

Issue 11
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Inside Life

Creation, Evolution, or *both*?

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A message the world forgot

**Go ahead –
Spend, spend, spend!**

Birds of a feather

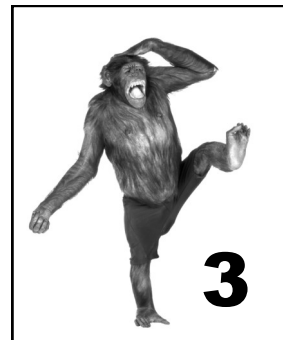
Loving the unlovely

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Inside Life

A magazine of understanding

Number 11, September 2009



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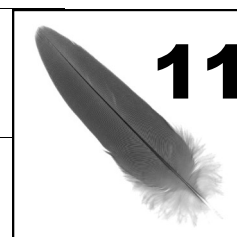
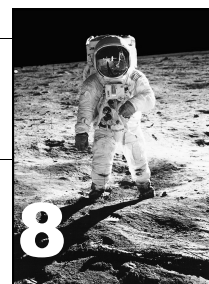
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Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve *inside* the marvellous mystery that is *life*, to discover what it is all about. Where did life come from? How can we make the most of it? Is there a special purpose for life?

Inside Life provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.

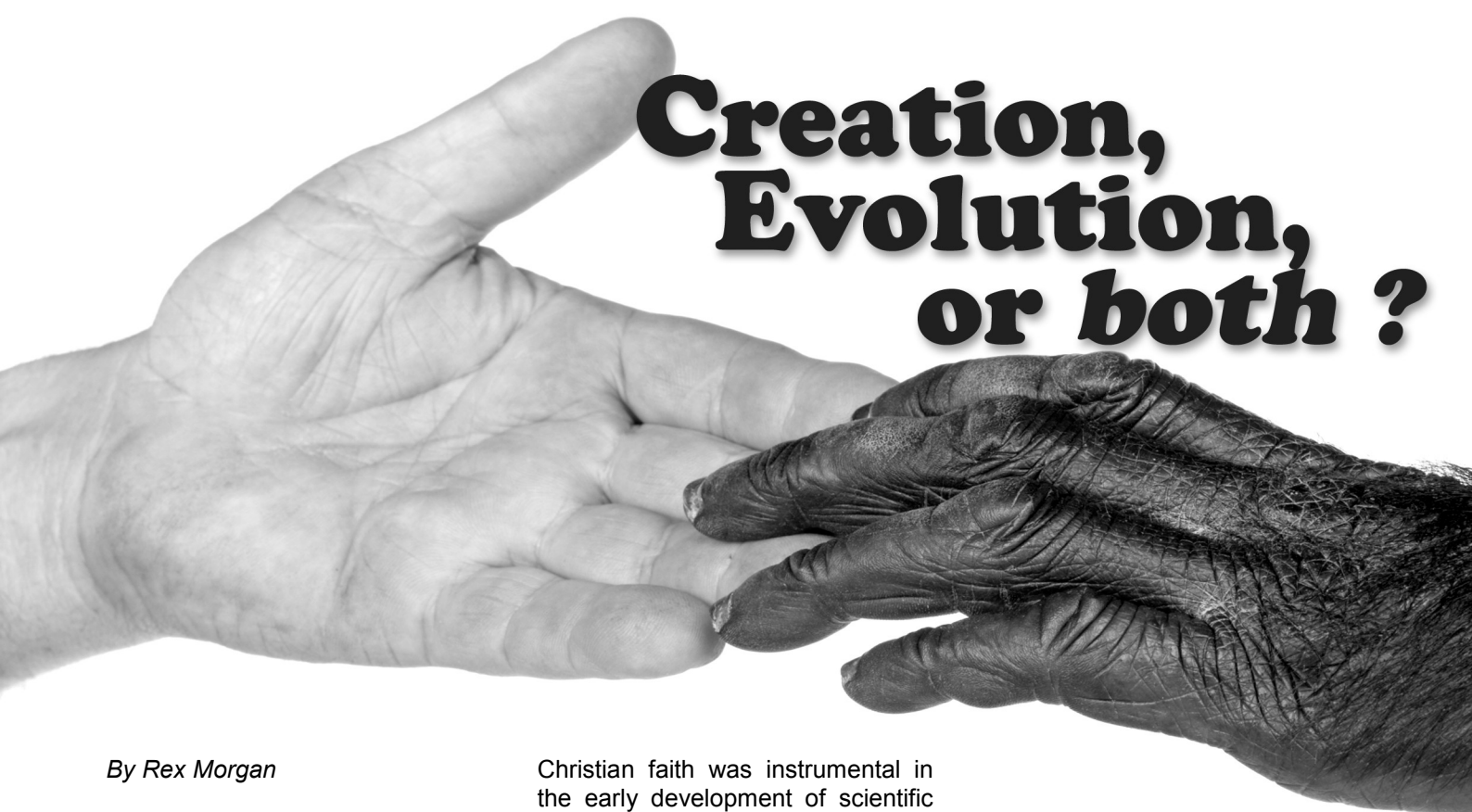
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Our Cover: The ape on our cover almost seems to be deep in thought, like a contemplative human, even reminiscent of Rodin's celebrated sculpture, *The Thinker*. But how closely related are humans and monkeys? The publication exactly 150 years ago of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* brought this question to the fore, and it has been vigorously debated ever since. Our lead article considers this topical issue, examining whether the often contrasting claims of science and religion can be reconciled.

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Creation, Evolution, or both ?

By Rex Morgan

Charles Darwin, the celebrated British naturalist of the 1800s, has been back in the headlines this year. February 12 marked the 200th anniversary of his birth, and November 24 commemorates the 150th anniversary of the publication of his most famous work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. This book promptly gave rise to vigorous debate between scientists and Christians, a debate that has continued to rage ever since.

Darwin himself presented his theory of evolution as a concept compatible with belief in God.

Darwin proposed that life on earth began hundreds of millions of years ago and developed by evolution through natural selection. This contrasts with the view held by some Christians that God created all life just a few thousand years ago, in six days. Which view is right? And what about humankind? Does an evolutionary origin of life and humanity necessarily exclude a Creator?

Christians and scientists haven't always been in conflict. In fact the

Christian faith was instrumental in the early development of scientific observation from the 1200s onward, particularly in mediaeval Europe. People like Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Bacon, Pasteur and many other leading early scientists were men of deep Christian faith and conviction. Galileo believed that he was revealing the laws of God in his work.

Darwin and the Creator

Darwin himself presented his theory of evolution as a concept compatible with belief in God. In the frontispiece to the first edition of *The Origin of Species*, he included a quote from the Anglican clergyman and philosopher William Whewell proclaiming that God doesn't act by constant miracles but "by the establishment of general laws". This was followed by a quote from Sir Francis Bacon stating that true understanding must be sought both "in the book of God's word and in the book of God's works", referring to scripture and nature.

The Origin of Species itself contains several references to the Creator, and the final sentence states "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one..."

