



F.A.C.S. REPORT

"A Monthly Newsletter on the Relevance of the Christian Faith"

Vol. 19, No. 6

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June, 2000

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... why do we insist on looking at our feeble grasp upon God when our comfort rests in His almighty grip upon us?

The dumbing-down begun by the humanists has been adopted by the Church.

VEGGIE TALES = VEGGIE THEOLOGY

by Murray McLeod-Boyle

The Art of Dumbing-down

SECULARISTS have been actively praising the philosophical concept of 'dumbing-down' for quite a while now. In the late eighties we were finishing our schooling and it was more than evident then that this principle was being applied. Children who could not cope were no longer "kept down" in order to acquire the necessary acumen. This prehistoric practice was far too detrimental to their fragile self esteem. 'Onward and upward,' was the cry. If these tragic souls run into trouble later, then we shall cross that bridge when we come to it. "Come to it," they did. So, what now? Well, we lower the bar, wet nurse them a little more and then we wipe our hands of them. Such was the compassion of the statist secular education system.

What the secularist did not count on was how well they would do their job. Once they had undermined parental rights and seized the children, they began to infuse their doctrines. In the short term this worked.

Then the 'wheels began to fall off.' To use another colloquial expression, 'the chickens came home to roost,' and the statist juggernaut was not prepared for the consequences. Education had been based upon the idea of meeting a standard. One must pass an acceptable standard in order to move to the next level. It is encumbered upon the student that they respect their teacher; be diligent, be disciplined and so on. Yet these are the qualities the statist began to attack. Before long students were failing. They would not learn, for they were not disciplined. The statist destroyed the concept of an authority figure with the purpose of breaking parental control and substituting themselves as the child's compass. Initially this worked well. Then the kids 'wised up.' They figured that the teacher was just another authority figure that could be disobeyed. After all, had they not been taught that self was the measure of all things!? If I decide right from wrong, then I can decide a host of other issues.

In response the secularists lowered the standards

so that, at least on paper, their success rate remained intact. Dumbing-down became a good a necessary consequence, at least in the short term. Once they had progressed a student to year 12 they could breathe a sigh of relief. After that, the student was on his own.

This student who, for the sake of his fragile self esteem, was fast tracked through the education system, is now deposited in the wide world. He is lost, alone, bitter; his self esteem is about to take the greatest hiding it has ever received. The wet nursing has stopped. He has been deluded into thinking that the world is just waiting for him to graduate. Now he realises that all the promises were shams.

We have recently come face to face with this. My wife has taken up a teaching position at a university. As coordinator for first year students, she is constantly bewildered by the attitude displayed. These first year students are complaining that they have to look for information. When they are given lectures on how to write appropriate papers they simply disregard the

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instructions and then complain that the mark they received was not correct. Sentences are poorly formed. Statements do not make sense. The list could go on *ad nauseam*.

In moving from school to university, the student is transferred to a different world. Generally universities require discipline. You, the student, must find all your material. When your work is presented, it must meet the standard or you fail. Universities cannot afford to adopt the dumbing-down process or they face extinction. Who will enroll in a university that is renowned for passing everyone? In the end, the degrees will not be worth the paper they are printed on. Thus there is a gulf between the school system and the university system. "Students who want to learn can find ways to surmount what they encounter at an undergraduate level.... But the innocents, those whose minds had been upon other matters in their collegiate years, were now discovering that they had been quietly defrauded."¹

Dumbing-down the Church

WELLS' POINT is excellent, for two reasons. First it shows how the humanist

education system is failing. Second, it brings the issues to bear on Christianity. David Wells, at the time of writing his book, was Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. This quotation is taken from the preamble to his book where he recounts how he must give an introduction to his theology course with each new enrollment. In so doing comes face to face with the "innocents." They have made it through the school system, but they have been defrauded along the way. In short, they believe they have been given something when in fact their hands are empty.

