

Reformed

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

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PERSPECTIVE

CELEBRATING 35+ YEARS

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Reformed PERSPECTIVE

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

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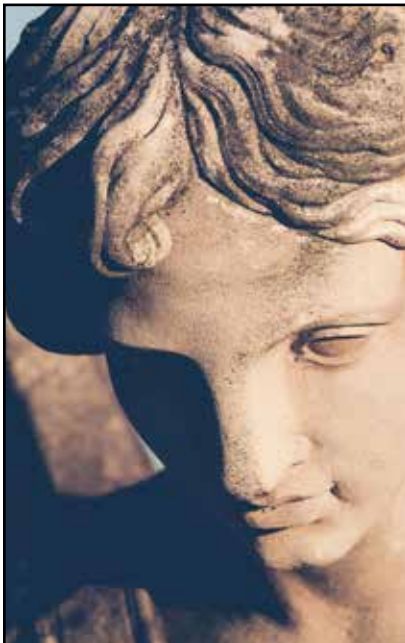
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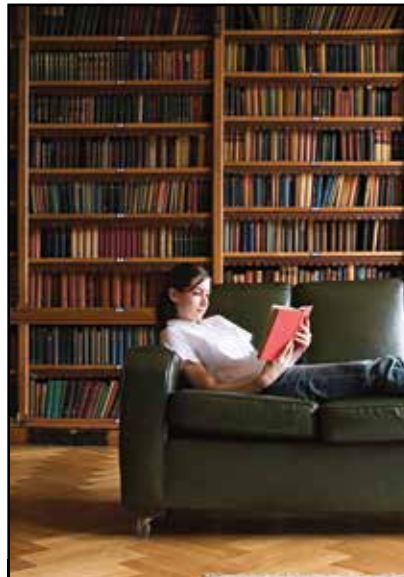


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The TP we need in the COVID crisis: **TRUST & PERSPECTIVE**

by Ed Hoogerdyk

Toilet paper (TP) has become a hot commodity. It's hard to find. Just mention Charmin and it evokes a wide range of emotions: frustration, greed, and anger just to name a few. So much for enhancing our soft side.

All the TP in the world won't give us comfort. Perhaps some physical comfort but that's about it. What we need is real comfort. Spiritual comfort. A better TP. We need trust and perspective.

Satan hurls a lot of flaming darts at us. One of those darts is doubt. He loves it when we doubt God's word.

"You surely won't die," he said to Eve.

"If you are the Son of God," he taunted as he tempted Jesus.

And he sows seeds of doubt in us when we don't seem to have the right answers in the midst of calamity and suffering. We're vulnerable. So, he tells us lies. He's good at that. He's the greatest at that. He's the great deceiver.

TRUST...

The psalms remind God's people of the need to put their trust in Him and His name. "Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you" (Ps. 9:8, 10). "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" (Ps. 20:6-7). "In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name" (Ps. 33:20-21).

In this COVID crisis, believers may and should put their trust in the Lord. We can trust Him to do that which is good. We can trust Him to turn all things for our good. Trust in God is key to Christian living: "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land find safe pasture" (Ps. 37:3).

PERSPECTIVE...

We need this Biblical perspective. Life is full of blessings, action, work, charity, faith, and relationships. Life is full of hopes, dreams, changes, and experiences. Life can be full of sorrow and regrets. Life can be full of confusion, disappointment, discouragement, and questions. The word of God brings us to our knees and gives us the proper perspective and reminds us what life really is. It reminds us of Who life really is. In moments of despair, grief, fear and sensationalism

God's word comes alive.


Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life. Jesus is life!

In this time of the COVID crisis, we need to re-cultivate an eternal perspective in our thinking. Stocking up the shelves for the long term won't cut it. Let alone loading up on TP. From a Christian's perspective there is sickness and death in this world. God has overcome that. He comforts us in times of trouble. He is still watching us 24-7 in all our comings and goings.



AND OPPORTUNITIES

As people of God we have a clear perspective. A hopeful perspective. Life is about opportunity. Opportunity to love God. Opportunity to love people. Opportunity to serve God. Opportunity to serve people.

And we do so because Jesus is our life. He is our only comfort in life and in death. And it's this perspective that we need to present to our communities and to our civil authorities. We've got the real TP that our society needs to load up on! Trust and perspective. 

Ed Hoogerdyk is the Alberta Manager of ARPA Canada (ARPACanada.ca).

NOTA BENE

News worth noting

THE "RELIGIOUS GHOST" BEHIND TIM TEBOW JOINING THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL BASEBALL TEAM

BY JON DYKSTRA

Heisman-winning former college quarterback, and now minor league baseball player Tim Tebow has accepted an invitation to play for the Philippine national team. Like every other sporting event, this year's qualifying games for the 2021 World Baseball Classic have now been put on indefinite hold but this story is still worth a closer look for how the mainstream media reported it.

Tebow is as well known for his public Christian faith as he is for his athletic exploits, but God is not popular among secular reporters. That's why there is, in this story, what *GetReligion.org's* Terry Mattingly calls, a "religious ghost." These are obvious angles in stories that reporters leave unexplored because they don't like where they

lead: to some sort of acknowledgment of God. In this instance, every reporter has to explain how it is that this well-known American athlete can play for a Philippine team. But that doesn't mean they have to give a *full* answer.

So a *WCTV* account gives as explanation that Tebow was born in

the Philippines, and leaves it at that. Two *ESPN.com* stories do a little better, noting that the reason he was in the Philippines was because his parents were serving there as missionaries. A third *ESPN* story did even a titch better, sharing that

"Tebow has spent a considerable amount of time in the country of his birth and has even been engaged in philanthropic activities in Davao."