In the sermon at Darwin's funeral, in Westminster Abbey, the Reverend Frederick Farrar said that Darwin's

theory posed no threat to belief in God, and that Darwin had enabled people to read "many hitherto undeciphered lines in God's great epic of the universe".

Darwin's American botanist friend Asa Gray, a devoted Christian who helped produce the first US edition of *The Origin*, argued that "evolution is the secondary effect or *modus operandi* of the first cause, design". Darwin imported and distributed Gray's pamphlet on theistic evolution, *Natural Selection is not Inconsistent with Natural Theology*.

The novelist Charles Kingsley, a Christian clergyman, was one of the first to praise Darwin's book, writing to him that it was "just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that he created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that he required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the action of his laws." Darwin added those words in the next edition, attributing them to "a celebrated author and divine".

Later, Kingsley wrote "Even better than making the world, God makes the world make itself". In 1860, a year after *The Origin* came out, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple, preached that "Darwin has simply shown us how God moves by natural processes

over unimaginably long distances of time”.

Another religious leader of the time, the Reverend Baden Powell, wrote an essay in support of evolution, commending “Mr. Darwin’s masterly volume” for substantiating “the grand principle of the self-evolving powers of nature”.

150 years after publication of *The Origin of Species*, many Christians still see both evolution and creation as being valid, according to a study by the US National Academy of Sciences.

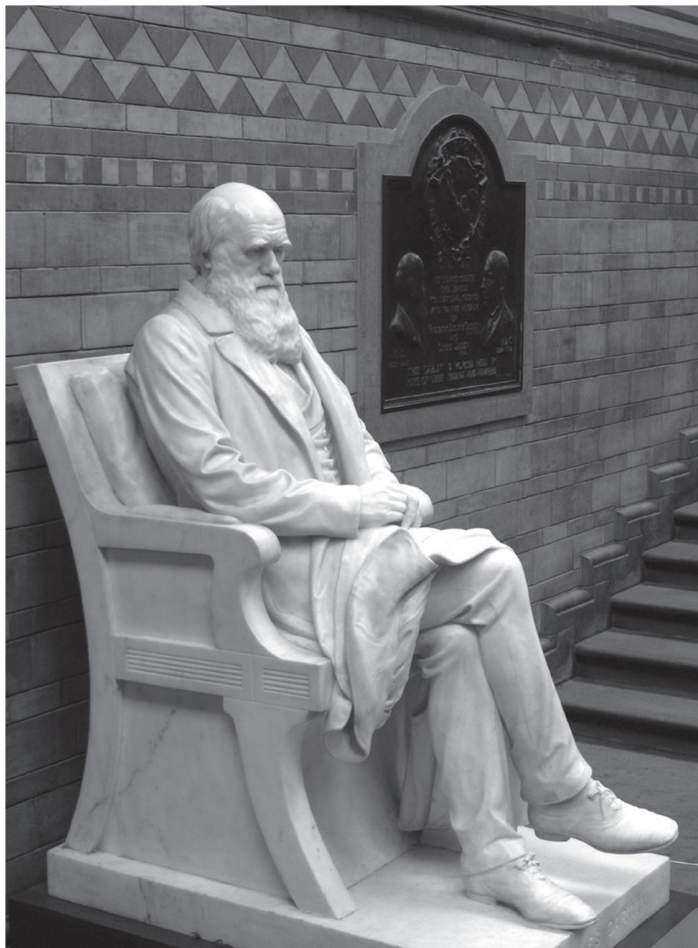
Their book *Science, Evolution, and Creationism* states “Today, many religious denominations accept that biological evolution has produced the diversity of living things over billions of years of Earth’s history. Many have issued statements observing that evolution and the tenets of their faiths are compatible. Scientists and theologians have written eloquently about their awe and wonder at the history of the universe and of life on this planet, explaining that they see no conflict between their faith in God and the evidence for evolution.”

The Clergy Letter Project, “an endeavour designed to demonstrate that religion and science can be compatible and to elevate the quality of the debate of this issue”, was established in 2004 by Michael Zimmerman of Butler University, Indianapolis. It has the support of 12,000 US clergy, who affirm the following: “We the undersigned, Christian clergy from many different traditions, believe that the timeless truths of the Bible and the discoveries of modern science may

comfortably coexist. We believe that the theory of evolution is a foundational scientific truth, one that has stood up to rigorous scrutiny and upon which much of human knowledge and achievement rests.”¹

Creationism

But what about the Bible record that God created the world in six days?



Statue of Charles Darwin in the Natural History Museum, London

Thousands of Christians worldwide firmly reject evolution in favour of an explanation based on a literal interpretation of the account in the biblical book of Genesis, chapter 1. These Christians, known as “creationists”, are divided into two major groups, “young earth” and “old earth” creationists.

Young earth creationists believe Genesis 1 describes God creating the universe and all forms of life in six days, around 6000 years ago. This includes the dinosaurs, which they maintain “were created on the sixth day and went on the ark and came off the ark,” before dying out.²

This conclusion flies so dramatically in the face of more than 150 years and millions of pages of scientific research that most scientists treat it as laughable.

Old earth creationists also deny the theory of evolution, but they agree with the scientific findings on the age of the universe and earth.

Creationists generally cite two or three major objections in their rebuttal of evolution.

One is to point out that the fossil record should contain millions of “transitional forms” as life gradually evolved from one species to another. This was something Darwin himself wrestled with, writing in *The Origin*: “Why, if species have descended from other species by fine gradations, do we not everywhere see innumerable transitional forms?”

Evolutionists respond that in fact abundant transitional forms have been discovered.

Creationists also dispute the evidence that mutations actually do cross species boundaries. They suggest that simple, minor modifications show microevolution occurs within species, but they argue a lack of evidence of

macro evolutionary mutations bringing about the formation of new species.

Scientists respond that all change at the species level is micro, and successive micro evolutionary changes bring about macro evolution.

In his popular *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, Bill Bryson notes, “Ironically, considering that Darwin called his book *On the Origin of Species*, the one thing he couldn’t explain was how species originated. Darwin’s theory suggested a mechanism for how a species might become stronger or better or faster – in a word, fitter – but gave no

“Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.”

— Albert Einstein

indication of how it might throw up a new species."

Scientists point out that the mechanisms for evolution have been discovered since Darwin's time.

Another major argument of creationists is that some anatomical structures seem too complex to have evolved through natural processes. Structures such as a bacterium's flagellum (the hair-like part that gives the bacterium motion), the human eye, or the immune system are "irreducibly complex". Such systems are composed of multiple parts, all of which are necessary for the system to function.

Creationists point to Darwin's confession that "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down".

Darwin also stated "To suppose that the eye with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree."

Comprehensive scientific answers to these and other objections are outlined on various websites, including <http://nsceweb.org/>; www.talkorigins.org; <http://nationalacademies.org/evolution/> and www.bioLogos.org.

Another approach is called "Intelligent Design" (ID). This view came to prominence in the 1990s, largely in an effort to overcome the ban on teaching creation in American classrooms. It has been described as "an intellectually presentable creationism".