Secular humanistic education is affecting the Church. It is inflicting heavy losses. Like the German 'wolfpacks' of World War 2, secular thought patterns lurk just beneath the surface, ready to pounce at a moments notice. In so doing, they wreak untold damage upon the Church. The dumbing-down begun by the humanists has been adopted by the Church. This has happened in an active and passive manner. Passively, it has come about because most Christians have a secular education. Thus they imbibe humanist thought and spew it out unwittingly at every opportunity. Actively, it has been forced on the Church by those who, having no faith in Scripture, are only too willing to adopt the latest secular craze, give it a quick baptism, and foist it upon the Church. Whatever the means, *it must be stopped*.

Our great concern is the way in which this reductionist view is being used today in Christians circles, particularly in the education of our children. Now think about this. Christianity and Judaism have been in existence for a long time. How did the children gain a religious education? Simply, they were taught the Word of God; they were taught by experience; and they were catechised. They were fed on solid truths. Christianity survived on this for two millennia. Now we are told we need new ways to teach our children.

Destructive Forces are Afoot

WITH MODERN DEVICES we have no quarrel. They are helpful tools that can and should be used. Thus, in what follows do not assume that we are anti-technology. What is of concern is the insipid pabulum and pure drivel that is purported as truth through these mediums. Truth is placed into the blender and given plenty of revolutions at a high speed. The intended outcome should be truth that is cut into bite size chunks upon which our children can chew. However, it seems that someone lifted the lid during the process. When this is done, the contents are thrown across the room. In the kitchen, we are concerned about hygiene, so all the spilled contents are wiped up and flushed down the sink. In the theological arena it seems that the spilled content is scrapped up, impurities and all, and simply returned to the blender. There, the whole lot is whisked again. Only this time flavouring, colouring, and a good dose of MSG² are added so as to disguise the nasties.

The end result is that our modern technology spews error in to our children's sponge-like minds. For astute parents this is less of a concern because they will use it as a teaching opportunity. However, there are few discerning parents these days; Christians are among the worst. If the Christian book shop sells it, it must be right!

You see, our children are being destroyed because of our lack of diligence. We have allowed dumbing-down into the Church to such an extent that we cannot differentiate truth from error any longer. How then are we to protect our children? How then are we going to raise up a godly heritage?

Veggies on the Loose

AS AN EXAMPLE, I give the following. Some years ago my daughter was given a video titled "Veggie Tales: Where's God When I'm Scarred?"³ This video series revolves around vegetables who play the main characters. In this article

1 David F. Wells, *No Place For Truth; Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, 1993), 3.

2 Moralistic Suspect Gunk?????

you will have the pleasure of meeting Bob the tomato and Larry the cucumber.⁴

The story begins with Junior Asparagus (hereafter JA) watching something scary on television. His mother interjects and sends him to bed. Climbing the stairs and entering his bedroom alone, his imagination starts to run wild. Then Bob (B) and Larry (L) turn up to bring some comfort. After initial greetings and salutations, the dynamic duo begin with a song aimed at allaying JA's fear. What follows is the full transcript:

Song

(B) You were lying in your bed; you were feeling kind of sleepy; But you couldn't close your eyes because the room was getting creepy. (L) Were those eyeballs in your closet? Was that godzilla in the hall? (B) There was something big and hairy casting shadows on the wall. (L) Now your heart is beating like drum, your skin was feeling clammy. (B) There's a hundred tiny monsters jumping right into your jammies.

Speech

(B) What are you going to do? (JA) I'm going to call the police! (B) No, you don't need to do anything. (JA) What! Why? (Breaking into song.) (B and L) Because... God is bigger than the boogey man; He's bigger than godzilla and the monsters on t.v. Oh, God is bigger than the boogey man and He's watching out for you and me.

Speech

(B) Get it? (JA) Umm! Well,... Well, no. (B) Oh! You see, you don't have to be afraid because God is the biggest! (JA) What? Is he bigger than King Kong; because Kong is a really big monkey and he's kinda scary. (B) Next to God, Junior, Kong would look like an ity bity bug! (JA) Really? (B) Uh huh! (JA) Well, is He bigger than the slime monster? Because he is the biggest monster of them all. (L) Compared to God the slime monster is like a tiny cornflake. (JA) Yeah, but the slime monster can squirt slime out of his ears (Junior pauses; you can here

