

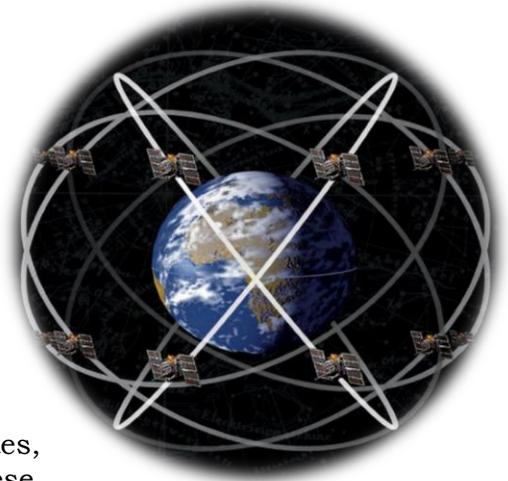
## Theological Musings from Dave's Laptop

April 17, 2018

It may not always be apparent to you, but the sermons I write are just as much for me as they are for you. I'm grateful that I get to wrestle with theological thoughts and attempt to make them intelligible to myself as well as to you.

I could offer many illustrations of this, but one recent example happened a couple of weeks ago with the opening illustration of the sermon. As you may (or may not) remember, I began a recent sermon talking about GPS satellites, and noted that, for all the technological wizardry available these days, Navy ships still have magnetic compasses as fail-safe backups for navigation.

I also noted that if the GPS satellites were to go offline (and I presume that they would be a first-level target were global war to break out), having a magnetic compass would be a pretty useful thing for any of us to have. That set me to thinking.



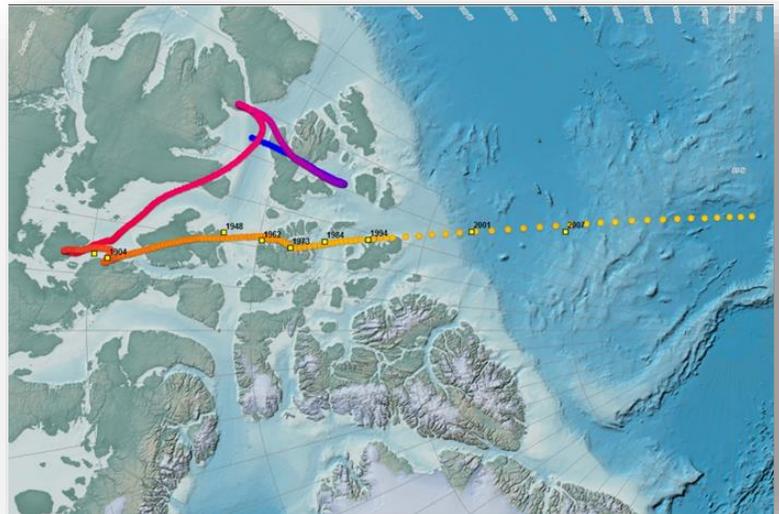
I had a magnetic compass once upon a time, probably when I was a (mediocre) Boy Scout. But happily, about the time a couple of weeks ago that I was thinking that maybe I should have a magnetic compass, the annual REI dividend came in the mail, and, voila! I went to REI and got a compass for next to nothing. That made me happy.



As I reviewed the various procedures for using a magnetic compass, I was reminded about a phenomenon known as magnetic declination. You probably know that, while the magnetic north pole is not terribly far from the geographic north pole, the magnetic north pole of the earth is not located at the geographic north pole.