But only *MLB.com* dared flesh out what was a ghost (there, but insubstantial) in the other accounts. In digging further into Tebow's religious motivations, Anthony DiComo gave readers a good understanding of why Tebow would want to represent the Philippines.

He...returned frequently to the Philippines as he became active in missionary work himself, spending at least three weeks there annually for nearly 15 years in a row.... In 2014, Tebow opened the Tebow CURE Hospital in Davao City to "meet the physical needs and provide spiritual healing for deserving children in the Philippines who could not otherwise afford care," according to the hospital's website....."I can't even tell you how many times I've been back," Tebow said, noting that his parents still have a ministry in the Philippines.

For covering the obvious religious angle, Mattingly gives "kudos to *MLB.com*," noting: "It's not that hard to get the faith details right. It just takes a little bit of journalism." **RP**

SOURCE: Fletcher Keel's "Former Gator QB Tebow to play for Philippines in World Baseball Classic Qualifiers" posted Feb. 26, 2020 to WCTV.tv; "Tim Tebow to play for Philippines World Baseball Classic qualifiers" posted to ESPN.com Feb. 26, 2020; Noel Zarate's "Why Tim Tebow will play baseball for the Philippines" posted to ESPN.com on Feb. 28, 2020; Noel Zarate's "Tim Tebow's PH debut postponed as baseball qualifiers postponed" posted to ESPN.com Mar. 12, 2020; Anthony DiComo's "Tebow to represent Philippines in WBC qualifiers" posted to MLB.com on Feb. 26, 2020; Terry Mattingly's "A baseball flashback (sort of): Kudos to MLB.com for getting some Tebow details right" posted to GetReligion.org on April 4, 2020; Picture credit: Keeton Gale/Shutterstock.com



AN UPDATE ON CONVERSION THERAPY BANS IN CANADA

BY LEVI MINDERHOUD

To fulfil an election promise, the federal Liberal government has introduced a bill to criminally ban conversion therapy. As I noted in my Nov/Dec article, "What is conversion therapy and why does it matter?" the provinces of Ontario, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and many municipalities in Alberta have already banned conversion therapy. This federal bill would ban conversion therapy across the entire country with the threat of criminal sanction, including jail time, a penalty not available to provinces and municipalities.

The entire legislation hinges on the definition of conversion therapy. A main recommendation in ARPA Canada's policy report on conversion therapy was that conversion therapy *only* include "coercive and aversive therapies" and specifically clarify that body-affirming counselling and spiritual counsel are not conversion therapy.

Unfortunately, the proposed legislation – Bill C-8 – has a broad and biased definition of conversion therapy. It bans both harmful therapies as well as beneficial counselling. It bans efforts to change someone's sexual *attraction* – which is psychological and based in the mind – and also bans attempts to

change someone's sexual *behavior*.

This means this legislation would forbid Christian counsellors from trying to help gay men address their same-sex attraction, and would also forbid them from counselling gay men not to engage in same-sex sexual activity.

Ironically, this legislation only bans attempts to draw someone away from same-sex attraction or a transgender identity. The legislation says nothing about attempts to draw someone *into* same-sex-attraction or a transgender identity. Thus, this legislation bans God-glorifying counselling but permits seductions into sinful lifestyles and identities. As one pastor commented, "If a man in my congregation confesses to me that he's been cheating on his wife, I can reprimand him and tell him to repent. But if his affair is with another man, then I'm prohibited from saying anything at all."

The legislation also is riddled with contradictions. The preamble notes that it is a myth that gender identity can change. Yet, queer theory says that gender is quite fluid, changing all the time. Further, the definition of conversion therapy explicitly "clarifies" that services to support a person's gender transition are not to be considered conversion therapy. But if



a gender can't change, how can one transition to another gender?

Federal Justice Minister David Lametti, who introduced the bill, reveals his moral worldview on this topic, saying, "Conversion therapy is premised on a lie, that being homosexual, lesbian, bisexual or trans is wrong and in need of fixing. Not only is that false, it sends a demeaning and a degrading message that undermines the dignity of individuals."

Christians recognize that virtually everything in that quotation is false. Acting on same-sex attraction or deliberately undermining one's biological sex is sinful and wrong. Sin always needs fixing. Human dignity is not based on following our own impulses; it is based on being the male and female image-bearers of God.

Justice Minister Lametti boasts that the proposed conversion therapy ban will be the "most progressive and comprehensive in the world." But Christians know that true progress cannot be based on man's view of right and wrong. True progress must be based on God's standards of right and wrong.

Bill C-8 must be amended. The definition of conversion therapy requires greater clarity and should not include body-affirming counselling or spiritual counselling or teaching on sexual behaviour. ARPA is already working to have the definition changed but will need the support of many Christians across the country to also speak up. May we continue to labour and pray that God's perfect will, not man's fallen will, be done here on earth as it is in heaven, also on the issue of conversion therapy. ^{RP}

Levi Minderhoud is the ARPA Canada (ARPACanada.org) BC manager.



"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Prov. 1:7

TEACHING VACANCY – NEW ZEALAND

The Reformed Christian School Association in Upper Hutt, New Zealand is seeking a teacher to teach lower primary levels at our Christian School. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed faith.

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DAWKINS ON EUGENICS: EVIL UNCLOSED

BY JON DYKSTRA

Richard Dawkins has been called one of the “Four horsemen of atheism” and is famed, as well, for being one of Charles Darwin’s most ardent defenders. In February he got himself into trouble for this tweet:

“It’s one thing to deplore eugenics on ideological, political, moral grounds. It’s quite another to conclude that it wouldn’t work in practice. Of course it would. It works for cows, horses, pigs, dogs & roses. Why on earth wouldn’t it work for humans? Facts ignore ideology.”