his mind ticking over. Then he asks excitedly...) Can God squirt slime out of His ears!?!? (B) Ahem. Cough. Cough. (Ducking for cover sounds) Come over here (Move to the window). What do you see up there? (JA) My Curtains! (B) No, outside the window. Up in the sky. (JA) I see lots of stars. (L) God made all the stars out of nothing. He just went pwwwwtt and there they were. (JA) No way!?! (B) That's right, and he also made the sun and the moon and even the earth that we are living on right now. (JA) Wow! Slime monster couldn't do that. Even if he tried he would get everything really sticky. (B) Do you know what else He made? (JA) What? (L) He made all the plants, and the animals, and people too. (JA) Wow! (B) And that's why we don't have to be afraid. (JA) Huh? (B) You see everything God makes is very special to Him. He made all the little kids and He loves them very much; and because He loves them He takes extra good care of them. So we don't need to be afraid because God is always looking out for us. (JA) Oh, I get it! So you're saying, God's the biggest of them all and He's on my team! (B) That's right.

Now, let me reiterate, we are not against technology. Our emphasis is that it should be decent and Biblically accurate. *Theology should not be compromised for mere entertainment value.*

Big is not Always Best

IN THE TRITE NONSENSE above, we see that Bob foolishly begins with a futile argument—God is bigger. So does this mean that if something bigger than God ever arrives we should feel quite free to wet our pants? Perhaps it means that we can unashamedly hide under the bed, quivering like a leaf? Such arguments are based on human fallacy. Ask Goliath whether being the biggest and the strongest was a prescription for 100 per cent success. As he lay on the ground with a rock in his forehead, he may

well have been wondering what went wrong. How could this kid waltz out on to the battlefield, no armour and only a sling, and win the contest? It was because David fought in the Name of the Lord God, king of Israel. More to the point, it was the Lord who fought through David.⁵

It is time this stereotyped concept of David and Goliath was put to rest. This pathetic idea that the story is about the little guy triumphing over the 'big baddy' is totally inaccurate and should be removed from the Church once and for all. We ask, when David walked onto that battlefield that day, could he have been defeated? If you were an Israelite in the camp, we are sure that weak knees and soggy trousers could well have been the order of the day. Butterflies and a sustained sinking feeling were, no doubt, evident also. To those present, the battle hung in the balance. Their fate was about to be decided.

What of the Christian? When Mrs. Bloggs goes to Sunday school this week, how is she going to teach this lesson? Will it be baptised humanism and a hackneyed story of corporate giants versus old Mrs. Doe? Or will it be a historical-redemptive treatise that places this text firmly in the activities of God Almighty? If it is not the second, then it has no place in the Church. As far as we Christians are concerned, David was never going to lose. Goliath's head was already severed when David walked onto that field.

Read 1 Samuel 16:12-13. There you will find that David is anointed by Samuel and the Spirit of God descends upon him. In the Old Testament this type of action is then attested by some great feat. Is this not what we have in the narrative immediately following David's anointing?⁶ In this case, it was not big versus little, great versus small. It was about the Lord's anointed achieving a victory that demonstrated that God existed and that He had chosen this person for a great work.

3 © 1996 Big Idea Productions, Inc.

4 Look at the title of this video. Here is one more example of how modern theology is in error. Note how the title implies that God is somehow at fault. Philip Yancey, similarly, has a book, "Where is God When It Hurts?" It seems that the rage today is to question God. To me, this smacks of irreverence!

5 See 1 Samuel 17:45-47. Indeed, read the whole of chapter 17 and see the whole story in context.

6 See: "The Tale of Two Sons," *FACS*, Vol. 18, No. 6, (June 1999): 2.

Bob the tomato, would have been far better off setting Junior straight on this issue, rather than peddling rehashed humanism. In other words, Bob should have focused on the omnipotence of God. He should have taught this young one to stand in awe of God's power right from the very start.⁷ In the words of the Westminster Confession, 2:1, "There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, **invisible, without body, parts, or passions**; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty ... most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will...."⁸

There is no room for a big versus little argument when it comes to speaking about our eternal God. To use such a human analogy is to belittle God.

That is strike one, Bob!