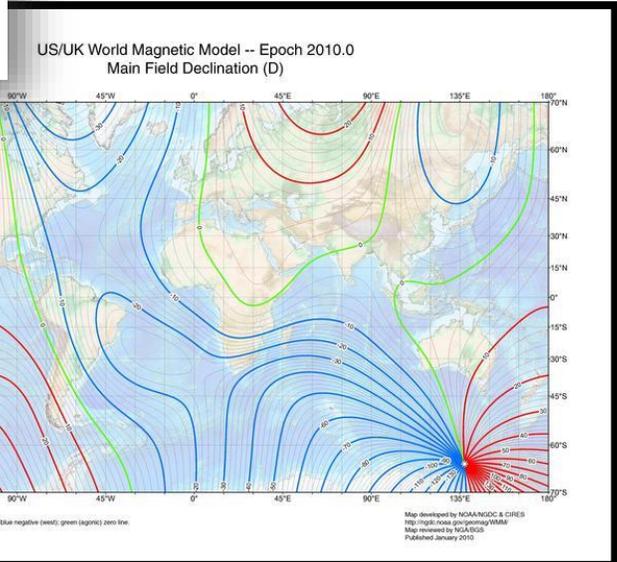
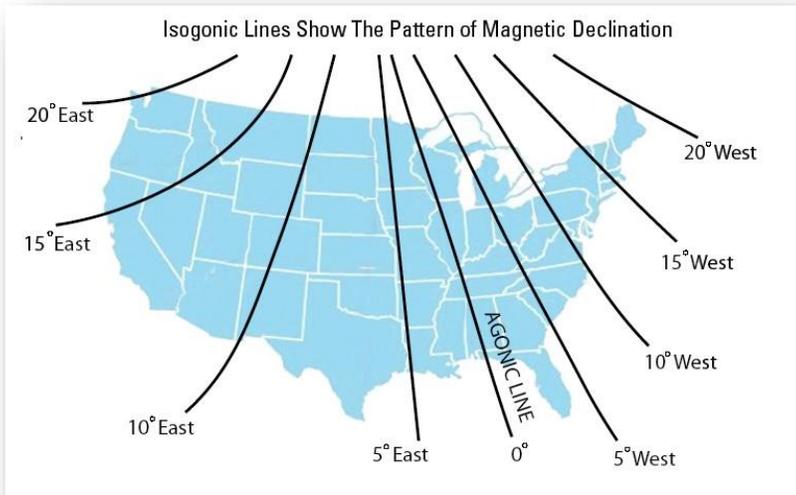
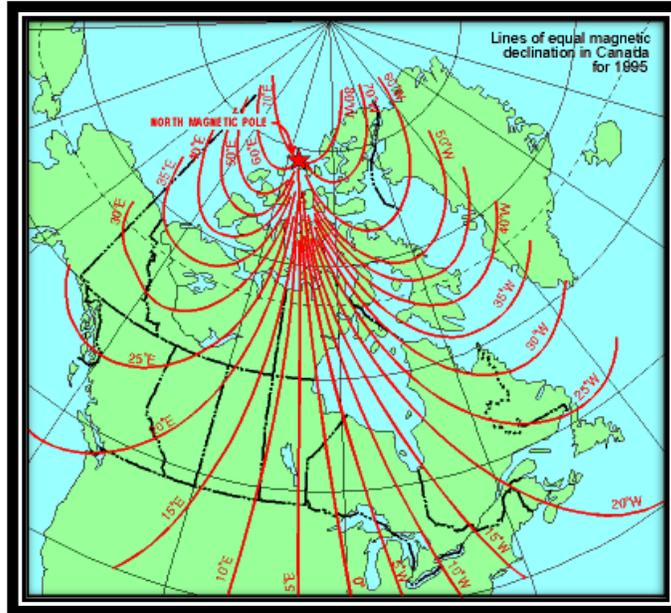
The magnetic north pole even moves over time, probably due to shifts in the molten metallic stuff at the center of the planet. This diagram shows the movement of the magnetic north pole for the last century or so (yellow locations have been measured; darker colors have been calculated).

Declination is the angular difference, measured in degrees, between geographic north and magnetic north. Since maps are designed around geographic north, a magnetic compass has to be adjusted for declination in order to point to "true north."





The graphics on this page give a visual overview of the global pattern of magnetic declination, and the compass to the left shows what the adjustment looks like for our area.



By now, you may be wondering what the point is of this exercise. I am trying to make a point, after all.

My Dad often observed that illumination in sunlight is our standard for determining what color something is. Every other light source is “artificial.” While technical definitions of color may vary from my Dad’s opinion,<sup>1</sup> there is an intuitive “rightness” about that observation, and I’m going to offer a similar argument about declination and “direction.”

With respect to the “direction” of our lives, our culture’s definition of “proper priorities and direction” changes all the time. It changes significantly between generations, and it changes enormously over longer periods of time. As James Russell Lowell put it, “New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth; They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth.”<sup>2</sup>

While I’m grateful that we humans do often grow in understanding, I submit to you that cultural definitions of proper priorities and direction for our lives provide a shifting, uncertain, and untrustworthy “north” for our lives. Cultural definitions are like magnetic north: they are not the same as True North, and they change all the time.

To mix metaphors, the only way we can be sure of “True North” is to put things in Son Light. The priorities and direction of our lives need to be firmly tethered to what our Creator has revealed to be True, whether these things are obvious and intuitive to us, or not.

While there are plenty of things in the Bible about which we need to give one another room for interpretation (given adequate and serious study beforehand), some things do serve as anchors for our faith. Two examples of such anchors are the ancient confessions we know today as “the Apostles’ Creed” and “the Nicene Creed.” These are provided for you on the next page, and I commend them to your reflection and study.

Dave



# True North

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/James\\_Russell\\_Lowell](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/James_Russell_Lowell)

## The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son,  
our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living  
and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

The earliest form of the creed is c. A.D. 140;  
the present form is from c. A.D. 600.

## The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified  
under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge  
the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,  
the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped  
and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic  
and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

A.D. 325, 381