe the whole of it is inspired by God. I cannot believe the God of Jesus inspired Psalm 137:9. I still find 'progressive revelation' a truth which enables me to keep Jesus Christ at the centre of my faith and believe He is with us today, still leading us into all truth.

This evening I dug out the somewhat battered leaflet about St. Stephen's. . . . I'd like you to look at the photo of the Wednesday congregation. As you will see the majority are young men and women. In addition to the crowd in the Church on Wednesdays, and sometimes also on Sunday in those days there would be up to 300 more in the hall below watching on closed circuit TV. What brought them along? Insofar as I was preaching theology it was the theology of my book *The Blessing of Belief*, a collection of Wednesday sermons. But mostly my sermons were like those in my best-seller *Happiness is a Habit*, based on the Sermon on the Mount. I am not saying I am right because many hundreds came to hear me preach as they did not come for my predecessor or my successor, but it does encourage me to think I was not far off the track. You can bluff some of the people some of the time, but you can't keep it up for 14 years. (Incidentally looking at the photo tonight I realised for the first time how lucky we were to have a Church entirely without columns or pillars.)<sup>16</sup>

Thank you for the trouble you have taken in writing, Angus. I will look forward to your future contributions to theological thought with great interest.

Sincerely,

Gordon.

apparently noble causes, such as establishing the biblical family, is not the way to win the battle for the hearts and minds of the people in this nation.

Speaking to a group of students at Davidson College in 1868, R.L. Dabney made the observation that "not only the agents, but the victims of unrighteous oppression, are usually degraded by their unavenged wrongs." If this is true, and we have little reason to doubt its veracity, then the citizens in the so-called free democracies of the West have been consistently degraded now for decades. Little wonder that crime is on the increase and that, no matter what action is taken by the governments of this world the situation does not improve. On the basis of Dabney's observation, their increasing legislation of unrighteous laws will only degrade the people further.

This, in turn, leads to further problems. "Every down-trodden people is impelled almost irresistibly to seek escape from the injustice which can no longer be resisted by force, through the agency of concealments, of duplicity, of lies, or perjuries. The government of the oppressor is therefore a school to train its victims in all the arts of chicanery and meanness." Dabney thus saw that increasing government control not only makes matters worse at the political and legislative levels; it encourages baseness in the ordinary citizen as he seeks to find means to escape the force of government decrees.

Thus, concludes Dabney, God "has ordained the virtuous man's life in this wicked world to be often a battle, in which he may be called 'to resist unto blood, striving against sin.'" Therefore, "truckle to no falsehood and conceal no true principle; but ever assert *the right* with such means of endurance, self-sacrifice and passive fortitude as the dispensation of Providence has left you. If wholesale wrongs must be perpetrated, if wholesale rights must be trampled on, let our assailants do the whole work and incur the whole guilt. Resolve that no losses, nor threats, nor penalties, shall ever make you yield one jot or tittle to the true or just in principle. . . ."

This is "The Duty of the Hour." May God grant us men and women who will not compromise in the least those principles handed down from above.

14. Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1985, ch. 8, pp. 62-70.

15. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986, ch. 6, pp. 217-235.

16. Dr. Powell further elaborates on the size of his congregations in the introduction to his latest book, *Famous Birthdays* (Melbourne: The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1988). He writes concerning the effectiveness of his famous "tonic cards": "I am convinced these cards were a major factor in building up quite dramatically the congregations on Sundays and Wednesdays, especially in our Sydney church. On August 20, 1964 the 'British Weekly' published its cover story under the headline, The Largest Lunch Hour Service in the World, with a picture of the congregation. That church was St Stephen's Presbyterian (now Uniting), Macquarie St, Sydney. For ten years attendances at the Wednesday services often exceeded 1000." (p. iii).