While it attempts to skirt the ban on teaching religion as science in public schools by avoiding using the term "God", a court in the USA ruled recently that ID is not a scientific option, but another form of creationism.

The "Missing Link" FOUND?

In May 2009 the fossil of a small lemur-like animal was unveiled at New York's American Museum of Natural History. The fossil, discovered in Messel, Germany in 1983, was named "Ida" after the daughter of the researcher who assembled a team of scientists that spent two years studying her in secret before she was revealed to the world. Her formal scientific name is *Darwinius masillae* in honour of Charles Darwin's 200th anniversary year.



Ida is believed to be the most complete primate fossil ever discovered. She is 95% intact and so well preserved that her tissues, hair and even her stomach contents are visible.

Ida — the missing link between animals and humans?

A great deal of hype surrounded the revealing of the fossil, with claims that she was the missing link between man and the rest of the animal kingdom, and a "rosetta stone" for understanding early branches in the human evolutionary tree. Dr John Hurum, the scientist at the heart of the project, variously described the fossil as the "Holy Grail of palaeontology" and the "lost ark of archaeology". The History Channel reported "This groundbreaking discovery fills in a critical gap in human and primate evolution."¹

But just a couple of months later an American palaeontologist, Chris Beard, came up with a 38-million-year-old fossil he touted as a much better candidate for the "missing link".

"Ida is an oddity at the far end of the primate family tree, about as far away from man's ancestors as you can get, Dr Beard said. "Ida is a good-looking fossil, but it was the victim of incredible marketing".² Writing in *New Scientist* magazine, Dr Beard, who is curator of vertebrate palaeontology at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh, said "So Ida is not a missing link — at least not between anthropoids and more primitive primates. Further study may reveal her to be a missing link between other species of Eocene adapiforms, but this hardly solidifies her status as the "eighth wonder of the world".³

In an article entitled *Ida Fossil Hype Went Too Far*, Robert Roy Britt, Editorial Director of *Imaginoa*, commented: "Ida's unveiling was highly scripted (with some "Barnum and Bailey aspects", said palaeontologist Richard Kay of Duke University). More important, it can now be said the findings may well have been significantly overstated. We won't know for sure until further research is done. But if this event causes the public to distrust science and media, that distrust is well placed".⁴

The *New Zealand Herald* reported that the discovery of Ida had been "carefully choreographed by the publicity machine of the film company behind a television documentary sold to the BBC and the publishers of a book to sell on the subject".⁵

Exaggerated claims of this nature that are later overturned give rise to scepticism from literal creationists, and have prompted cynical questions such as "How many times will palaeontologists find the missing link?"⁶

1. <http://www.history.com/content/the-link/about-the-link/the-link>

2. *The New Zealand Herald*, July 4, 2009

3. <http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn17173-why-ida-fossil-is-not-the-missing-link.html>

4. <http://www.livescience.com/culture/090520-ida-fossil-hype.html>

5. *The New Zealand Herald*, July 4, 2009

6. <http://www.slate.com/id/2218838/?from=rss>

The major denominations of Anglicanism and Catholicism reject these forms of creationism and ID on theological grounds. Instead, many Christian scholars espouse an approach known as “Theistic Evolution” (TE) or “Evolutionary Creation”. They accept the findings of science, and see no contradiction between the theory of evolution and a proper understanding of the biblical account in Genesis 1. They point out that Genesis declares that God is Creator, but it says nothing about *how* he created.

The ancient writers described the world in concepts and language they and their audiences could understand, employing the simple narrative and poetic style of a non-scientific culture, rather than the standards of modern science.

Genesis 1 – Science or Theology?

Specialists in the study of the early chapters of the Bible, whether Jewish or Christian, understand Genesis 1 not as a literal day-by-day account of the mechanics of the creation. Rather, they point out that the chapter has a carefully sculpted literary structure, with use of repetitive phrases and numerical symbolism. (See adjacent box.)

Proponents of TE point out that Genesis was written at a time when creation epics were the standard approach to explaining the origin of the cosmos. These epics generally referred to various types of gods begetting other gods, and clashes between them. Genesis 1 uses the standard genre and style of the contemporaneous creation epics, but dramatically surmounts them all by declaring that the God of Israel was far above all other gods in creating everything out of nothing simply by the power of his spoken word. Each of the things revered by the nations as gods is systematically presented as having been created, and declared “good” by this God, demonstrating his utter power over them.

The ancient writers described the world in concepts and language they and their audiences could understand, employing the simple narrative and poetic style of a non-scientific culture, rather than the standards of modern science. The burning issues of their day were theological rather than scientific. Who made the world? Who is in charge of it? Who is to be worshipped?

The nature, structure and size of the universe are not explained in the book of Genesis. That is simply not its purpose.

Genesis 2 is clearly written in story form, referring to the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which may or may not have been literal trees, but certainly were symbolic of spiritual concepts. Whether the serpent of Genesis 3 was literal and spoke is not nearly as important as what (or who) it symbolised.

Genesis 1 matches the scientific scenario in that it describes a beginning point followed by the

development of life in stages, with animals and then humans appearing in the last stage. When the chapter is viewed in this way, there is no need for any conflict between creation and evolution.

Proponents of TE explain that a great God has built into the creation many ongoing systems and processes — the transpiration cycle, photosynthesis, the formation and destruction of stars and nebulae, and so on. After putting these into operation, God allows them to continue without overt divine intervention to create new things. It is posited that he began the creation of life in the same way, by putting into place laws that enabled it to freely evolve over billions of years.

The idea is that God imbued the universe in the early moments of creation with the potentiality to produce the fruitful outcomes we see today. This doesn't mean that God is divorced from the unfolding process, however. As the first-century apostle Paul explained, nothing can exist without God and, since he sustains the universe on a

The Symmetry of Genesis 1

Problem	Preparation	Population
Verse 2	Days 1–3	Days 4–6
darkness	1(a) creation of light (day) 1(b) separation from darkness (night)	4(a) creation of sun 4(b) creation of moon and stars
watery abyss	2(a) creation of firmament (sky) 2(b) separation of waters above from waters below	5(a) creation of birds 5(b) creation of fish
formless earth	3(a) separation of earth from sea 3(b) creation of vegetation	6(a) creation of land animals 6(b) creation of humans
“without form and void” (Heb: <i>tohu vabohu</i>)	<i>tohu</i> is formed	<i>bohu</i> is filled

As early as Augustine in his “City of God” (c. 400 AD), commentators have noted the schematic structural arrangement in the Genesis 1 account of the creation. The first six days are presented in two sets of three, describing the filling of the conditions of formlessness and emptiness found in verse 2. This symmetry indicates that form is as important as content, giving reason for Genesis 1 not to be taken literally as a 7-day historical account.

moment-by-moment basis, anything that happens in nature from the subatomic to the macro level can be seen to reflect his over-arching purpose.³ This purpose can accommodate what appears to us as nature's processes operating freely.