While eugenics – controlled human breeding – has been popular in the past, its best-known proponents were the Nazis, and that’s an association no one wants. That’s why Dawkins’ atheist and evolutionist cohorts didn’t like his endorsement of eugenics’ practical possibilities – it made them all look bad. And they jumped on him.

But on what grounds could they attack him? As Dawkins made clear in follow up tweets, he thinks eugenics immoral.

“For those determined to miss the

point, I deplore the idea of a eugenic policy. I simply said deploring it doesn’t mean it wouldn’t work. Just as we breed cows to yield more milk, we could breed humans to run faster or jump higher. But heaven forbid that we should do it.”

“A eugenic policy would be bad. I’m combating the illogical step from ‘X would be bad’ to ‘So X is impossible’. It would work in the same sense as it works for cows. Let’s fight it on moral grounds....”

But there is a problem with an atheist evolutionist taking a *moral* stand against eugenics. As Dawkins highlighted in his 1994 book, *River out of Eden: A Darwinian view of life*, his worldview doesn’t allow for a wrong and right.

“The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”
If there is no good, no evil, and



nothing but pitiless indifference, then on what moral basis can we stand against eugenics?

One fellow scientist, Dave Curtis, took a different tack, using a number of tweets to make the case that eugenics wouldn’t *practically* work, what with human being’s “long generational times and small numbers of offspring.” But this practical objection to eugenics doesn’t make atheist evolutionists look any better. Since when do we object to evil on the basis of how difficult it is to successfully pull it off? What would we say of a man who objects to murder on the basis of how hard it is to dispose of the body?

While other atheists and evolutionists might not appreciate how Dawkins is sidling up to *der Fuhrer*, we can be grateful for the illumination he provided. As *Discrn.com*’s Peter Heck noted:

“It’s one thing for Christians like myself to offer hypothetical illustrations to the world showing what happens to human ethics apart from God’s moral authority. It is another for Richard Dawkins to actually demonstrate them personally.” **RP**

SOURCE: Richard Dawkins (@RichardDawkins) Feb 15,16 tweets; Peter Heck’s “Opinion: Thank God for Richard Dawkins” posted to Discrn.com on Feb. 19, 2020; Dave Curtis (@davecurtis314) Feb 18 tweets

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DON'T WISH YOU WERE HERE: ILLUSTRATOR'S NATIONAL PARK POSTERS GO VIRAL

BY SHARON L. BRATCHER

Illustrator Amber Share always wanted to create a vintage travel poster for each of the 63 Na-tional Parks in the United States. After sharing some of her posters on Instagram (@subparparks) and an article on BoredPanda.com, her efforts went viral. Her posters are beautiful, but what garnered the most attention was the wording: she added a tongue-in-cheek humorous twist to them by lettering the *worst* comment that was ever posted online by a visitor. Some of the results were:

- Olympic National Park in Washington state: "No WOW factor"
- Grand Teton National Park: "All I saw was a lake, mountains, and some trees."
- Grand Canyon National Park: "A Hole. A very, very, large hole."

And perhaps the worst one of all:

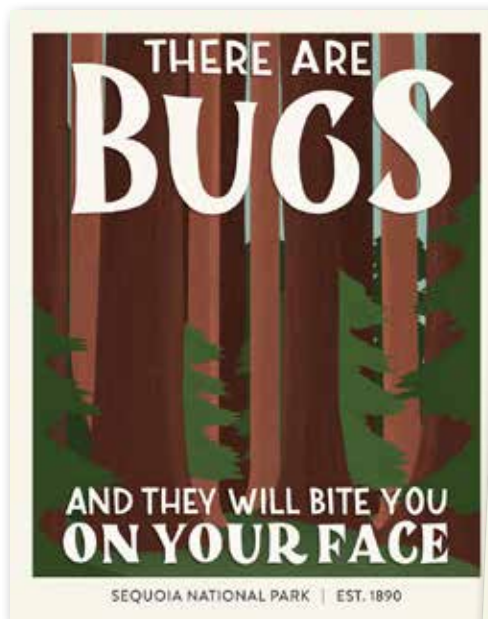
- Isle Royale National Park: "No cell service and terrible wifi."

While this is humorous, it is sad to note two things that this says about our culture. First of all, it reflects our real national pastime: complaining! Secondly, it shows what an indoor culture we have become, as these visitors completely missed the value in the beauty of creation.

In contrast, Christians can be a light in this world just by following the command in Philippians 2: 14-15:

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

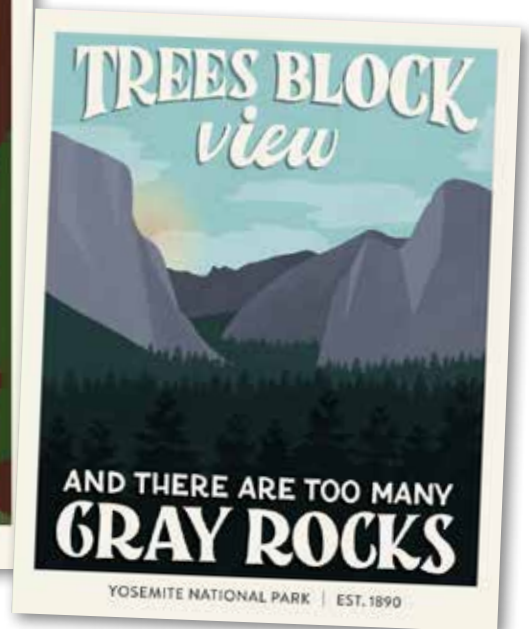
Instead of limiting ourselves to small screen entertainment, we will better appreciate God's amazing landscapes



firsthand, and rejoice with Ps. 96:11-12:

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord....

