

# Desperate Times or the Modest Newsletter Reduced and Depleted

The Progress of Knowledge  
*by The Editor*

With the arrival of spring, an old man's fancy may lightly turn to thoughts of graduation (perhaps I should say 'gingerly' and not 'lightly'). Now that I've reached the twilight of my life and am still not ready to get on with it, I've reached some conclusions that I'm not altogether unwilling to perpetrate on the very limited public (or should I say 'private'?) of this small and unpretentious organ. "What," you may ask, "does an elitist think about when he is undergoing the rigors of what is commonly known as the classroom?" That is an excellent question.<sup>1</sup> The answer to that question is found in two meditations.<sup>2</sup> One is on the grand subject of lecturing, the other is on the quite understandably, quite the contrary of a grand subject, of other things uttered during the lecturing. There is also a third category which nobody in their right mind, and not even I, would call a meditation, which is by some strange and mysterious influence attached to the meditations.

There are five clearly discernible varieties of lecturing.<sup>3</sup> The first of these is the boring lecture. The boring lecture is a very common phenomenon and, apparently, a teaching method of choice. It is characterized by a salient lack of energy and by vague to nonexistent organization.<sup>4</sup> This sort of lecture is meant to promote the idea that the subject matter is not really important because it is not worth the effort, or the organization, or the energy of interest. The boring lecture is a good indication of decadence and very effectively serves to communicate contempt for the subject on which the teacher is making the lecture and his living. Studies have shown that this teaching method is something toward which many teachers gravitate.<sup>5</sup> I use the term gravitate deliberately. There is some great and mysterious influence like the force of gravity which exerts itself on teachers. Perhaps it is called original sin.

The second variety of lecturing I shall call the non-lecture masquerading. This sort of non-teaching method, alas, is quite common. The non-lecture masquerading is the sort of talk that is used to hoodwink students who are paying into thinking that they're getting their money's worth when, indeed, they are being ripped off with a colossal level of insouciance. There is much to be admired in the non-lecture masquerading because such a lecture is compellingly interesting. It is replete with anecdotes and contains more than mediocre humor. The most effective thing about the non-lecture masquerading is the fact that the students who are being ripped off with the aforementioned level of insouciance, are, by and large, blissfully unaware of their plight. They succumb with great enthusiasm. What is even more interesting is that the one perpetrating the non-lecture is very frequently as oblivious of the scam as those scammed.

The third variety of lecture is the semi-lecture. The semi-lecture is a lecture whose most salient feature is the use of interlocutors for its advancement. In this lecture, the teacher uses questions to engage the interest of the audience. This is valuable for a teacher who has problems being interesting or has simply neglected to prepare

<sup>1</sup>If you have nothing better to do with your time. One can think of better questions to ask.

<sup>2</sup>So called for lack of a better word. Perhaps I should give myself over to a meditation on meditation, or better! a meditation on the mental activities of the student in the classroom, but those are murky waters. I think Pope had some words about those who tread those ways.

<sup>3</sup>They are clearly discernible to the semi-alert student, at least. It is a not unknown fact that there are students whose level of alertness renders distinctions, even of a very gross sort, rather hard to make. Alertness being such a vital part of an elitist's credo, it is hardly worth mentioning that this is one of the main things elitists have going for them.

<sup>4</sup>It might be added that the organization of such a lecture can also be characterized, in some cases, as downright arcane. The essential point is that whatever sort of organization exists is quite inaccessible to those it would most benefit, whether this person is the lecturer himself or his victims.

<sup>5</sup>My own studies, that is.

adequately. But this method is more than a fix for mediocrity. It can be used to engage the mind of the student and create the necessary level of interest needed to achieve understanding.<sup>6</sup> The semi-lecture is not a discussion, however, for it still has organization and deliberately placed questions. It is more flexible than the pure lecture but not as fluid as a pure discussion.

The fourth sort of lecture is the interesting lecture. It is characterized by a certain minimum level of energy and by more than a modicum of organization. It is a lecture which betrays the fact that the teacher likes what is being explained because he is displaying more signs of life than the teacher delivering the boring lecture. The interesting lecture is above all, characterized by clear direction because it has a clear objective. This may not be accomplished in one single lecture. The crucial difference between the interesting lecture and scintillating lecture (see below) lies in this very thing. The former can take the form of a series of lectures, the latter cannot. The interesting lecture is designed to communicate information about the subject and also an attitude toward the subject. This sort of lecture is a heuristic device in itself and a very effective teaching method.

