

# BELFAST BIBLE COLLEGE: 'Mounting Concerns'

In my March 2007 '**News From The Front**' ministry newsletter I voiced some concerns about matters related to **Belfast Bible College**. They arose as a result of a contribution made by one of their lecturers, **Professor Robert Keay**, to a Radio Ulster debate between **Richard Dawkins** (evolutionist) and **Professor Andy McIntosh** (creationist). This is what I wrote in my newsletter –

Another disturbing matter that arose from the broadcast radio debate was a contribution made to it by **Professor Robert Keay**, a lecturer at the Belfast Bible College. In a circulated email the local **CALEB** Evangelical Group wrote – 'What was most disappointing in the debate was the attitude of the Belfast Bible College lecturer, **Professor Robert Keay** ... **Mr Keay**...indicated that he believes in evolution, (William Crawley [presenter of the programme] remarked – An 'evangelical Christian' arguing that Creationists are misreading the Bible!) and was completely confused when David McConaghie [assisting Professor Andy McIntosh] quoted **Romans 5:12** ...! Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, obviously believed in a literal six-day creation and a young earth! ... Confronted by the implications of the text, **Keay** tried to 'spiritualise it' away! Now, we must ask ourselves, "What on earth are they teaching at Belfast Bible College?" Is it really an evangelical establishment, or has it fallen from its previous standards, following the lure of academic acclaim? I intend to ask!

**Like CALEB I too emailed the Belfast Bible College on 19 December –**

Dear Belfast Bible College,

During the 'Creation v Evolution' debate broadcast on Radio Ulster on Sunday 10 December 2006 there was a contribution made by one of your members of staff, namely **Professor Robert Keay**. A brief summary of 2 points that **Professor Keay** made would be as follows –

1. Creationists [those who accept 6-day Creation as affirmed by God Himself in Exodus 20:11] have 'misread' the Bible in relation to Genesis 1 & 2 where God Himself outlines His work of creation.
2. Paul's statement in Romans 5:12 teaches that the result of sin was merely 'spiritual' separation from God and not also physical death.

In the light of your published 'Doctrinal Basis' that states – 'The guilt and depravity of human nature in consequence of the Fall' my question is simply this – are these expressed views of **Professor Keay** fully compatible with your 'Doctrinal Basis'?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries

On 1st February 2007, [having previously sent a reminder] I eventually received a response from David Shepherd, Principal of Belfast Bible College. Herewith are some extracts from that email –

Dear Cecil (if I may),

Thank you for your email. While I myself might take a different position than **Dr. Keay** with respect to the best way to read the opening chapters of Genesis, I am satisfied that his position falls within the breadth of evangelical thinking on the subject [Cecil - no mention of the College Doctrinal Basis] ... I've asked **Dr. Keay** to elaborate on his position and include his response below. **Dr. Keay** writes:

'I am in full and hearty agreement with the doctrinal basis of Belfast Bible College. My views on Genesis and creation are typical of mainstream and historic Evangelical thought, as is represented by many Evangelical works and commentaries on Genesis ... [There then followed quite a lot of academic comments that did nothing to address the points raised in my email] ... I consider it a blessing to be serving the Lord at Belfast Bible College, an Evangelical institution that recognizes that no one denomination or movement owns the truth'.

**In a further email to the College on 2nd February I wrote –**

I have received your response for which I thank you. I'm just heading over to England but perhaps I could meantime ask this further question –

Your 'Doctrinal Basis' makes reference to 'The guilt etc in consequence of THE FALL' – can you please explain the College position on how and when 'THE FALL' occurred – was it as God's Word states after He had created all things in 6 days or have those who take this meaning from God's Word 'misread' what appears to be a clear narrative?

It's a fairly simple question and I look forward to your clarification of your 'Doctrinal Basis'.

To date I have not received a reply to this email

This incident just compounds another worry that a student at the College alerted me to and that was his own concern about a lecture given by the 'trendy' Presbyterian Chaplain at Queens University, **Steve Stockman** who was endorsing favourably the 'spiritual walk' of rock-band U2 whose lead singer is the well-known **Bono**. In an interview **Bono** commented on the Roman Catholic Church and a meeting he had with the late Pope and he said – 'Let's not get too hard on the Holy Roman Church here. The Church has its problems, but the older I get, the more comfort I find there...The Pontiff was about to make an important statement... During the preamble, he seemed to be staring at me. I wondered. Was it the fact that I was wearing my blue fly-shades? So, I took them off in case I was causing some offence. When I was introduced to him, he was still staring at them. He kept looking at them in my hand, so I offered them to him as a gift in return for the rosary he had just given me. Not only did he put them on, he smiled the wickedest grin you could ever imagine. He was a comedian'.

The papal Antichrist is many things but not 'a comedian'. In the light of these incidents and also the platform given at the College [February 2007] to **Eddie Gibbs** of Fuller Theological Seminary to promote his views of 'Emerging Churches', true evangelical concerns about Belfast Bible College are well-grounded and fully justified.

In my June 2007 '**News From The Front**' I included a follow-up to my March item as I did receive a reply from **Belfast Bible College**. This is what I wrote –

On page 16 of my March newsletter, I quoted an email that I had sent to Belfast Bible College on 2nd February asking for clarification on a point in their 'Doctrinal Basis' and I mentioned that at the time of 'going to press' for my newsletter I had not received a reply from them. A couple of days after [2nd April] my newsletter was posted to our ministry website I received the following email from the Principal, David Shepherd and also responded to him as below

**Dear Cecil,**

I trust all is well with you. Please see...my response – Our doctrinal basis is as clear as a statement of such brevity may be and allows for the breadth of evangelical thought on 'The Fall'. While some evangelical thought (including my own) tends toward a more literal reading of Genesis, it is possible along with R. Niebuhr, J. Ellul, C.S. Lewis, H.M. Kuitert, James Orr, Donald Bloesch and others to insist on a historical fall without insisting on a rigidly literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3.