A line from an old John Denver song says, "I know he'd be a poorer man if he never saw an eagle fly." Let's not trade

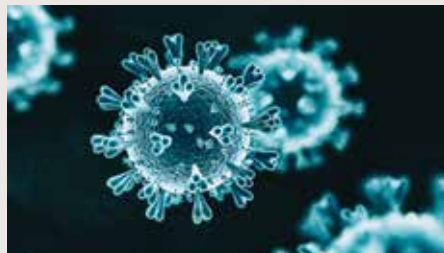


reality for an inadequate substitute. Go outside and rejoice in God's magnificent creation! And don't let Junior say, "Uh-huh" and sit in the car with his video game. **RP**

Pictures used with permission of artist Amber Share

NAMING THE VIRUS

BY JON DYKSTRA



When US President Donald Trump was criticized as being racist for calling the COVID-19 the "Chinese virus," he ended up with a most unlikely defender. On the April 10 episode of *Real Time with Bill Maher*, the show's host noted that viruses have long been named after the places they first came from.

"Zika is from the Zika Forest, Ebola from the Ebola River, Hantavirus the Hantan River. There's the West Nile virus and Guinea worm and

Rocky Mountain spotted fever and, of course, the Spanish flu. MERS stands for Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome....So why should China get a pass?"

Reformed economist Gary North had a slightly different take. He thought that, instead of calling it the Chinese virus, we should give the credit where it is most specifically due. He wanted it to be called the "Chinese Communist coronavirus" because:

"The Chinese Communist officials at the top who covered up what was happening are the ones to blame. They could have stopped it early, but they didn't. They wanted to save face. They wanted to do what Communist tyrants have always done: sweep it under the rug so that the world doesn't find out about a major disaster." **RP**

SOURCE: Gary North's "Video: The Chinese Communist Coronavirus" posted to GaryNorth.com on April 4, 2020.

STATES, CITIES, REVERSE COURSE ON PLASTIC BAG BANS

BY JON DYKSTRA

In 2007, San Francisco was the first city to ban regular single-use plastic bags, directing businesses to use compostable plastic bags, paper, or, preferably, reusable bags. In the years since, more than 120 other cities, and some states have followed their lead.

But now the city is reversing direction, at least in part. In the wake of the coronavirus crisis, the city's Department of Health issued a new guideline: people were not permitted "to bring their own bags, mugs, or other reusable items from home" to coffee shops, grocers, and other stores. An April 9 Wall Street Journal editorial noted:

"The department was responding to fears that the reusable bags are more prone to carry coronavirus than the disposable bags that were standard

before the 2007 ban."

San Francisco isn't the only government changing course. Massachusetts, Oregon, New Mexico, Maine, New Hampshire, and other locales across the US are responding to the coronavirus by discouraging or prohibiting reusable bags, and often times suspending or delaying the implementation of single-use plastic bag bans.

While the coronavirus has brought increased attention to the health risks that can come with reusable bags, those risks have always existed. An earlier March 16 WSJ editorial shared that when researchers at the University of Arizona and Loma Linda University randomly tested grocery shopper's reusable bags they found, "Large numbers of bacteria were found in almost all bags and coliform bacteria

in half." The same researchers also discovered the reason why: most shoppers either rarely or never washed their reusable bags.

One of the key benefits of all sorts of disposable plastics has been hygiene. As the Fraser Institute's Ross McKittrick wrote:

We used to get our meat the way we still get most of our vegetables – from open counters. But people grew uncomfortable with the exposure of meat to insects and germs, not to mention the problem if people handle raw meat in one aisle then touch products in other aisles, so stores responded with those little Styrofoam trays with absorbent liners and clear plastic wrap, to which we all soon grew accustomed.

Lots of things got wrapped in cellophane to avoid being touched by other customers. Would you want to buy a toothbrush from a bin that a hundred people rummaged



through? As for disposable plastic water bottles, this is surely one of the great public health inventions of the modern age. They are remarkably cheap and they save us the ordeal of shared public water fountains.

So the question might be asked, why does anyone have a problem with these plastics? What was motivating these bans? Part of the answer is probably related to plastics being produced from oil. But even in a world obsessed with global-warming, this doesn't make them worse than paper, which seems to have the higher carbon footprint.


The real issue is pollution.

Environmentalists point to the amount of plastic being ingested by animals, particularly marine animals. You may have heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, or one of the other ocean garbage patches where the currents collect plastics into large islands, meters deep in some places.

While this pollution is a problem, it is not a Western problem. Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, in their article "Plastic Pollution" published on OurWorldinData.org make the case that as of 2010 Canada and the US combined accounted for less than a percent of the "global total mismanaged plastic waste." They define this as "the sum of littered or inadequately disposed

of waste...that could eventually enter the ocean..." The big polluters are China (28%), Indonesia (10%), the Philippines and Vietnam (both at 6%). These four, together, amount to just under 50% of all such mismanaged plastic. This is due in large part to inadequate or non-existent garbage disposal, with waste flowing directly into key rivers, and then out into the ocean.

This isn't to dispute that there are plastic bags littering North American streets. That is a problem. But it is a much smaller problem. And it is a problem that is eradicated by creating another problem: ban single-use plastics, and their replacements might well make us sick.