The scintillating lecture is the final lecture to consider. The scintillating lecture is the lecture that most purely embodies the ideals of the lecture. This is a lecture whose organization is absolute. It coheres in every part – introduction, body, and conclusion. This is also a lecture in which the level of energy compels the listener to enter with enthusiasm into the flow and argument of the lecture. A very important element in the scintillating lecture is a conclusion. The conclusion of the scintillating lecture makes the whole lecture seem like one of those huge ski ramps – it flings the hearer out into long and high reaches of thought. The scintillating lecture gets the idea across with the most power. The shortcoming is that this lecture is limited to one idea and this must be accomplished in that one lecture. A scintillating lecture may cover a longer duration of time than a regular lecture, but it keeps a good listener with it all the way.<sup>7</sup> It may also serve as a capstone or even a good introduction to a series of interesting lectures.

We have not arrived at the point where we can discuss the second of our meditations, but the title is about progress, so we will journey on in the direction we are heading for, whatever that may be. The second of our meditations is about the topic of counter lecturing. It is what the students are wont to utter in the classroom by way of obstruction to the lecture.<sup>8</sup> There is some strange and mysterious influence which operates on the students as well.

The first form of counter lecturing is the fatuous interjection. The fatuous interjection is raised quite innocuously most of the time. Occasionally it is aimed at disrupting but is essentially a dud as far as the real purposes of the student are concerned. The best way to deal with the fatuous interjection is to prove its fatuousness by a swift answer that exposes the student, or by knitting the brows and asking “what?” One must be careful with this last suggestion; it can have very tedious consequences when directed at the wrong student. The fatuous interjection is not a serious challenge even if it was meant to be. It is a minor bump in the road.

Then comes the deliberate challenge. The deliberate challenge must be judged shrewdly. The teacher has to be able to tell whether the student must be shut down immediately, or if giving him enough rope to hang himself will render a better yield in the long run. If the student really thinks he knows more than the teacher, and the teacher perceives that this is a grave error, the teacher must help the student to find some humility. This can be done by pointing out the scant extent of the student’s knowledge in the most direct way possible. Nothing is more instructive to the wise than the twitching corpse of the foolish. I firmly believe that our capacity to learn is bound up with our capacity to feel terror.

The inane question that is pregnant with meaning is a sort of question that reveals more about what the student

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<sup>6</sup>Is this not, genial reader, another way of saying exactly what was stated in the sentence about the betrayal? Does it not render the intervening sentence rather irrelevant? How would you put it? Do you think that such a statement is worth making in so many and in such captious ways? But really, how does the placement of these three sentences make you feel?

<sup>7</sup>The listener’s role has not been discussed, and will not be discussed in any positive light. This, I am sure all will agree, is the subject of another meditation. It is clearly related, but must be considered in its own right in order to do it justice.

<sup>8</sup>I am sure you will forgive me the habitual reaction of prescribing a solution to the problem I diagnose. It is an essential part of my meditation (i.e., the way my mind works).

understands (or lacks in understanding) than the student himself understands. This sort of question can be disciplined by simply ignoring it or by enlightening the student about his own ignorance. The question is ignored if the knowledge imparted by doing so can be trusted to reach the student indirectly. A teacher would enlighten the student more directly in the event that the student could not be trusted to perceive his ignorance eventually. The inane question can be an obstruction if the teacher takes it seriously and spends time and effort in something that is not to the point or even helpful.

The blunt instrument of unrighteousness is the clumsy attempt to derail the train of thought. It is usually brought about by a visceral reaction of disgust or irritation to the perceived goal or point the teacher is aiming for. The blunt instrument of unrighteousness is a great teaching opportunity, but you have to judge the motives and this is such a tricky thing that it is more likely to go wrong than it is to go right. So what is the teacher to do? Questions are a good way of determining if there is any consistent thought behind the blunt instrument of unrighteousness (if there's a consistent thought it may be better classified as a deliberate challenge) or if the problem is simply an attitude. The attitude must be quarantined by exposing it as ridiculous. If the student does not come to learn, then why does he come?

The not-so-provocative suggestion is another flaccid attempt to redirect the discussion or lecture that must be converted into a *cul-de-sac*.<sup>9</sup> One speculates in vain as to the cause which provokes the not-so-provocative suggestion. It must be chalked up to mystery, but a mystery that is not great or even interesting.