Theologians have worthwhile questions for evolutionists, who in turn have searching questions for Bible believers. It is important that both sides of the debate are willing to respect and listen to each other as experts in their respective fields.

This "hands-off" process is mirrored in the way God has acted in human affairs. He has chosen to interact with specific individuals down through history, once with a group of slaves who became the nation of Israel, and today with willing individuals who are being shaped into a spiritual "nation". But these, and humanity as a whole, have always been free to make choices and follow their own paths, even when urged by God to choose the better way.

Even though in God's eyes spiritual creation, or salvation, is much more important than any physical components of the universe, people can freely choose to respond, or not, to his call to become new, spiritual, creations. For those who do respond, rather than perfecting them immediately, God allows such individuals to gradually mature as a new creation by a process which could be called "spiritual evolution".

Theism or Atheism — Which?

A final approach we should mention is that of "Naturalistic Evolution", the atheistic idea that an evolutionary process necessarily precludes the existence of a God who may have ordained it and sustained it.

One problem with this viewpoint is that closing the door to the possibility of the existence of God

means refusing to explore any evidence of that, which is a contradiction of the principles of objective scientific investigation.

The theory of evolution may explain the process of how the universe and life developed, but it is still left with the fundamental question of "Why is there something rather than nothing?" This is a profound question that science cannot answer.

Theologians have challenging questions for evolutionists, who in turn have searching questions for Bible believers. It is important that both sides of the debate are willing to respect and listen to each other as experts in their respective fields.

Christians benefit from scientific discoveries and research helping them better understand the awesome creation God has designed. Scientists benefit from the spiritual aspects of purpose, ethics and values that Christians can bring to the table.

Learning from One Another

We all have so much to learn from science. It boggles the mind how astronomers can calculate the exact location where a planet hundreds of millions of kilometres away will be on a certain day in several years' time. But we know they can do it, because we've seen the photos they send back when they successfully launch a spacecraft to rendezvous with a distant heavenly body.

Similarly, it stretches the mind how science can calculate that the big bang took place some 15 billion years ago and that, for instance, fossils of the Cambrian period are over 500 million years old, but surely it is sensible to defer to the experts who have spent their working lives researching and refining these calculations.

And we all have so much to learn from biblical theology. The Bible doesn't claim to be an authoritative book of science or technology, but a charter of salvation, authoritative in telling us about God and how he has provided for the eternal salvation of mankind.

As far as Christian theology is

concerned, whether or not God chose to make the world through the big bang and evolution, this doesn't detract in the slightest from his offer of spiritual salvation to those who seek him. The biblical promise of spiritual "new creation" is far more momentous to humanity than the physical creation, important though that is.

The biblical promise of spiritual "new creation" is far more momentous to humanity than the physical creation, important though that is.

Science and theology can complement one another in the quest for truth and understanding. Albert Einstein said that "Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind". Pope John Paul II expressed it this way: "Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes. Each can draw the other into a wider world, a world in which both can flourish."

None of the scientific discoveries and the theories that explain them stands in conflict with what the Bible reveals about God's relationship to the creation. Where the Bible and science appear to conflict, one or the other has been misunderstood. Both science and religion have a part to play in plumbing the depths and heights of understanding the awesome universe we are privileged to call our home.

Notes:

1. www.butler.edu/clergyproject.
2. Adrian Bates, NZ CEO of 'Creation Ministries International' quoted in the NZ Herald, February 8, 2009, page 32.
3. Colossians 1:16-17.

Rex Morgan, the editor of "Inside Life", and his wife Marilyn live on Auckland's North Shore.



Rex has worked in office administration and Christian ministry for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at: rex@wcg.org.nz

A Message the World Forgot

By Neil Earle

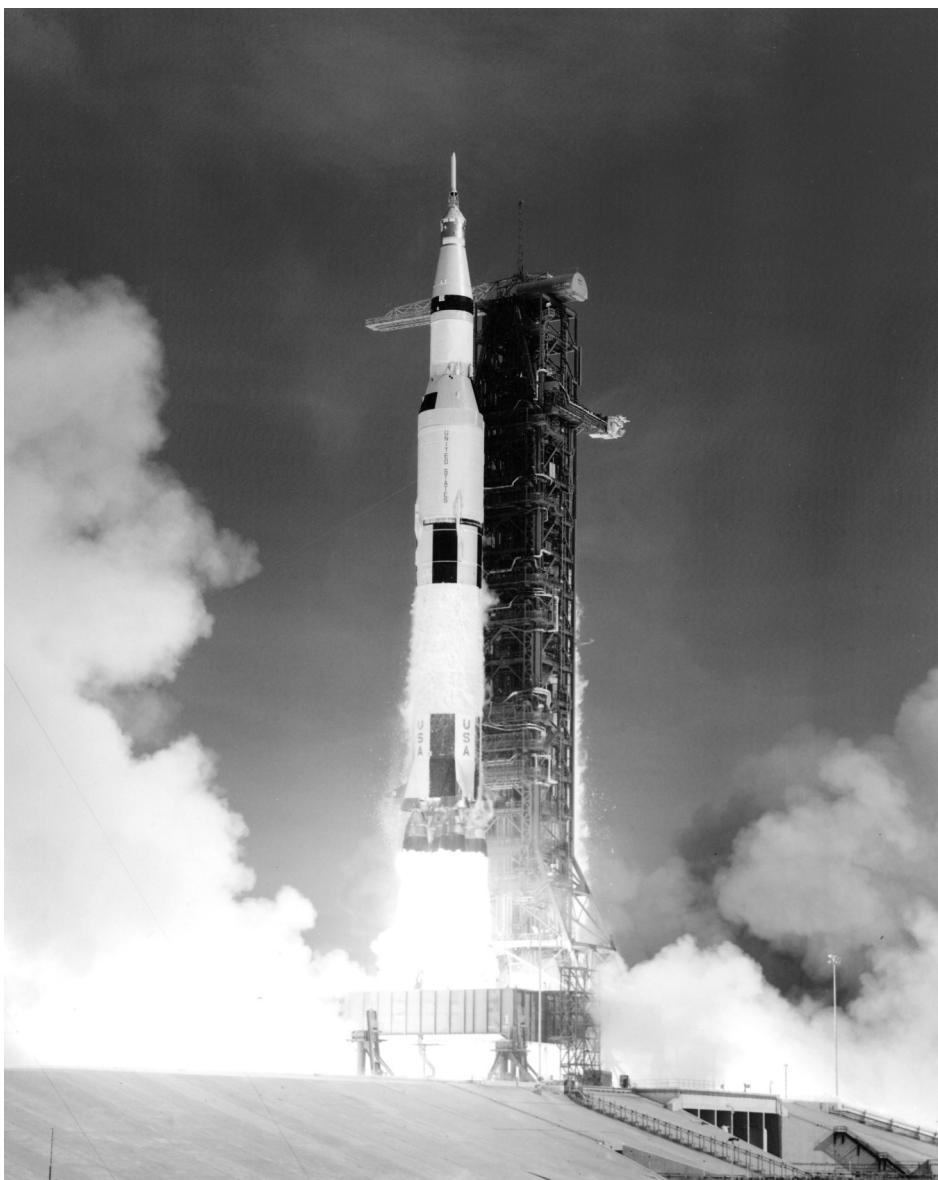
Forty years ago, two men landed on the moon. One of them spoke unforgettable words. The other did something equally momentous.