Myth verses Reality

BOB'S SECOND MISTAKE is to confuse myth with reality. In his song he says, "God is bigger than the boogey man; He's bigger than godzilla and the monsters on t.v." Why, pray tell, would any Christian compare God to figments of man's imagination? Here the criminal aspect is the assertion that God is to be treated on the same basis as mythological creatures. Boogey men and godzilla do not exist; and the only monsters you are likely to see have a title, 'the honourable ...' and can be seen on the ABC!

Does God then fit this category? Is He now to be officially classed as myth, legend and fable? Look at it this way. Bob is trying to assure Junior that there is nothing to be afraid of because there is a bigger myth in control of the little myths!? "Now Junior, all those boogey men are just figments of your vivid imagination. Instead of troubling yourself with nasty fabrications that

scare you, think instead of a nice phenomenon that does not trouble you. I know, how about God? You know that grand-fatherly figure who would not hurt anyone. He is not real either, but at least you won't have nightmares!"

Are we surprised that our children find it hard to believe in a real faith when the Author and Perfecter of that faith is catalogued alongside a myth. If our children are to believe, then they must believe in something credible. They need a substance, not an abstract. They need a person; a being; a real entity, not a myth.

Most texts today are influenced by German liberalism and existential thought. We have "demythologised" the Scriptures. We have removed the supernatural. We have created a truly subjectivist position. No one can assault Christianity now for it is reduced to a "language event" that takes place in the inner man. It is universalistic in nature and detached from the world.

Many in evangelical circles would refute such theologies if you gave them a tome on the subject. Yet they serve it up to their children daily in the name of Christian education and entertainment.

That's twice, Bob!

A Word on Creation

"BATMAN AND ROBIN" was a popular television show many moons ago. During fight scenes, the screen was covered with, kasplats, kapows, boofs, bangs and a host of other words. These expressions have their place, but we are not sure it is in the field of theology.

In an effort to help Junior understand, Larry the cucumber, states that God created all the stars *pwwwwtt ex nihilo*. Now please understand, *pwwwwtt* is our rendering of what we think Larry is saying. We may have misquoted him by adding one t or w too many.

Nonetheless, we are still yet to find an adequate definition for *pwwwwtt*.

The Scriptures inform us that God is One who communicates. It is because God communicates, that we, creatures made in His image, can communicate. Scripture also instructs us that God is intelligible in His communications. The Westminster Larger catechism, question and answer 15, reads:

What is the work of creation?

The work of creation is that wherein God did in the beginning, **by the word of his power**, make of nothing the world, and all things therein, for himself, within the space of six days, and all very good. (Gen. 1, Heb. 11:3, Prov. 16:4)⁹

God spoke by divine fiat and created the world (Psalm 33:6). Genesis chapter one records that each act of creation was preceded by, "God said." God spoke! He did not, *pwwwwtt*. Creation came about by intelligent, authoritative commands. Words were found on the lips of God, not a type of gibberish that is best suited to the lips of a senile geriatric.

Larry, you have been in Bob's company too long.

Health, Wealth, and Prosperity

ONE OF THE SAD elements in Christianity is our propensity to propagate error when we are trying to give comfort. We are not sure of the answer because the dumbing-down has been quite effective, so we blurt out some pious sounding cliché. In reality we have spoken falsely, even if it was done with good intentions.

Bob gives us a prime example of this. God made Junior. We have little problem with this. God *spoke* and created all things (Contra Larry). However, we have serious concerns over Bob's interpretation—"He made all the little kids and He loves them very much; and because He

7 The theme of God's creative power is introduced later in the dialogue, as you have seen. However, it is only introduced when Junior's remark regarding God and slime is seen as a little irreverent. Note also, though, that the topic does not change from size to power. Creation is used to illustrate that God is big, whatever that may mean.

8 Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995. Parentheses deleted. Emphasis added.

9 Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Larger Catechism*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995. Emphasis added.

loves them He takes extra good care of them. So we don't need to be afraid because God is always looking out for us."

