

Ohio Congregationalist

CONSERVATIVE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE OHIO FELLOWSHIP

Still soft and stretchy

from Answers In Genesis

A recent dinosaur soft tissue find provides a stunning rebuttal of “millions of years.” This exciting discovery was apparently made when researchers were forced to break open the leg bone of a Tyrannosaurus rex fossil to lift it by helicopter. The bone was still largely hollow and not filled up with minerals as is usual. Chemicals were used to dissolve the bony matrix, revealing the soft tissue still present.

It appears that this sort of thing has not been found before mainly because it was never looked for. Dr. Schweitzer was probably alert to the possibility because of her previous serendipitous discovery of T. rex blood cells. (It appears that the fossils were sent to her to look for soft tissues, prior to preservative being applied, because of her known interest.) In fact, Schweitzer has since found similar soft tissue in several other dinosaur specimens!

The reason that this possibility has long been overlooked seems obvious: the overriding belief in “millions of years.” The long-age paradigm (dominant belief system) blinded researchers to the possibility, as it were. It is inconceivable that such things should be preserved for (in this case) “70 million years”.

Will they now be convinced? Unfortunately, the long-age paradigm is so dominant that facts alone will not readily overturn it. As philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn pointed out, what generally happens when a discovery contradicts an entrenched paradigm is that the paradigm is not discarded but modified, usually by making secondary assumptions, to accommodate the new evidence.

That’s just what appears to have happened in this case. When Schweitzer first found what appeared to be blood cells in a T. Rex specimen, she said, “It was exactly like looking at a slice of modern

bone. But, of course, I couldn’t believe it. I said to the lab technician: ‘The bones, after all, are 65 million years old. How could blood cells survive that long?’” Notice that her first reaction was to question the evidence, not the paradigm. That is in a way quite understandable and human, and is how science works in reality, though when creationists do that, it’s caricatured as non-scientific.

CCCC Board to Consider Congregational Track at Westminster

Westminster Theological Seminary has just approved a proposal that would establish a Congregational study track on its Philadelphia campus. The proposal, now being sent to the CCCC Board for consideration at its July meeting, was developed by a committee appointed by Conference Minister, Dr. Stephen Gammon. The committee met with WTS Chancellor, Dr. Samuel T. Logan, Jr., and Executive Vice President, Stafford Carson, in September of 2004.

Westminster already has in place several courses which offer excellent historical/theological undergirding for Congregational ministers. Two WTS faculty members, Dr. Logan and Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, are authorities on Congregational stalwarts, Jonathan Edwards and John Owen, respectively.

Westminster Seminary was established in 1929 when four professors objected to Princeton Seminary’s reorganization under modernistic principles and withdrew. These scholars, J. Gresham Machen, Robert Dick Wilson, Oswald T. Allis, and Cornelius Van Til, set the theological standard at Westminster, which is renowned for its orthodoxy and adherence to Reformation doc-

trine. The Proposal under consideration, if approved, would mean that candidates preparing for ministry within the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference could choose from two conference related seminaries: Gordon-Conwell in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, and Westminster in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

David Brand, who moved from Virginia to the Mount Vernon area of Ohio in July, 2004, chaired the WTS Proposal Committee. He will be conducting a workshop on the subject “Westminster Seminary—an Excellent Match for the 4-Cs” at the CCCC annual meeting in Harrisburg, PA, July 25-28. Brand, a member of the CCCC since 1988, is also currently introducing ADVOCATE Enterprise, a non-profit organization that commends the historic Christian faith to educational, community and church leaders on Ohio’s campuses of higher education, at historic sites, and in other public and private venues. Further information is posted at www.dcb.com.org. Brand will partner with your church to help reach your community.

Christian Education: Our Obligation

by Phillip A. Ross

Seminary training, which has become quite expensive and is out of reach for an increasing number of people, has suffered from the spiritual acids of modernity (Liberalism and Humanism) for two hundred years, and shows no signs of abatement. Congregationalists, of all people, should understand this. We’ve given a lot of seminaries away!