Those who reject God will often look to the government as a replacement, turning to it to solve all their problems. In contrast, Christians, understand the government can't address every problem and shouldn't try – God has assigned them a limited role because they are made up of limited people. Our government should legislate with restraint because we live in a broken world and, consequently, any "solution" politicians settle on is going to come with tradeoffs – any benefit will come with a cost. One cost common to all government action is a loss of freedom for citizens to make choices for ourselves. It is, after all, the government that demands we do things their way or else. That "or else" might amount to fines, or jail time, or the loss of a business's license, but whatever the punishment might be, the ability to mete this out to dissenters is a fearsome power and one that, therefore, should be used with restraint. Another reason for restraint is simple humility – an acknowledgment of our finite abilities. If reasonable, informed, intelligent people can disagree about what approach might be best, the government should be hesitant about stepping in and deciding for everyone. With bag ban reversals highlighting how politicians missed something in their original deliberations, will they take the lesson and act with restraint going forward? 



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JOE BIDEN AND THE UNWORKABLE, UNBIBLICAL (BUT I REPEAT MYSELF) "BELIEVE ALL WOMEN" STANDARD

BY JON DYKSTRA

The presumptive Democratic nominee for president, Joe Biden, was accused of sexual assault in late March, and the mainstream media doesn't want to hold him to the same standard he has proposed for others.

It was only two years ago that the former vice president supported a "believe all women" standard. When the Trump-nominated candidate for the US Supreme Court, Brett Kavanaugh, was publicly accused of sexually assaulting a woman, Biden told reporters:

"For a woman to come forward in the glaring lights of focus, nationally, you've got to start off with the presumption that at least the essence of what she's talking about is real, whether or not she forgets facts, whether or not it's been made worse or better over time. But nobody fails to understand that this is like jumping into a cauldron."

But now it's Biden in the crosshairs. In a podcast released March 24, one of Joe Biden's former Senate staffers, Tara Reade, accused him of sexual assault. It is a case of she said/he said, with no corroborating witnesses to the alleged event. Biden has, through his campaign spokeswoman, denied the charge, but, of course, that's what accused men do. So the obvious question is, why should we believe this man when this man has insisted we should always believe the woman?

His hasn't been the only hypocrisy evidenced. The mainstream media was slow to cover the accusation, with most waiting a couple of weeks or more before writing anything. If the lack of coverage had been due to them holding to a very different standard than the former vice president – if they believed that a reputable news organization can't simply pass along every unsubstantiated accusation they hear – then their lack of coverage would have been understandable. But as commentators



on both the Right and Left have noted, that hasn't been the media's standard in the past. The same *CNN* that took more than two weeks to mention Reade's charges, reported the accusations against Kavanaugh immediately. The Christian satire site *Babylon Bee* summed up the extent of *CNN*'s early coverage with their headline: "Cricket In *CNN* Newsroom Gives Detailed Report On Biden Allegations."

But there something more noteworthy than the hypocrisy going on here. The #MeToo movement sprang to life in late 2017 when a number of women came forward to accuse Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Though Weinstein's behavior had been an open secret for years he hadn't faced this kind of negative attention before, because most of his encounters had involved just himself and the victim – like the accusation against Biden, they were mostly she said/he said situations. So, previously, victims hadn't come forward because these women weren't confident that they'd be believed when it was just one person's word versus another's.

So how can we help women who are victimized in circumstances in which there are no other witnesses?

The #MeToo movement proposed one sort of "solution" to this problem: always believe the women. The shortcoming to this approach was clear from the start though it took the Left until now, with their own guy getting accused, to finally realize it: women don't always tell the truth.

There was always another solution available but, based as it is on biblical

principles, it wasn't their go-to. God says in Deut. 19:15:


One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

If we, instead of pretending there is some way of picking one witness's testimony over another, acknowledge that it can't be done, we'll be on our way to recognizing the risk that comes with one-on-one situations. And when we acknowledge that risk, then it'll become clear, too, how to minimize it. The only way to protect a woman from victimization in one-on-one circumstance is to so craft our culture that it is unacceptable to suggest such private pairings. Hollywood agents who send their young starlets off to see a powerful Hollywood mogul alone in his suite should be understood to be encouraging sexual predation. And any US senator who went off with his young intern for alone-time would be publicly condemned for creepy behavior.

If we want to protect women from being victimized in one-on-one situations, we seem to have just the two choices. We either:

1. Don't believe a man
2. Don't have a man alone with a woman (other than his wife).

This second approach is, of course, the much-mocked "Billy Graham Rule." Now that the Biden accusations have even the Left acknowledging the unworkability of the first approach, will they recognize the merits of the second?

And if they don't, what alternative do they have to offer? 