This smacks of the modern evangelical truncation of Romans 8:29. That text, in full, reads, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose (NASB). In most circles within the Church, the last phrase is conveniently omitted. Two things must be noted in this regard. First, this text belongs to Christians only. The other day we saw this text, in its neutered form, adorning the notice-board of a church. It was hanging there, presumably as a great evangelistic tool or in order to somehow convey comfort to the masses. Yet the text has nothing to say to such people. It is for the elect of God—those who love Him.

Second, this text does not say anything, to put it colloquially, about 'beer and skittles.' It says that God causes things to work together for our good. This does not imply that smooth sailing will be the order of the day. Many today use this verse as though it is promising a trouble-free, carefree, prosperity-filled life to all Christians. To posit such is nonsense.

What this text declares is that God will put us through sanctifying works. This means that in terms of our eternal pilgrimage He is making sure that all the rough edges are eliminated. However, this may mean many different things for different Christian people. In this light Bob's words are hollow, shallow, empty! He may as well have spoken them down a drain pipe as bothered to foul Junior's ears with such error.

Does God care for little ones? Yes, He does. Jesus says in Matthew 18:10 that little ones should not be despised for their angel in heaven has access to the face of His Father. We hasten to add, that unfortunately, most interpreters do not view such passages covenantally. The fact that Jesus welcomed the children is often used to justify the idea that all children are saved, up to the age of discretion. Is it not better to say that these children, being covenant recipients, had every right to be welcomed by Christ. They were, after all, His children. They were marked in their flesh, as

Jesus Himself was, and together considered as belonging to Abraham. Thus, if Bob's words have any truth in them, it is only for those marked with covenant sign.

Nonetheless, as true as all this is, it does not mean that all will be a picnic. How hollow is the echo of Bob's words to godly parents who have lost children to that cursed enemy, death. I know of a couple who have lost three of their sons. How do Bob's words comfort a mother whose cry is, "Are not my sons allowed to grow up?" How do they sound to a five year old that is told that mum or dad will not walk through the front door ever again?

Is Romans 8:28 true? Absolutely. Let anyone who denies that be anathema. However, this text does not promise a life of prosperity. It is not a formula for a pain-free life. It is rather the promise of God that His eternal purpose shall be fulfilled in us.

Bob, we grant a stay of execution, just this once!

Upside-down Cake

SOME YEARS AGO my wife was given a recipe for a pineapple upside-down cake. It seems that many today are using a similar recipe to do theology. Of all that is said in the conversation given above, the issue that is the most indicative of the humanist dumbing-down procedure are Bob and Junior's concluding remarks. As the penny finally drops, Junior says, "Oh, I get it! So you're saying, God's the biggest of them all and He's on my team!" To which Bob replies, "That's right."

The statement is very subtle, but it is nonetheless a return to both the Garden and a the evil one's invitation to be our own gods. Bob asserts that God is bound to Junior. God is on Junior's team. What a perversion. Once more we are confronted with the twentieth century version of God. He has been placed in a zip file; dehydrated; compressed; condensed; abbreviated; compacted; and some have even tried the recycling method. Whatever term may be used, it always means, reductionist.

Why must God be on Junior's team? Surely, Junior would receive far more comfort from knowing that

the God of the whole universe has set His mark upon him. In a recent sermon, the Rev. Archie MacNicol, speaking on the perseverance of the saints, asked, why do we insist on looking at our feeble grasp upon God when our comfort rests in His almighty grip upon us?!

In the reductionist view everything is turned on its head, just like the upside-down cake. God is enslaved to man. This should never be. Consider Joshua, a man of great faith, yet in need of learning a vital lesson. In Joshua 5:13-15 we have an interesting event recorded. There we read:

Now it came about when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing opposite him with his sword drawn in his hand, and Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No, rather I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down, and said to him, "What has my lord to say to his servant?" And the captain of the Lord's host said to Joshua, "Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so.

Here we have Joshua, a good and faithful man, entrusted with the care of God's people. He has lead this people since his master, Moses, died. He has crossed the Jordan and enters a foreign land—a land he is to conquer. There are no friends here, only enemies. The sin of the Amalekite is full. Judgement day has arrived. As the leader of this people, Joshua was in charge, was he not? He thought so, and to some degree he was right. However, he needed to remember that there was a greater reality than that which his eyes beheld. He led a people who were about to go to war. Yet, whose war was it? It was not Israel's war. It was God's. God had called this people. God had marked this people as His own. God had refined this people. Similarly, God was about to fulfill His promise and give this people a land. Israel was required to fight, but it was the Lord who would grant the victory.