In the summer of 1969 the news was literally "out of this world". Though we have always been space travellers—our planet logs millions of miles every day—the landing of Apollo 11 on the moon was truly a turning point.

Pictures of our sparkling blue planet suspended above a bleak lunar surface underscored an already growing sense of the fragility of "Spaceship Earth" in the vast cosmos. The first Earth Day quickly followed on April 22, 1970.

Canadian thinker Marshall McLuhan called for a new commitment to environmental responsibility, observing that "on Spaceship Earth there are no passengers; everybody is a member of the crew. We have moved into an age in which everybody's activities affect everybody else."

Buzz Aldrin had somehow wedged into his stowage pouch a plastic bag. In it were a small flask of wine, a chalice and some wafers.



Apollo 11 lifts off: Forty years ago, Neil Armstrong and Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin of the Apollo 11 mission became the first men to set foot on the moon. The Apollo project, which landed five subsequent manned missions on the moon, lasted for 14 years and cost \$25 billion, employing some 400,000 people at its peak. It has been called the greatest technological achievement in human history.

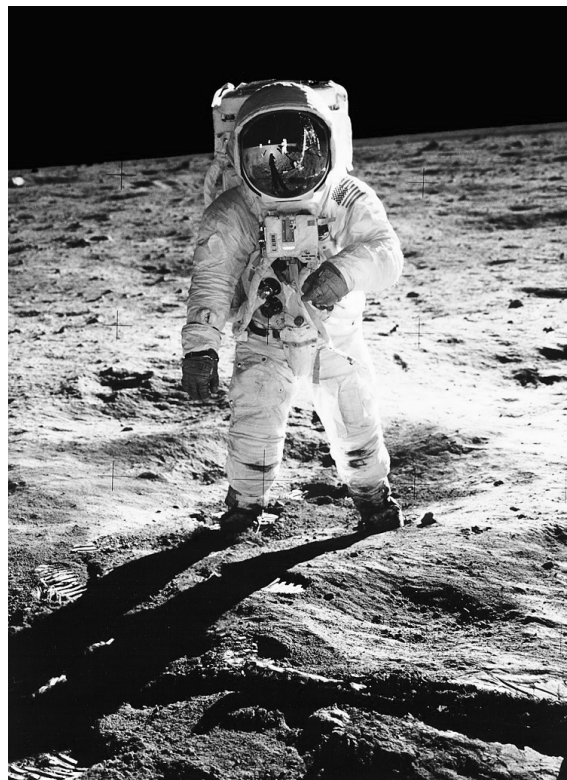
Books such as *The Limits to Growth*, *Small Is Beautiful* and *If You Love This Planet* helped birth the phrase "quality of life." The anti-nuclear movement, the New Age movement, micro-circuitry and science fiction were all given a boost by the Apollo 11 images of human beings investigating the lunar dust.

But something even more fundamental to the quality of life was on the mind of Apollo 11 crew member Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin that unforgettable July 20, 1969.

Earlier, in December 1968, the crew of Apollo 8 had drawn legal fire from atheist groups for reading from

Genesis 1 while they orbited the moon on Christmas Eve. Broadcasting a reading from a religious book during a government-sponsored space mission seemed to some Americans to compromise the separation of religion and state. To avoid more legal problems over the issue, NASA asked the Apollo 11 crew not to recite any scriptures. (On a humorous note, one judge eventually threw out a legal challenge filed against Apollo 8 by claiming that the event "was out of his jurisdiction.")

An Episcopalian, Buzz Aldrin had somehow wedged into his stowage pouch a plastic bag. In it were a



One giant leap: Buzz Aldrin in the lunar module (above left) and on the moon (right). Below: The moon surface beside the lunar module, and Buzz Aldrin's boot print in the lunar soil.

small flask of wine, a chalice and some wafers. About 5:57 p.m. Houston time, he set the elements on the fold-down guidance-computer table. He spoke into his microphone: "This is the LM [Lunar Module] pilot speaking. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours, and to give thanks in his or her own way."

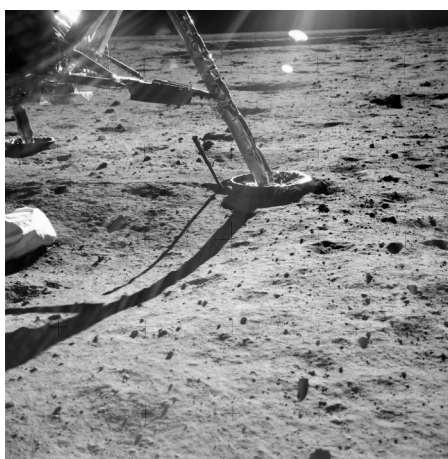
Aldrin's way of giving thanks was to gently pour the wine into the chalice. He then recited—silently, as NASA had requested—John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches.... Without me you can do nothing."

Taking Communion on the moon!

What is man?

This remarkable story is relayed in Andrew Chaikin's history, *A Man on the Moon: The Voyage of the Apollo Astronauts*. Back on earth, Aldrin's wife Joan marvelled—Buzz had not forgotten the deeper significance of what was happening on July 20, 1969.

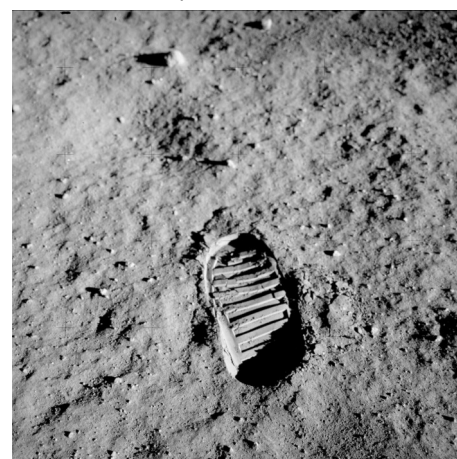
On his return to earth, Aldrin reflected aloud on the meaning of the words written some 2,800 years earlier by another gazer into the starry night: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,



the moon and the stars, what you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"¹

Ironically, humanity's most stunning technological feat took some of its key participants back—if only for a few moments—to their own humble place in the cosmos. As the apostle Paul told a group of advanced thinkers back in Athens, Greece, in the first century, "God is not far from every one of us."²

The world has all but forgotten Buzz Aldrin's call to thanksgiving and his Communion service, standing as they do in the shadow of Neil Armstrong's famous words, "That's one small step for a man, one giant



leap for mankind." But that humble acknowledgment from space of our dependence on the Creator of all things and our union with Jesus Christ speaks to the quality of human life in ways that will forever transcend even our most amazing technological achievements.