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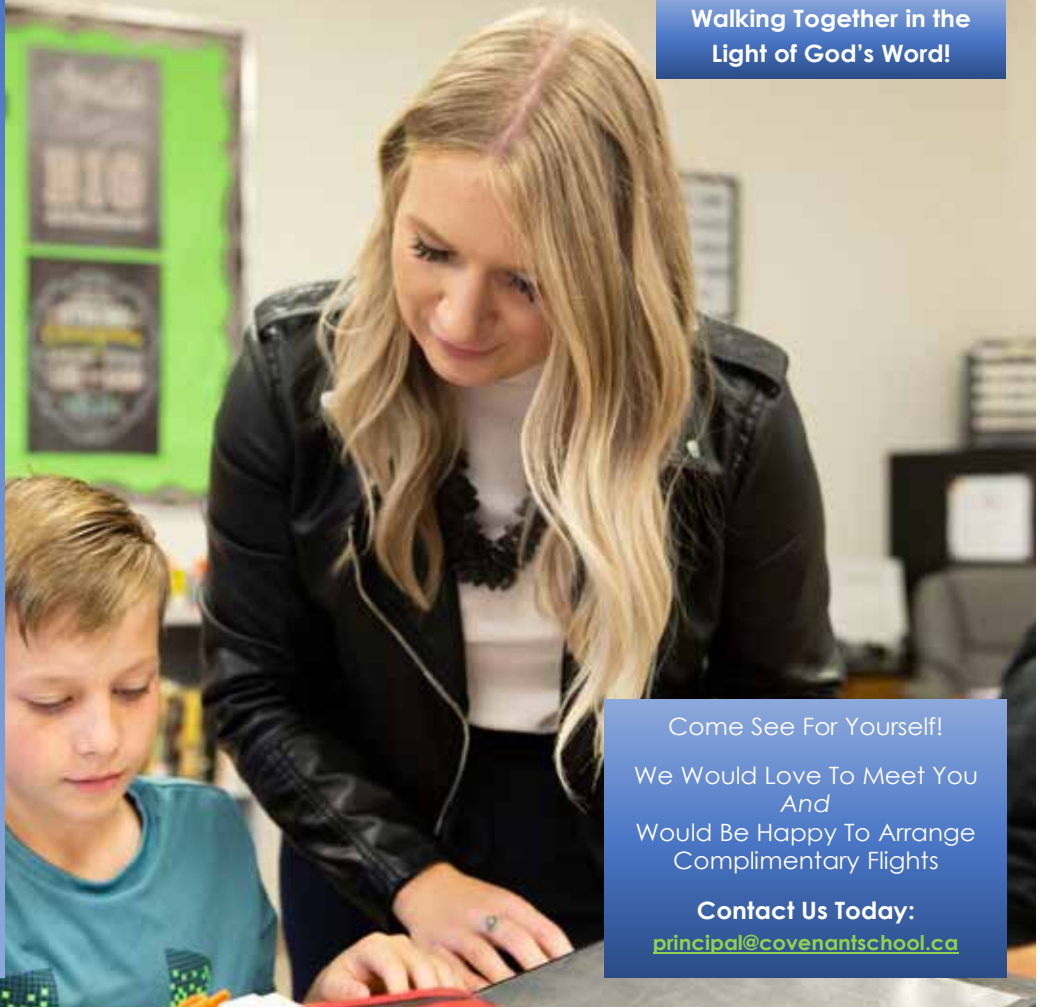
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IN A NUTSHELL

TIDBITS RELEVANT,
AND NOT SO,
TO CHRISTIAN LIFE

BY JON DYKSTRA

MARTIN LUTHER ON THE CORONAVIRUS

The bubonic plague hit Wittenberg in the fall of 1527. It was highly contagious, painful, and in an earlier 1347 outbreak, might have killed as much as 60% of Europe's population. While they didn't, at the time, know what caused it, they were aware it involved being around sick people. So when the plague struck, healthy people would flee. But Luther did not. When another pastor asked him "whether it is proper for a Christian to run away from a deadly plague," Luther wrote a letter in reply, titled "Whether one may flee from a deadly plague," that is applicable to our own situation. While the whole letter is worth reading, one excerpt in particular has been making its way around the Internet:

"I shall ask God to mercifully protect us. Then I will fumigate, purify the air, administer medicine, and take medicine. I shall avoid places and persons where my person is not needed in order not to become contaminated, and thus perchance inflict and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God shall wish to take me, He shall surely find me. But, I have done what He has expected of me, and so I am not responsible either for my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person, but shall go freely. This is a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy, and does not tempt God."

GOTTA SERVE SOMEBODY

"So many political and theological liberals need a cause to substitute for their moral obtuseness on such issues as abortion and homosexual behavior. They've found it in the worship of animals and plants."

- Cal Thomas

WHAT KIND OF IMPACT WILL YOU HAVE?

In the US, federal elections happen every two years, and in Canada too, whether it is federal, provincial or municipal, there always seems to be an election just around the corner. A lot of

FAINT HEART NEVER WON FAIR LADY

"Many a man has known a great woman, yet did not win her because, out of fear, he failed to pursue her. Every man understands this, both the brave man who has risked it all (and won or lost) and the timid man who did not dare. The battle to take the great action required at these 'make it or break it' moments is won or lost privately, deep in the heart."

- Patrick F. Fagan

IT'S SO EASY TO GET THINGS WRONG

While doing evangelism, Christian apologist Ray Comfort will often ask his conversational partner a series of quick trick questions. The goal is to provoke a little humility by highlighting how easy it is to get things wrong. So take this quiz and see how many you get right, and then turn to the bottom of page 15 to see how many of your answers were actually right.

1. How many of the unclean animal did Moses take onto the Ark?

2. What is the name of that raised print that deaf people use?
3. Spell the word *shop*. What do you do when you come to a green light?
4. It's noon. You look at the clock, and the big hand is on the three, and the little hand is on the five. What time is it?
5. Spell the word *silk*. What do cows drink?
6. You are the driver of a train. There are 30 people on board. At the first stop 10 people get off the train. At the next stop, 5 people get on the train. Here is the question: What is the name of the driver of the train?

And here's one Comfort doesn't use, but should:

What mouse walks on two legs?

I don't know.

Mickey Mouse! What dog walks on two legs?

Goofy?

Right! And what duck walks on two legs?

Donald Duck!

No silly – all ducks walk on two legs!



DAD, MOM, & SON TAKE THEIR BIBLES TO CHURCH.

elections going on means there are a lot of opportunities for Christians to speak God's truth in this sphere and have an impact.