The I'm-really-smart-please-recognize-me utterance is a sign of pathetically proud student and should not be encouraged. It is a sign of some admiration for the teacher, but the teacher must not be flattered. The problem is that the student may be smart and the teacher desires smart students, but humility is what makes the smartness useful. A proud student is hardly teachable. The teacher may need to resort to sarcasm in these events, which may be confusing for the student, but if he's as smart as he thinks he is, perhaps eventually he will get the point. The rest of the class will no doubt get the point. Even if they do not derive any benefit, they will at least derive amusement.

The thoughtless rustling (or other audible and visible disturbances) is the occasion that comes about by thoughtlessness of which Evangelical students have much and evangelicalized Fundamentalists have an increasing measure.<sup>10</sup> It is often coupled with disorganization and seems to be chronic and insoluble. It seems to be impervious to ridicule even of the most prolonged, subtly deft sort. Of course, the very heart of the problem is thoughtlessness, which

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<sup>9</sup>Pardon my French. I realize that it is probably not an expression a polite Frenchman might be given to using. I will admit that the adjective in some sense has to apply, or should, but I am happy to say that the noun has no application to me whatsoever.

<sup>10</sup>If, at this point, I may be permitted a characteristically cantankerous interjection, I would like to point out what the heart of the problem is. It is irreverence. Irreverence, is the consequence of failing to see one's proper place in relationship to something else. It is tied to that all important sense that is so often neglected, the sense of proportion. Much of the source of this irreverence, I have no doubt, has to do with the modern, prevailing lack of good manners. This is not an idle or insignificant observation on my part. It is one that deserves to be developed further and with rigor. The terrible condition into which the average household has lapsed, and the sheer inability of most people to exercise good manners is, in my irritated opinion, very much to blame. What I'm saying is that the reason people are irreverent when it comes to important things like worship and interactions with authority is that they have not been taught to rule themselves when it comes to eating and drinking around other people. What I'm saying is that people who have not been taught to realize the shocking incivility of the clamor and spectacle they make while eating, or the thoughtlessness of obstructing a passage way, or feel no shame when rebuked for the tone or volume of their voice, in other words, people who are not taught a certain measure of self-consciousness for the sake of those around them, such people, I say, are unlikely to be aware of the awful other presence they purport to worship. They are certainly unlikely to defer to the teacher in the classroom unless it is in the most cursory and most meaningless way (this footnote is dedicated to Richard Mitchell).

means anything that is pointed out or imparted by way of ridicule or stern rebuke is unlikely to grip the mind for any considerable period of time. In this way, the cure is rendered useless. Perhaps execution should be used as a disciplinary method to wake others up. Of course, there is the old and barbaric practice of expelling students or even failing them, but these practices are part of a dark age that none of us wishes to return to.

These things I have learned during my sojourn in the classroom. But I have also learned that some of the best teaching takes place outside of the classroom. I have a great and abiding love for good lecturing and so you must forgive me if I seem to idealize it. If this newsletter is unduly taken up with the exercise of my flagrant and distressing opinions, it is not therefore safe to say we live in desperate times? To this I have come by the progress of my education, alas! At least I can be said to have learned the paratactic style well (or with a certain annoying proficiency).

**Book Review of *Faith, Form, and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms about Creation and the Age of the Universe* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), by Kurt P. Wise.**

*by Jillian Ross*

*Eureka!* After having trudged through philosophical and scientific jungles for some time; fatigue, despair, and dehydration have taken their toll. After dropping my bucket into the archaic<sup>a</sup> and over simplified well of young earth creationists' data, I drew a partially filled bucket of stagnant water. Next, I headed to an eye-appealing cistern, the *Intelligent Design* cistern; this cistern was full of salt water. At this point, I resigned myself to the fact that "there just wasn't any good water out there." Then, I spotted a glorious oasis in Kurt Wise's book, *Faith, Form, and Time*.