Notes:

1. Psalm 8:3-4
2. Acts 17:27



Neil Earle, who lives in Duarte, California, has served as a pastor and journalist in the USA and Canada for 36 years.

The Da Vinci Code: *Who is Jesus, Really?*

By Rusty Wright

The *Da Vinci Code*, the blockbuster novel that's now a major motion picture, makes some controversial claims: Jesus of Nazareth, a mere mortal, married Mary Magdalene and fathered her child. Their descendants live today.

Dan Brown's novel is an entertaining, artfully designed thriller filled with mystery, intrigue, and suspense. The film generally follows the novel's storyline. Reviews have been mixed. I enjoyed the film and feel that moviegoers are in for an adventure if they can follow the action and detail.

The novel raises healthy questions about Christian faith. The story's fictitious British scholar, Sir Leigh Teabing, says, "...almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false."¹

Teabing says that the Roman emperor Constantine had history rewritten to cast Jesus as divine rather than mortal and convened the famous Council of Nicaea to debate Jesus' divinity. He says the council upgraded Jesus to divine by a close vote.

The Greatest Story Ever Sold?

Teabing suggests that the greatest story ever told is, in fact, the greatest story ever sold,² a monumental cover-up. Was Jesus' divinity a clever fabrication?

University of North Carolina religion chair Bart Ehrman, not a theological conservative, found troubling Brown's assertion that "All descriptions of...documents...in this novel are accurate."³

Ehrman says, "Most of the descriptions of ancient documents, in fact, are not factual—they're part of his fiction. But people reading

the book aren't equipped to separate the fact from the fiction."⁴

Ehrman notes that Constantine called the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) not to debate whether Jesus was divine but rather what precisely that meant: Had he always existed as divine, or was he created as divine?⁵ The council overwhelmingly affirmed the former.

Dan Brown gets an A-/B+ for dramatic writing but a C-/D for historical accuracy. Still, what do we really know about Jesus?

Tacitus, a Roman historian writing around 115-117 C.E., refers to Jesus' execution under Pontius Pilate.⁶ The Talmud, a collection of Jewish laws and commentary, mentioned in the late first or second century a tradition that Jesus was hanged on Passover Eve.⁷

Jesus' contemporary biographers indicated that he claimed deity. For instance, one records a trial at which religious leaders asked, "Are you the Son of God, then?" Jesus' response: "Yes, I am."⁸ Accusing him of blasphemy, leaders said he deserved to die.⁹

The Alternatives

What are the alternatives? If his claim was true, he would be the Lord. If it was false and he knew it, he was lying. If he didn't know it was false, he had serious delusions, perhaps paranoid schizophrenia or paranoia proper.

Jesus' claim to deity sets him apart from great moral teachers. Either he was a liar, or a lunatic, or the Lord.

Was he a liar? If so, he died for that lie. Few, if any, would willingly die for something they knew was a hoax. Would you? Both believers and skeptics have considered Jesus a paragon of virtue.

Was Jesus a lunatic? His teachings about love, forgiveness, respect, and interpersonal relationships are often used as a basis for mental health today. He had a genuine concern for others, a cool response under pressure, and a great love for his enemies as he said from the cross, Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.¹⁰ If Jesus was insane, what must we be?

If he was not a liar and not a lunatic, we're left with the alternative that he was the Lord, as he claimed. Evidence for his resurrection supports this claim.¹¹

The Da Vinci Code touches many emotional chords. Clergy sex scandals have engendered mistrust. People like conspiracy theories. Feminist themes resonate with many. Deep hunger for spiritual experience is prevalent.

Who is Jesus, really? Why not examine the evidence and decide for yourself? www.WholisJesus-really.com is a good place to start.

Notes

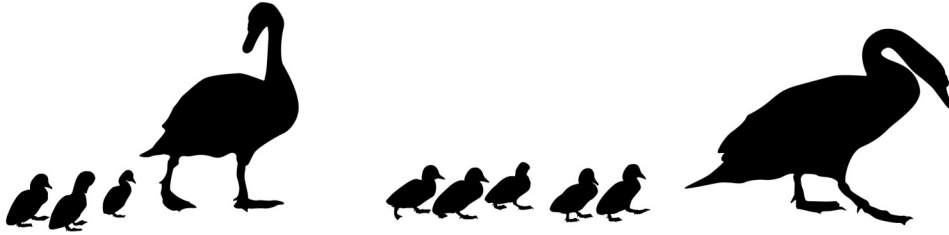
1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 235; emphasis Brown's.
2. Ibid., p. 267; emphasis Brown's.
3. Ibid., p. 1.
4. Deborah Caldwell (interviewer), "Unpacking 'The Code': What's true in Dan Brown's *'Da Vinci Code'* and what's pure historical fiction?", p. 1, Beliefnet.com, http://www.beliefnet.com/story/167/story_16783_1.html.
5. Ibid., p. 2.
6. Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44.
7. Sanhedrin (43a); in F.F. Bruce, *Jesus & Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 55-56.
8. Luke 22:70 NASB.
9. Matthew 26:65-66.
10. Luke 23:34 NASB.
11. www.WholisJesus-really.com.

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Thoughts of a Feather...



By Luca Radovic

“Birds of a feather flock together” is an often heard cliché. Usually we use it in the context of people of a certain type of character, personality, nationality or other categorisation, who are drawn together by their common bond, and it is easy to observe that the adage holds true in everyday life.

Used in this way, it is nothing but a mundane observation. But the ‘birds of a feather’ saying can also be used to illustrate a much more profound and useful principle, which we can use to great effect in our daily lives, by applying it to a different type of ‘bird’ altogether - those elusive and invisible birds that we call ‘thoughts’.

The principle is simple: thoughts have a kind of ‘magnetic’ quality - thoughts of a similar nature are drawn to each other. The more we hold a certain type of thought in our minds, be it positive or negative, the more it will draw similar thoughts into our mind, until those thoughts begin to dominate our entire outlook.

Thoughts lead to emotions

When a strong pattern of similar thoughts builds up, those thoughts tend to stir up an emotional reaction too, and those emotions add momentum to our thoughts, like a rolling snowball gathering more and more size and weight.

Emotions, in turn produce a bodily reaction - we don’t just experience emotions in our minds, we feel them in our stomach, shoulders, heart, legs, arms and other parts of the body. For example, anyone who has ever given a public speech will know that the nervousness is not just felt

in the head, it is experienced as ‘butterflies in the stomach’, or perhaps tension in the shoulders, or shaking in the hands and in various other parts of the body. The same applies to positive emotions such as joy, excitement and others.

Our thoughts and emotions influence the way we see things, and provide the basis for the things we say. As we talk about those things that we are thinking of, we usually find our words reflected back at us, which adds more weight to the snowball that is gradually becoming an avalanche.



The more we hold a certain type of thought in our minds, be it positive or negative, the more it will draw similar thoughts into our mind, until those thoughts begin to dominate our entire outlook.