How can we have an impact? Occasional *Reformed Perspective* contributor Tim Bloedow thinks one of the best ways would be by imitating Dr. Glenn Martin. This professor was convinced that every serious Christian should try to influence the vote of at least 100 people. He himself wasn't satisfied unless he attempted to influence at least 1,000 and the way he went about it was by writing these 1,000 people to tell them how they should vote, and why.

Another election is just around the corner. Are there other ways we can present a Christian witness in the political sphere?

4 CONCERNS FOR GAMERS

Phillip Telfer has been speaking about media's impact on teens for a couple decades now, and in his latest booklet he offers a number of "considerations" for video gamers, and their parents, to, well... consider. Four of them are:

1. **Video games can be a huge time sink.** Yet time is one of God's gifts, one of the talents, we are supposed to invest wisely so video gamers should make a deliberate decision about how much time they are going to spend – going to invest – and then stick to it.
2. **Video games can be habit forming and addictive.** In moderation some games might be just fine, but we need to understand that these games' programmers aren't trying to promote moderation. So, recognizing this, what can we do to prevent or counter video games' addictive nature?
3. **Video games foster escapism.** It is easier to play video games with people half a world away than to deal with our own family, or to go out and make friends.
4. **Video games often give a false sense of accomplishment.** The stereotype of a gamer is the 30-something-year-old living in their mom's basement. But it doesn't need to go to that extreme to be undermining real-world ambitions.

Telfer's 29-page booklet, *7 Considerations in the age of video games*, can be

downloaded for free at:
www.mediatalk101.org/7-considerations-in-the-age-of-video-games/

WHY ARE GREAT QUOTES GREAT?

What makes a quote memorable? One key is a clever turn of a phrase, as in Yogi Berra's "It ain't over till it's over" or Alexander Pope's "to err is human; to forgive, divine." But the very best quotes have another essential ingredient: wisdom. And it's no coincidence, then, that the best quotes have parallels in Scripture, or echo biblical principles.

- "The cure for crime is not the electric chair but the high chair."
– J. Edgar Hoover
- "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." – Prov. 22:6

The FBI Director makes the same point as King Solomon: parents, for good or for ill, set their children out on a course that, in general, they will follow for the rest of their lives.

- "With great power comes great responsibility."
– Spiderman's Uncle Ben
- "To whomever much is given, of him will much be required; and to whom much was entrusted, of him more will be asked." – Luke 12:48

Uncle Ben's statement might be the most famous in superhero movie history, and the reason it rings true is because it echoes what Christ says in Luke 12:48, and a point He makes in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30).

- "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." – Gandhi
- "Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you." – Matt. 7:12

We all know how *others* can behave, and, in fact, prefer to preach rather than practice. But as Jordan Peterson put it last year: "If you can't even clean up your own room, who... are you to give advice to the world?" In Matthew 7 Christ confronts this hypocritical tendency a few different ways, urging us to think first of the beam in our own eye, rather

than the mote in our neighbor's (Matt. 7:3-5), and then calling on us to do to others as we would want done to us. We are responsible first and foremost for our own behavior.

ARE WE ONLY AFTER BETTER-BEHAVED PAGANS?

Christians have made a habit of advocating for Christians positions without advocating for them *as* Christian positions. So we raise *practical* objections and stand against transgenderism because it just isn't safe allowing men into women's washrooms. We oppose euthanasia by arguing it'll put pressure on the aged who don't want to be a burden to their families. We fight promiscuity because it leads to STDs. And we argue against abortion by highlighting how it might be linked to an increase in breast cancer.

It's true that were the world to live by God's standards even for entirely secular reasons, their lives would likely be more enjoyable. But, as C.S. Lewis noted in *Mere Christianity*, that might also be accomplished if they followed any of the great teachers.

"It is quite true that if we took Christ's advice we should soon be living in a happier world. You need not even go as far as Christ. If we did all that Plato or Aristotle or Confucius told us, we should get on a great deal better than we do. And so what? We never have followed the advice of the great teachers. Why are we likely to begin now? Why are we more likely to follow Christ than any of the others? Because He is the best moral teacher? But that makes it even less likely that we shall follow Him. If we cannot take the elementary lessons, is it likely we are going to take the most advanced one? If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference."

If we're only presenting "good advice" the world is as likely to reject it as any other advice. So what if promiscuity brings with it an increased chance of

STDs, or abortion might result in breast cancer? We don't know if we even have a tomorrow. So as Paul put in 1 Cor. 15:29-32, if there is no God – if we live only for today – then “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.”

So often we are looking for the savvy argument, the magic bullet that will sway even the unbeliever to side with us. But the truth is, we need to look for the *God-glorifying* argument. That is why we were put on this earth: not to convince pagans to be better behaved, but to glorify God. And we might just find that God has so arranged things that the God-glorifying truth is often also the savvy, compelling one.

GRAPHIC PICTURES...

The image is outrageous,
but the act itself's okay?
That picture's met with fury...
But, the killing is okay?
Imagine our sheer terror,
when assailed with gun or knife
But, since no laws are broken,
you can take a pre-born's life?

And therein lies the horror!
Does the truth of this appall?
You're incensed at that picture,
but at murder? Not at all?
You think you're acting civilized
and raise the 'hue and cry'
Yet, you'll not lift a finger
while one-hundred-thousand die?

Yes, this figure is repeated
in our country year by year,
Should reflecting on God's wrath,
not invade our hearts with fear?
Let us, call-out to our authorities
and hold them to account!
May Truth yet change the hearts of men,
as these small corpses mount.