*Faith, Form, and Time* begins by seeking to explain creation through the presupposition of faith, but not just any faith. One must believe that the God of Israel and his Son Jesus Christ the Righteous created heaven and earth in six literal days. Wise divides his book into five sections. The first section, "God's Word Matters," begins with a call for witnesses of creation. Wise concludes that since man is fallible and God is infallible, it is necessary for humanity to believe what God testifies of creation. In Wise's next section, "The Dating Game," he affirms a young-earth creation view by examining God's nature, essence, and attributes. God is holy; he cannot lie (thus, one must affirm that a young earth position dates the earth using biblical records). Wise also discounts an old earth model since it fails to account for God's orderliness. In Part 3, "Creation Week," Wise goes through each day of creation by first discussing God's creative work from a biblical perspective and then enhancing his conclusions with scientific evidence. Wise answers difficult questions such as "What does 'after its own kind' mean?" In his chapter on man, Wise accurately contends that an old-earth creationist view discounts a central teaching in Scripture, namely the image of God in man. Thus, on the presuppositional level, a Christian ought to reject the old-earth position. Wise does not end here; throughout the book he provides scientific evidence that better explains creation from a young-earth perspective rather than from a theistic evolutionary one. In Part 4, Wise takes his readers from creation to catastrophe as he surveys "The Edenian Epoch," "The Fall," and "The Antediluvian World." His last section, "From Noah to the New Earth," engages readers in plausible reconstructions of earth during each epoch. While many situations fit a young-earth creation model, Wise is candid enough to draw the reader's attention to scientific research in which creationists lack adept answers. I especially appreciate Wise's last chapter, which emphasized both the beauty of and necessity for the New Creation (Rev 20).

Unlike most creation science books, *Faith, Form, and Time* is not intended to be an apologetical tool for believers. Instead, it is a book by which one's faith is to be increased. For this reason, *Faith, Form, and Time* is written on the popular level. Wise uses a clear and simple writing style that allows the average layperson to confidently read this book with comprehension. To aid his intended audience even further, Wise provides an eleven-page glossary of scientific terms with short, simple definitions for each term.

While *Faith Form, and Time* has abundant strengths, a few weaknesses do exist. First, Wise's select bibliography fails to provide the reader with any references to opposing views. While he does interact with other views, one is left hanging as to the opposition's rebuttals. This may be attributed to the nature of the book and the intended audience. Also, due to the book's audience and purpose, much of his information is simplified. While a

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<sup>a</sup>The editor blushes at this use of such a venerable word, or as the Romans might say, *sic*.

reader may have a competent answer, he does not have a complete answer. Thus a reader should be cautious about interacting with those in the scientific community.

In conclusion, I believe this book should be widely circulated among Christians. It should be required reading for any Christian school biology class. Furthermore, it would behoove parents to read this book so that they can have responses for when their children question creation. Wise's presupposition of faith coupled with his scientific competency makes *Faith, Form, and Time* an excellent book dealing with creation.

In preparation for the bash, please read the first chapter of *Faith, Form, and Time* and "Life's intelligent design"  
<http://www.discovery.org/news/life'sIntelligentDesign.html>

While reading the two documents (about 10-12 pages total) please seek to answer the following questions.

1. What presupposition(s) are driving the views?
2. What was your initial reaction to each position? Why?
3. What are the strengths of each view?
4. What are the weaknesses of each view?
5. To which view are you more inclined?
6. Do you think both can/should be affirmed by a believer?
7. How does this relate to Bosch's idea of reality? (Deborah asks)

### **Further Directions**

*by Andrea Brown*

We will consider whether or not music must have text in order for it to have a valid place in Protestant worship services. Some things to consider:

Does music communicate?

Does it use words to do so?

If music must have words, is it a corollary that everyone in the congregation must know the words?

If so, how ought one to guarantee that everyone knows the words?

### **-A Quotation**

In the next place, a right view of sin is the best antidote to that sensuous, ceremonial, formal kind of Christianity, which has swept over England like a flood in the last 25 years, and carries away so many before it. I can well believe that there is much that is attractive in the system of religion, to a certain order of minds, so long as a conscience is not fully enlightened. But when that wonderful part of our constitution called conscience is really awake and alive, I find it hard to believe that sensuous ceremonial Christianity will thoroughly satisfy us. A little child is easily quieted and amused with gaudy toys, and dolls, and rattles, so long as it is not hungry; but once but it feel the cravings of nature within, and we know that nothing will satisfy it than food. Just so it is with man in the matter of his soul. Music, and flowers, and candles, and incense, and banners, and processions, and beautiful vestments, and confessionals, and man-made ceremonies of the semi-Romish character, may do well enough for him under certain conditions. But once let him awake and the rise from the dead, and he will not rest content with these things. It will seem to him mere solemn triflings, and a waste of time. Once let him see his sin, and he must see his Savior. Until stricken with a deadly disease, nothing will satisfy him but the great physician. He hungers and thirsts, and he must have a nothing less than the bread of life. I may seem bold in what I am about to say; but I fearlessly venture the assertion that four-fifths of the semi-Romanism of the last quarter of a century would never have existed if English people had been upon more fully and clearly the nature, vileness, and sinfulness of sin.

*-John Charles Ryle*