For example, if we stop to talk to someone about a terrible crime that we have heard about in the news, they will typically respond with a story of their own about a similar or even worse tragic event. At the end of the conversation we will probably sigh about how terrible the world we live in is and about how things are “getting worse”. In this way we have

added impetus to our thoughts by putting them into words and drawing a relevant response from others.

Ultimately, thoughts and emotions combine in a way that eventually results in outward bodily action, and gradually transform themselves into physical reality.

This whole process is summed up by a saying (of unknown origin) which I once heard at church and now carry in my wallet: *“Watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.”*

Focus on the positive

How can we apply this in daily life? Simply by focusing our thoughts and attention on those things we want, and not on those things we don’t want. If we focus on what we don’t want in life, then those thoughts will do nothing but reinforce the very things we don’t want, attracting similar thoughts and giving us more of what we don’t want. If we place our emphasis on what’s wrong with the world, then that is all we will ever see, no matter what positive changes may take place.

Think about what you want to see in the world. Dwell on the positive things, or if you see nothing positive in your current situation, dwell upon how you would like things to be - what positive changes you would like to experience, what results would you like to see in your life?

Our thoughts will literally determine, sooner or later, who we become. This is perhaps what is meant by the biblical proverb, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”¹

1. Proverbs 23:7

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Go ahead... SPEND, SPEND, SPEND!

By Jeb Egbert

In times of great economic challenge, most people's behaviour changes. They tend to pull back and be more conservative.

I'd like to challenge you to consider spending *more* during this crisis. Not more money, though. More time.

More time with your spouse, children or grandchildren.

It's interesting that when people believe they have *more* financial resources, many of the things they do can actually diminish the simplicity of time spent together. We rent movies or purchase the latest gadgets. Even going to amusement parks or to the movies not only costs money, but often does not result in additional quality time together.

But when we need to cut back for financial reasons, doors can open to more thoughtful time together. For instance, making a priority of playing board games not only doesn't cost much, but it binds the family together. It might help to create a tradition that will be remembered for years to come.

There are so many things that can get in the way of spending time together as a family. Parents have to be intentional about using what time is available.

My wife shared with me the story of a single mother with three pre-adolescents who had "restaurant night." Instead of going out, they took turns in pairs serving each other. Those being served got dressed up as if they were at a fine restaurant while the other two brought menus, took orders and served the meal.

Even washing the family car can be a family event that saves money and creates fun memories of "accidental" sprayings of siblings or parents.

Riding bikes together can be fun, inexpensive and provide exercise. And what about having an occasional picnic at the local park when the weather allows? One family I know made a goal of eventually visiting all the parks in their community.

My wife introduced a silly tradition that has since become a family staple. Marshmallow fight! It all began after a meal when we were settling down to enjoy some roasted marshmallows in front of the family fireplace when suddenly my wife let fly with a marshmallow that hit my teenage son right in the stomach. With that, the fight was on! All three of our children were adolescents at the time and we had a terrific time over the next 20 minutes, pelting each other and weaving and ducking as the torrent of marshmallows flew across the room. We also found marshmallows over the next few weeks in the drapes, behind chairs or in the planters.

Another favourite activity is doing word games at meal time. The idea is to get as creative as possible with names of countries. Some are eminently predictable: "Hey mum, I'm 'Hungary.'" "Okay then, let's have some 'Turkey.'" "But I'd prefer 'Chile'." And so it goes until it morphs into the more outrageous. "Yugoslavia" is embedded in a

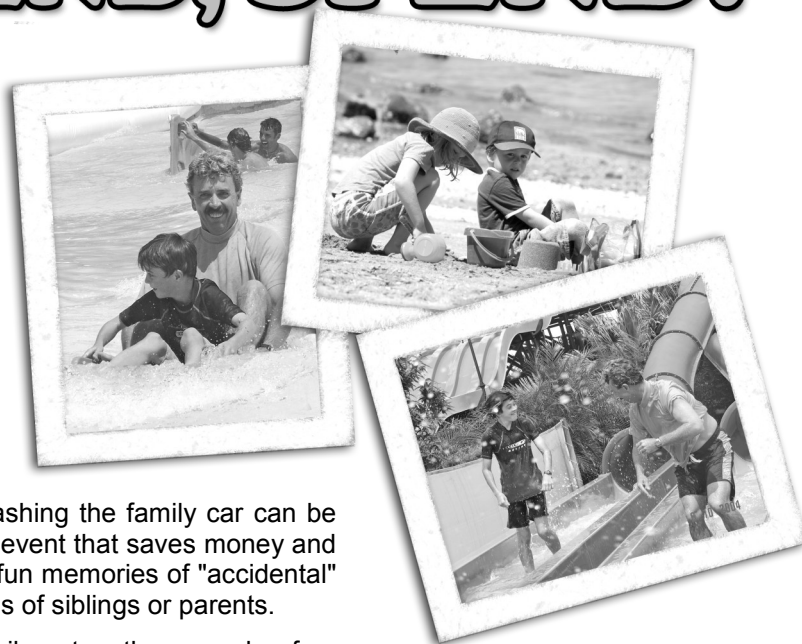
sentence to mean "you're a slob—ia." Perhaps the most fun is watching family members become quiet as they are trying to think up the next silly sentence.

Sometimes that game shifts to making up silly names. My daughter will ask during dinner, "Hey dad. Have you met my friend Rick?" "No," I reply. "Oh," she says. "His last name is O'Shay. Rick O'Shay." That is followed by "Phil Erup," and "Larry N. Gitis."

An idea that used to be fashionable was having a barbecue and making homemade ice cream. Chances are, grandparents still know how to do that and can enlist the help of their grandchildren to do some of the work on this fun project.

The point is that there are so many things that can get in the way of spending time together as a family. Parents have to be intentional about using what time is available. While financial resources may be shrinking, our allotment of time remains.

So go ahead. Spend, spend, spend! Spend as much time as you can with your family. Make it fun. Build traditions and memories that will last a lifetime!



LOVING the Unlovely

By Gael McInnes

Are you repulsed by those people who seem undesirable, different, difficult, mean, argumentative, opinionated, and who use coarse language? These are people a modern writer calls 'Sandpaper' people.¹

In an old *Peanuts* cartoon, Charlie Brown says, "I love mankind, it's just people I can't stand!" It's often said if there were fewer people in the world, there would definitely be fewer problems. Or would there? Let's be honest!

We all know people who are more difficult to get along with than others, and people we would rather avoid, and sometimes we are one of them! We have to communicate with people every day, be it with those at home, our neighbours, at work, at play, on the bus, train, plane, in church, school, university, or just out shopping.

You can choose to make an effort to get along with abrasive people, or to walk away.

Parents of teenagers will tell you that their offspring just mumble their way through life. The commuter who wants to have a chat will tell you that nobody wants to talk – they are all wired up to their latest gadget to escape any conversation.

Have you ever noticed how some people communicate and others avoid communicating? The person who just 'flashes' their bus pass at the driver, without acknowledging

him or her, or the shopper who just places items on the counter, oblivious to the cheery 'Hello' from the operator, while at the same time checking a mobile phone. Perhaps desperate that someone is trying to make contact!