Joshua may have forgotten this. He may have believed it but needed some extra encouragement. At any rate, Joshua is out surveying the lay

of the land. As he does this he is confronted with a figure. A man. Sword drawn. A man ready for battle. Joshua calls out, are you with us or against us? Make no mistake. Joshua was a warrior. He was ready to fight. He has issued his challenge. This person needs to respond. Imagine, the intrigue when the answer comes back as "No!" Joshua has asked this person, are you on my team or not? The reply he gets must have been bewildering, at least momentarily. Then, this man continued, I am the captain of the Lord's host. Joshua's reaction was immediate. He fell face first in the dust. His next question was oriented the right way, "What has my lord to say to his servant?"

Joshua started out with Junior's humbug. He wanted to know if this warrior was on his team. The answer came back, 'No, you are on mine.' Unlike Bob's pathetic affirmation of Junior's statement, Joshua went the next step. He realised that he was a man under authority and responded accordingly—he fell to the ground and worshipped.

We must seriously ask, what sort of perception is Junior going to have, if he is allowed to believe that God is always on *his* team? The outcome will be, that there is one more impotent Christian who walks through life blinded to the reality that he is serving himself in the name of God. You may think God is on your team and delude yourself, but be assured, come judgment day, the question going to be asked by God is, "Are you on my team?" In the light of that question, self delusion will crumble.

Bob, that is strike three, we have ordered the executioner.

Conclusion

WE QUOTED from Wells earlier. It is fitting we do so again. Wells is about to describe a situation, a conversation, that took place after he had given an introduction to his theology course:

That day, an obviously agitated student who had come forward told me how grateful he was for what I had said. It was as if I had been reading his mind. He told me that he was one of those I had described who felt petrified by the prospect of having to take this course. As a matter of fact, he said, he had had a mighty struggle with his conscience about it. Was it right to spend so much money on a course of study that was so irrelevant to his desire to minister to people in the Church?¹⁰

Here was a student who wanted to be a minister, and yet he openly stated that he saw the study of theology as totally irrelevant to that vocation. If this is the state of someone entering seminary, in order to have a ministry in the Church, we cannot help but ask, what of the laity?

For too long, the serious study of theology and doctrine has taken a back seat to 'slop'. Christians today are insipid because they have not been introduced to doctrine. In fact, they have been actively alienated by those pushing the 'Christ unites, doctrine divides' bumper-sticker theology. Imagine the lad mentioned by Wells actually being unleashed upon the Church? God forbid! What would he teach his people?

This leads to the crux of the matter. We all do theology. If we open our Bibles, read a text, and

then say, "I believe this means...", we have done theology. So the question is not 'will we do theology', but 'will our theology be correct or incorrect?' You see, all these bumper-sticker theologians are still doing theology. That is the joke. They claim Christ but deny doctrine. Yet, how do we know Christ, if it is not through theology and doctrine?

In this article we have focused upon this issue as it impacts our children. We are tired of seeing covenant children shipwrecked, simply because their parents cannot or will not turn to the Scriptures so that they may be truly discerning. However, nothing will change in this regard unless parents and Christian adults first bite the bullet. As we sat down to write this piece, the latest Koorong catalogue arrived. The main catalogue is titled "ministry matters." The front page carries a letter from the marketing and buying manager, which reads, in part, "The purpose of this catalogue is to show you the type of resources that are available and to make the selection of these materials easier." Alright, so what is the book placed on the front cover? It is a novel about Paul! That is right, a novel. In a day when people are struggling to grapple with Paul's letters as they are found in Scripture we are given a novel! More myths when what we need is God's eternal truth! So, this is what our leading Christian bookstore believes is profitable to the Church of Jesus Christ?! This is meant to help in ministry?!

It is time to halt the rot. If we continue with veggie tales and veggie theology, we shall have nothing less than veggie Christians.