It seems very strange to me that churches work so hard to raise and train faithful Christians in local churches—the primary locus of Christian education, only to send those who are best suited to Christian service away to serve elsewhere. As soon as someone in

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our churches shows sufficient faith and dedication to engage in serious Christian ministry, we bless them and send them away to be trained by people we don't know to serve in situations from which our specific local church most often does not benefit. The result of this modern practice has been the systematic weakening of local churches, which now find themselves unable to engage in serious Christian education.

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It also puts unwarranted and unbiblical power in the hands of seminaries, which often have no genuine biblical relationship to local churches or denominations. Seminaries usually have an *historical* relationship with some particular denomination, but lack a *significant* relationship.

The reality of seminary education today is that seminaries intentionally broaden their theological perspectives in order to attract students from a variety of backgrounds. The seminary student market is so small that for seminaries to meet their own cash flow obligations, they believe that they must attract students from across the denominational field—and into the contemporary church horizon.

They justify this practice with the notion that they can reach more students and therefore more people with their broad-based denominational distinctives. But the reality is that in order to appeal to students from across the board, they must teach an increasingly "generic" theology, and then add denominational distinctives with classes in various denominational polities. The error of this practice is the assumption that denominational distinctives or particular denominational theologies do not affect the course of "generic" theology—even more, that there exists a "generic" theology that can be taught without appeal to any particular denominational distinctives.

I believe that history will show this to be a false treatment of theology. Why? Because if there is a right biblical perspective (a genuine, unified orthodox Christian theology), then whatever denominational distinctives that are

not in line with such orthodoxy are necessarily false. Thus, the effort to teach a "generic" Christian theology ends up with a watered down theology that is short of the mark. This is only to say that the attempt to teach generic, multi-perspectival theology muddles clear thinking by assuming that there is a *neutral* theological position. There isn't.

Of all Christians, Congregationalists, whose heritage is the original American "city on a hill," and who believe that the primary institution of the gospel is the local church, should know better. I am not arguing against theological education or missions, only pointing out the fact that our methods of doing these things has harmed our local churches.

This generic seminary education is relatively new in the history of Protestant Christianity. Again, I'm not arguing for the end of theological education for clergy. Rather, I'm suggesting that we might do it differently. In as much as local churches give the responsibility for theological education to seminaries, they fail in their efforts to strengthen the local church focus of historic Congregationalism.

Every American seminary has grown more Liberal with each passing decade since the founding of this country. Looking to seminaries to provide pastoral renewal or church renewal is contrary to the historical distinctives of Congregationalism. Renewal always flows from the bottom up. Congregationalism, like the democratic republic created by the U.S. Constitution, requires an educated and committed membership if it is to thrive—or even survive.

Any recent seminary graduate will attest to the fact that that seminary training is not adequate preparation for pastoral work. Much of the problem is that the pastor is a new comer to the local church. None of the time and relationships that are a necessary prerequisite of trust are in place.

Moderator—Rev. Dr. John Hood, retired, Ohio Association CCCC, Howard, Ohio

Vice Moderator—Rev. Gary Eno, Chaplain, Ohio Dept of Rehabilitation & Corrections, Noble Correctional Institute, Caldwell, Ohio, Ohio Association CCCC, 740-826-7502

Treasurer—Rev. David Lippert, Pastor, Emanuel Reformed Church, Marion, Ohio, 740-528-2457

Secretary—Rev. Dr. Marshall Pierson, Pastor, Pilgrim Fellowship, Bellefontaine, Ohio; Ohio Association CCCC, 937-592-6387

Editor, Ohio Congregationalist—Rev. Phillip Ross, Marietta, Ohio, 740-376-9827

Editor, Ohio Fellowship News—Rev J Patrick Street, Pastor, Salem Evangelical Church, Marion, Ohio, 740-387-7560

The average length of today's pastorate is about 2-3 years, which is not enough time for trust to develop. Consequently, pastors spend the bulk of their time trying to develop trust with a congregation, but rarely stay long enough to gain it. Pastor and people never get beyond a 2-3 year friendship, never attain deep trust.

Part of the problem is that the seminary graduate has been taught a *generic* theology, whereas a local congregation is a repository of a *specific* theology. Pastor and people are seldom "on the same page."