Then there are the outspoken, ever-chattering, abusive types of people where nothing is right, especially when it comes to 'their rights'. One of the most annoying types of people can be the 'know-it-all', a person who has a dogmatic opinion about everything, is closed to anything new, resents discipline and refuses to look at a situation in a different light.

Abrasive People

It's the 'abrasive' type of person that was a challenge to me during my nursing career. I term this person as the one who is rude and unpleasant in manner – they have an instant dislike for you and it doesn't matter how you approach them, nothing will be right! Getting along with such people has required me to look at them from all

angles.

This type of person needs someone who will look beyond their behaviour and recognize their worth. Often undesirable attitudes and behaviours have become part of their persona, as a result of exposure to such behaviours from others, over a long period of time. The child who has never been told they are loved or hugged, is continually being put down, told they are no good, will never amount to anything and so forth. They grow up with little self-worth, an unhealthy self image and scant belief in themselves or their abilities. Often a false identity has been established. As a result they live lives having no real concept of who they really are, or what they can become.

As a Christian, I have tried over the years to make a deliberate choice to see these abrasive people as God sees them. He is a God of love, and he wants us to love others as he loves us. We can't base love on feelings, but on God's love released by the choices we make.



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ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

Jerry was the kind of guy you love to hate. He was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!" He was a unique manager because he had several waiters who had followed him around from restaurant to restaurant.

The reason the waiters followed Jerry was because of his attitude. He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Jerry was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation. Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up to Jerry and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

Jerry replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, Jerry, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood, or you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose a good mood. Each time something happens, I can choose to be the victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.

"Yes it is," Jerry said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or a bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live life."

I reflected on what Jerry said. Soon thereafter, I left the restaurant industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it.

Several years later, I heard that Jerry did something you are never supposed to do in the restaurant business. He left the back door open one morning and was held up at gunpoint by three armed robbers. While trying to open the safe, his hand, shaking from nervousness, slipped off the combination. The robbers panicked and shot him. Luckily, Jerry was found relatively quickly and rushed to the local trauma centre.

After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, Jerry was released from hospital with fragments of bullets still in his body. I saw Jerry about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied, "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scars?"

I declined to see his wounds, but did ask him what had gone through his mind as the robbery took place. "The first thing that went through my mind was that I should have locked the back door," Jerry replied. "Then, as I lay on the floor, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live, or I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked. Jerry continued, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read 'he's a dead man'. I knew I needed to take action."

"What did you do?," I asked.

"Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Jerry. "She asked if I was allergic to anything."

"Yes!" I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply.

I took a deep breath and yelled, "Bullets!"

Over their laughter, I told them, "I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead."

Jerry lived, thanks to the skill of the doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. Attitude, after all, is everything.

-- Author unknown

After all, God created them too and they are worthy of being loved.² It takes time and effort, because abrasive people are always suspicious of those who care about them, or take an interest in them. After all no one else has, so why you? "What do you

want from me?" they often ask.

Our ability to succeed in life comes down to a matter of choice; how we react to what has been done to us in the past, or is being done to us right now. And for those of us who have

been blessed to have come this far without many problems, we have a choice to make too.

I have a philosophy that every day I am going to look for something good in everybody I meet. Try it, and you'll

surprise yourself, because it is an attitude you can adopt.³

You can choose to make an effort to get along with abrasive people, or to walk away. You won't succeed in all cases and you will never be able to 'peel off all the layers', (like an onion skin), but you might make a start. You'll be 'stung' along the way, but at the 'core' of this person is a soul crying out to be loved, to be accepted, and be given a chance.

A hospital visit

Go to any emergency department in a public hospital, on a Friday or Saturday night, and you'll witness nursing and medical staff being verbally, and often physically abused by wounded, drunken people, who pound them with every obscenity known! I know, I've been on the receiving end, and often had to call in the Police. This type of person has reviled me over the years. It's times like these that I have had great difficulty in accepting these people as fellow children of God.

It takes a deliberate choice on our part to walk alongside others that are different to us.

I recall an incident I had with an elderly patient who complained about everything, and it seemed impossible to please her. She wasn't into talking, and I often wondered what life had dealt her. It could have just been a feeling of inadequacy, because of her illness and old age. I was settling her for the night, when she told me to "bugger off!"

"Why waste your time on me?," she snarled. I racked my brain to find a breakthrough in this situation, when I suggested that she might enjoy a back massage. I knew this was a 'long shot' as it would be 'up close and personal'!

She was sitting on the edge of the bed with her legs dangling over the side – her back towards me – perhaps avoiding any eye contact. At first she said no. I said I found it soothing and relaxing when I was upright. She consented, although I

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sensed grudgingly, so I knelt on the bed behind her and started to massage her shoulders.

They were tight, so I proceeded gently, and she began to dissolve like putty in my hands. As I proceeded down her spine she began to cry, and said nobody had ever done that before. We both cried and hugged each other. We didn't need to talk. She slept well that night. This lady was crying out for someone to love her, to accept her as she was, and I

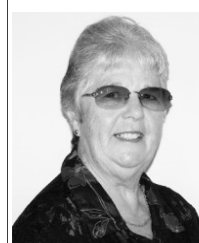
was thankful that I persisted.

Have you come into contact with people like this? Our communities are full of them. We make choices every day as to what we think or are going to do in various situations. Attitude is everything – see box on page 14.

It takes a deliberate choice on our part to walk alongside others that are different to us. You don't have to pry into their lives. Just listen to them if they talk, and offer encouragement. Abrasive people desperately need someone who will look beyond their abrasiveness to recognise their worth. We all have worth. We just have to 'dig' for it in some people. We have to make a choice.

Are you prepared to step out and choose to love the unlovely? I hope you make the right choice. You might even make a friend for life.

1. www.marysoutherland.com/women_in_ministry
2. John 13:34
3. Philippians 4:8



Gael McInnes is a retired nurse and midwife, lives in South Auckland, and is experienced in holistic care. Gael spends one day a week as the School Chaplain at a local Primary School. Gael can be contacted at: gaelmcinnes@xtra.co.nz

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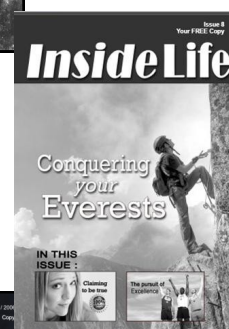
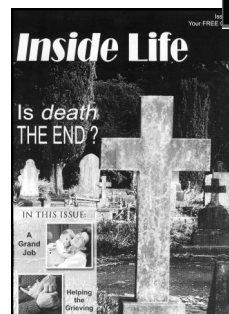
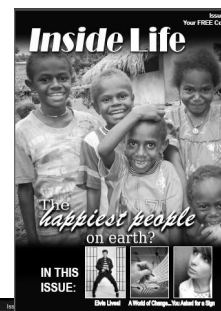
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