



Science and Reformed Theology

By David Cook

In June, 1977, the Uniting Church in Australia deliberately adopted the nomenclature, ‘Uniting’ rather than ‘United’, because it was believed that the ecumenical process was to be an ongoing one.

It is also the nature of Reformed theology to be ongoing, to be reforming.

Reformed Theology is that theology whose statements and convictions spring from a right understanding of the content of Holy Scripture, God’s Word. Therefore, the Reformed theologian is always self-examining and reforming, bringing conclusions again and again under a proper understanding of the whole Bible.

Holding a conviction, one will always be open to the possibility that the conclusion springs from an inadequate or inaccurate reading of Scripture. That is why church, fellowship and the Holy Spirit’s presence are so vital in maintaining truth.

However, theological conviction must never be swayed by sociological, cultural or philosophical matters, for the Bible is the supreme authority. Only a better reading of the Bible can lead to theological adjustment!

The Reformed theologian will never rest conviction on what can be seen or on what seems reasonable, but on what God has said, even if that seems to contradict observable factors.

Surely science must be like this.

Too often we hear the clause, ‘the science is settled’, or this has been ‘ratified by peer review’.

If the science has been settled it is thought to be beyond

dispute. But the scientific method consists of experimentation, observation, developing theory, testing the theory and a conclusion. Once the conclusion has been reached, as in theology, ongoing discussion is not eliminated, further insight and testing is welcome and encouraged.

Writing in *The Australian* newspaper on Wednesday, 16 September, 2020, Dr. Peter Ridd, formerly a Professor at James Cook University and a physicist, refers to a recent Senate enquiry into the health of the Great Barrier Reef. Dr. Ridd believes it is the first time, by rigorous questioning, scientists, ‘have been forced out of their bubble’. Please read the article, it asserts that very little of the Reef has been affected by agricultural runoff.

What struck me was Ridd’s reference to Dr. Paul Hardisty, the Head of the Australian Institute of Marine Science who has recently instituted a red-blue system within his organisation. This system helps quality assurance, ‘a red team is a group of scientists that takes a deliberately antagonistic approach to test, check and replicate scientific evidence. A genuine red team is a far more rigorous approach than peer review, ‘which is often little more than a quick read of the work by the scientist’s mates’.

If this is the case it is a contrast to the genuinely critical method used in the world of Theology.

Ridd refers to our, ‘generally untrustworthy science institutions’ and refers to the ‘scientific cancel culture’, which attacks any questioner of scientific orthodoxy, rather than genuinely examining evidence.

Response to this column may be to write it off as having its source in the ‘Murdoch press’, just as theologians may be rejected as being, ‘from Sydney’. This is mindlessness!

The quest is truth, so settled conviction must be preceded by genuine and open enquiry.

This is crucial both in our understanding of God and the world He has made.

David Cook was the former principal of SMBC.