The Executive Committee is considering a recommended course of study for potential CCCC Ohio Fellowship pastors. It is not a difficult or expensive recommendation. I am now suggesting that the churches themselves give it their blessing. But in order to do that, they (you/we) must know and understand what will be recommended ourselves. Pastor and people must know the content of the recommendations. Therefore, I propose the following:

In the interest of the renewal of the Ohio CCCC churches all able-bodied local church members and current pastors of the Ohio CCCC (as well as those who want to

engage an alternative to seminary education) take up the serious study of the Christian faith and of our historic Congregational distinctives by personally engaging the recommendations when they are made.

Again, all pastors, elders, deacons, Sunday School teachers, choir directors, musicians and other church leaders—seminary trained or not—should engage in the recommended study program as a means of protecting and strengthening our common faith (and Congregational distinctives) from further erosion by modernity (Liberalism and or Humanism).

Christian study is not just for pastors, but must be engaged by church leaders and members in order to strengthen and extend the ministry of the pastor and the local church. Pastors and people must be "on the same page," so to speak. The success of the pastor depends greatly upon the faithfulness and commitment to (read that as study and understanding of) the theology of the church. Not only do the people need to be on the same page as the pastor, but the people need to be on the same page as each other. Nothing will get people rowing in the same direction better or faster than the reading of these historic documents. Church renewal is always a matter of returning to the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16, 18:15).

Friends, the hard truth is that the responsibility for the weakness of Congregational churches belongs squarely to the churches themselves. Congregational polity provides no one else to blame. The good news of the gospel is that the key to renewal is the confession of sin and error, and repentance thereof. These are the basic elements of Christianity. We cannot be instruments of Jesus Christ if we refuse to accept the reality of our own sin and failures as individuals and as churches. Cooperation with the Spirit of renewal means giving ourselves completely to the Holy Spirit in prayer and to the ongoing practice of repentance. Repentance is a daily work of trusting God, which means retooling our minds through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Prayer and repentance are the Spirit's engines of renewal.

"...parents will pay up to \$6,000 per child per year for the privilege of having you evangelize their children in your learning center."

Of course, we can continue to neglect prayer and study in the hope that someone (the right pastor, the Conference, some super TV preacher, or maybe even God Himself) will snatch us from the jaws of our impending defeat. Or we can trust God to complete what He began in the historic Congregational churches in America—the Christianization of the world. (For more on the early history of Congregationalism see *Political Polytheism-The Myth of Pluralism*, by Gary North).

Jesus Christ has given this awesome responsibility to those who are weak enough to be used by His Holy Spirit. Are you weak enough yet? Are our churches weak enough yet? Or do we need more exposure to the spiritual acids of modernity? I hope not! In our weakness, let us turn to ordinary faithfulness in the Lord.

Ordinary faithfulness begins with the Word of God, and the orthodox explanation of it to the whole world. Those who fail to understand the orthodox teachings of the Christian church can't possibly live it or preach it. They can only serve as bad examples for God's faithful saints.

Historically, the Ohio Fellowship is the only remaining regional fellowship in the CCCC that continues to grant ministerial licensure/standing apart from the national CCCC. However, I believe that historic Congregationalists understand that the granting of such regional credentials is consistent with Congregational polity (orthodox Christian practice). So, I further recommend that the Ohio Fellowship take their/our responsibility in this matter more seriously—not merely to help stem potential problems in our churches (which have been increasing dramatically over the last two decades), but to spearhead and encourage the renewal of our churches. As Congregational churches we cannot expect a top-down renewal program, but must work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to bring renewal from the bottom-up, church by church.

There are no shortcuts. There are no magic pills, only the Spirit-led work of progressive sanctification.

You may not think that you are able to contribute much to this historic mission in our times. But God can use you! Can we trust Him to complete what He began in our churches? Yes, we can because God has guaranteed it (Philippians 1:6)!

Get Paid to Grow Your Church's Ministry

With the information published by Dominion Education, in less than 18 months, you or your church can have a full-time young child evangelism learning center ministry for at least 100 children, and maybe as many as 150. This will not be a conventional day care program, but a true educational ministry.