This is made possible by the range of thinking on key passages such as Romans 5...Where Paul refers to death in verse 12, he may well be referring to physical death only since that's what *thanatos* seems to mean in verse 14...Then again the passage appears to draw a contrast between death and 'eternal life' in v.21 and in vv 16 and 18 Paul seems to use condemnation in a similar way to death in v.12...which may suggest a 'spiritual death' was intended...Or does he mean death in its physical and spiritual aspects...?

While I myself would defend a more traditional evangelical position on the 'Fall'...I would acknowledge the possibility that others (including **Dr. Keay**) who I would consider to be evangelical might read Genesis in a different way than I might. While I hope that the above answer might satisfy you, I am not confident that it will do so, nor do I anticipate that further exchanges on the issue will be of particular assistance. Let me therefore thank you again for your concern for the ministry of Belfast Bible College and wish you every blessing in yours.

**Dear David,** many thanks for your response just received and likewise I have no desire to prolong this issue. I have read your comments and in the light of Ephesians 2:1 I think it's very obvious that Paul viewed mankind from Adam as being spiritually dead **as well as being subject to physical death and all because of 'the fall'**. **Sadly Dr Keay**, according to his contribution to the 'evolution v creation' debate on Sunday Sequence, clearly doesn't believe this truth. I am your servant for Christ, Cecil Andrews

PS When it comes to C S Lewis I would simply say 'Take Heed' and direct you to [['Take Heed' ministry website link to article on C S Lewis then quoted](#)]

That was what I wrote back in 2007 and perhaps one of the names mentioned, **Steve Stockman**, may sound familiar. Well, in recent weeks I have penned a further article about him and his role in the annual ecumenical '**Four Corners Festival**' and that article can be accessed on <https://www.takeheed.info/pdf/2022/January/four-corners-festival-belfast.pdf>

The heading for my ministry newsletter back in March 2007 was – **Concerns with Belfast Bible College** and, as you will have read, this article is titled '**Mounting Concerns**' so what has prompted me to write once more about **Belfast Bible College**?

On Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022 I received the following message from a Facebook friend

**'Belfast Bible College** Announces its new principal. The college writes: "We are delighted to announce the appointment of our new Principal. **Rev. James Burnett**. He is currently the minister of **Lowe Church** Belfast and comes with considerable experience of Christian service – in leadership, teaching, pastoral ministry and mission activity." The college looks forward to Mr Burnett's leadership and list his impressive theological qualifications.

Yet a simple web search for Rev Burnett threw up this enlightening piece of information: "As well as various activities for young and old Lowe Memorial are also inviting people to come and explore their faith by taking part in the Alpha Course in the Devenish Complex every Wednesday from 7.30pm-9pm "We are partnering with three Catholic churches, St Michael's, St Anne's and Our Lady Queen of Peace, on this Alpha course," said Rev Burnett. It's a ten-week course which has the full approval of the Pope and the Catholic Church and is also fully approved by many of the Protestant churches as well .... We have so much in common and this course highlights it."

Further ecumenical activities included a meeting addressed by Tyrone GAA football manager Mickey Harte. **The church stated, "We want to be a cross-community church and we also want to strengthen our links with the GAA."** The GAA is a nationalist sporting organisation which often names its venues after dead terrorists. **Belfast Bible College** has been on a doctrinally downward path for some time. One of its former lecturers, **Professor Robert Keay**, openly stated on BBC Radio that he didn't believe in the biblical account of creation. This new appointment can't improve that situation'.

<https://belfastmedia.com/more-than-just-a-church-at-the-heart-of-finaghy>

When I was converted back in 1984, **Lowe Memorial Presbyterian Church** would have had a reputation of being a doctrinally sound evangelical church. As you can read from the message my friend sent, in recent years they have very much entered the ecumenical, doctrinally-questionable realms, especially through their ecumenical promotion of the **ALPHA course**.

Could the visit of **J I Packer** in July 1998 have contributed to the 'downgrade' on their part? **Mr Packer** was here to jointly promote with '**Father** **Pat Collins**' the launch of a booklet entitled '**Evangelicals and Catholics together in Ireland**'. I wrote an article about that visit – it is located on <https://www.takeheed.info/evangelicals-and-catholics-together-in-ireland/>

There is a section in the article headed '**Reflections on The Visit of J.I. Packer**' and it begins as follows –

I [Cecil Andrews] attended two meetings in Belfast on Thursday 30th July [am - Fitzroy Presbyterian; pm **Lowe Memorial Presbyterian**] and one in Dublin Friday 31st July [ pm-Kill-O-The-Grange Church of Ireland]. At the two evening meetings Mr Packer was the sole speaker but at the Thursday [am] meeting '**Father**' Pat Collins also spoke. Basically, Mr Packer outlined briefly the history of ECT in America involving in particular Charles Colson and Richard Neuhaus. He stated how on the basis of a limited number of common beliefs he was prepared to recognise Roman Catholics as Christians.

I am conscious that there are some known to me who have lectured at **Belfast Bible College** and who would I believe be concerned at the matters mentioned in the message from my friend. This ecumenical-willingness and enthusiasm on the part of **Rev. James Burnett** does not augur well for the future of **Belfast Bible College** and is therefore I believe a cause for '**mounting concerns**'.

Cecil Andrews – 'Take Heed' Ministries – 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022