Five days a week, 50 weeks a year, young children will hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, hear Bible stories twice a day, memorize two dozen Christian songs and Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments. They will learn to pray before meals.

They will also learn to read, count, recognize numbers, appreciate classical music, develop their motor skills, and color inside the lines.

They will learn how to treat each other decently, play outside without pushing each other around, and sit quietly – hands folded – when it's time to pay attention to the teacher. In short, they will have their lives transformed.

Depending on the cost of living in your community, parents will pay up to \$6,000 per child per year for the privilege of having you evangelize their children in your learning center. Do the math. One hundred students at \$6,000/year. Now try it with 150 students.

Your church may be suffering financially. Within six months after your church-housed learning center opens, even if you don't reach the goal of 100 students, the learning center should be able to pay the church's monthly mortgage – until the day it's completely paid off.

A husband/wife directors' team

will jointly earn at least \$75,000 a year within two years from today.

Four years from today, you will probably be ready to build a second learning center/church facility, either on-site at your present location or at a new location. If it's at a new location, this new facility can also house a new congregation on Sundays.

More information at:
www.demischools.org.

Pete's Post

As we look ahead to enjoy the sunshine and warmth of spring and summer after a cold and snowy winter, I wanted to encourage us again to take time to love and care for our family. We are all aware of the many strains and stresses placed on family members as well as some unhealthy restraints from old prejudices of the past about fixed roles that sometimes need to give way to more flexibility (i.e. a father can and should be able to change a diaper; a mother can take out the garbage, etc.).

We have all heard sermons on Paul's classic statement about marital partnership from Ephesians 5:22-24: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord ... husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church...

"...I can't brake or steer, but I do have the power to stop the bike and ruin the ride."

A minister's wife, Noel Piper, commented on this Pauline passage using the analogy of taking a ride on a tandem bike. Her comments are a welcome reminder of how important the leaders of the family, mom and/or dad are and that the two love each other and work together. These same comments might very well apply to the role of women in the church as we work together as a church

family to love and serve our living Lord.

Sunscreen on, helmets buckled, pedals in sync, and we were on our way. After a few minutes, Johnny called over his shoulder, "You're doing pretty well for your first time on a tandem." Without a thought, I replied: "I guess all these years of marriage have been good practice."

Here are some random lessons learned last week riding along the Cannon Valley Trail behind my husband on a bicycle built for two:

- *If I throw my weight around, we wobble and swerve.*
- *My initial "seasickness" eases when I quit resisting and let him lean the bike into curves and turns in the path.*
- *I often feel as if I'm not really adding much to the effort. But I must be doing my part, because if I lift my feet, he feels it and asks, "Are you still there?"*
- *My instinct is to press harder on the pedals to make sure I'm carrying my share of the load. But when I do, he says, "Slow down. Don't push me so fast."*
- *Looking over his shoulder, I can see a lot of what he sees, but not what's immediately in front of us. Good thing he's the one steering, braking, and changing gears. On the other hand, I'm more free to look around and point out the mile markers and the turtles basking on a log.*
- *I can't brake or steer, but I do have the power to stop the bike and ruin the ride. If*

I stand still on the pedals and refuse to move, he can't make them turn.

- *I love it when we're on level ground and using a us forward. But I need warning when he changes I'm caught off guard, my feet are slung from the without snarling the progress up a steep hill.*
- *When I realize I'm gripping the handlebars, I have to remind myself, "Let go! You've always wanted to ride 'no hands.' Now you can!"*
- *When I'm ready to turn back, he's aiming for one more mile marker. When I'm ready to finish easy, he says, "Let's see if we can beat our record." With that kind of encouragement, I do what never would have happened if I'd been on my own.*

Near the end, when I see one more hill, I open my mouth to say, "Let me off. I'll walk up." Then I realize how foolish we'd look, me plodding alone and him trying to keep the bike going by himself. So I shut up and keep pedaling.

And I discover that, when we pedal together, impossible inclines become possible.

Perhaps the 19th century songwriter was wiser than he knew when he created a marriage proposal that said, "You'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two." It makes me think of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:22-24: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing."

Ohio Congregationalist
149 E. Spring St.
Marietta, OH 45750