And that's the greater tragedy,
when folks like you resolve,
This holocaust's not happening,
plus, it's not mine to solve
Yet, all must face His judgment
in the fullness of our days
And pay a price much heavier
if we don't mend our ways.

Proverbs 24:11,12, Deuteronomy 30:19b
– Aart Blokhuis Nov. 22/19

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CHRISTIAN GROWTH IN THE “POST-CHRISTIAN” WEST?

In his short review of Glenn Stanton's *The Myth of the Dying Church*, Marvin Olasky shares some big news. While we regularly hear about declining church attendance across the US (and the rest of the Western world), Stanton pointed to polling that shows there's a decided upside too. From 2007-2014 there has been an increase in the percentage of Americans who:

- “say their faith is ‘very important to them’”
- “identify as Christian and say they pray daily, beyond a church service”
- “say they read the Bible at least once a week”
- “say they attend a small group for prayer, Bible study, or other religious education”

In addition, over this same period, there has been an increase among regular church attendees, of those “who say they speak about their faith with others.”

The Devil wants us to despair and forget Christ has *already* won. Let's not blind ourselves to the work God is doing even here in the supposedly “post-Christian” West.

SOURCE: Marvin Olasky's "Not even mostly dead" in the Feb. 1, 2020 WORLD

CHESTERTON ON WAR

G.K. Chesterton was 40 when “the Great War” began, and he died three years after Hitler's rise to power. So even though he didn't see the Second, this journalist and Christian apologist lived through the lead up to both World Wars, and had some pronounced views on the subject of war.

- “War is not the ‘best way of settling differences;’ it is the only way of preventing their being settled for you.”
- “The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.”
- “The only defensible war is a war of defense.”

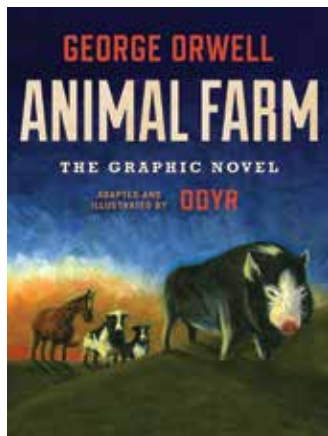
ANSWERS FOR: “IT'S SO EASY TO GET THINGS WRONG”

1. Moses didn't take any animals on the ark; Noah did.
2. Deaf people don't need special raised print; Braille is for the blind.
3. You certainly don't stop.
4. We told you, it's noon.
5. Remember, you are the driver of the train.
6. While calves might drink *milk*, cows drink water.

ANIMAL FARM: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

BY GEORGE ORWELL (& ODYR)

2019 / 172 PAGES



Orwell wrote his allegory during World War II to highlight the dangers of creeping totalitarianism. Instead of a country, his setting is that of a farm, and instead of an oppressive government, things are run by Mr. Jones, who treats Manor Farm's "citizens" – the pigs, horses, sheep, chickens, and more – like they were animals! When the animals rise up and drive Mr. Jones away, they soon find out that though they are free of the farmer, they aren't free of having to follow orders – the pigs have risen up to take leadership, and it soon becomes evident that while "all animals are equal... some animals are more equal than others."

This is a brilliant adaptation of Orwell's classic work, with a mix of colorful and also stark images that will grab any reader's attention. Odyr has made *Animal Farm* accessible to age groups and casual readers that might otherwise never read it.

While I highly recommend this as a gift for teens, it would be a waste to hand it off to your son or daughter and then leave it at that. Unless an adult helps them understand that message behind the story, they aren't likely to see the real world application, and will miss Orwell's warning about the dangers of big governments.

HUNGER WINTER

BY ROB CURRIE

2020 / 236 PAGES



The book begins with a bang – a neighbor furiously pounding on the front door to tell 13-year-old Dirk Ingelse that the Nazis have his older sister. And they'll be coming for him next! It's November 11, 1944, in the Netherlands, and the Ingelse farmstead near Oosterbeek is still under German control. What makes it even more difficult for Dirk is that he has no one to turn to. His mother had suddenly passed away not too long before, and his father is in hiding, working for the Resistance. That's left just him and his older sister Els to take care of their six-year-old sister Anna. Now Els has been arrested, and Dirk has to run. But where to?

The title, the "Hunger Winter" refers to that period of 1944-45, when Allies hadn't yet liberated all the Dutch, and the Germans weren't bothering to feed them. So Dirk not only has to run from the Nazis, he also has to find food.

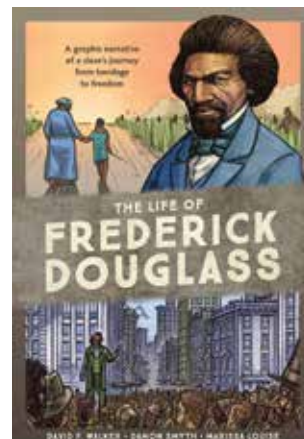
The only downside? The author is Christian, and prayer is mentioned, but God is not as big a character in the story as I expected.

Altogether this is an exciting book, and while there are some tense moments, it all gets tied up nice and neatly, making it a great story for ages 9 or 10 up to about 14.

THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLAS: A GRAPHIC NARRATIVE...

BY DAVID F. WALKER

2018 / 173 PAGES



Frederick Douglass lived his first 20 years as a slave, spent the next 25 speaking against the evils of slavery, and after the emancipation of American slaves, he spent his last 30 years fighting the bigotry that still lingered. He knew John Brown, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, and was both an ally and opponent of Abraham Lincoln. While a graphic novel biography can't do such a figure full justice, this makes for a very good introduction to its subject.

A word of warning is due for a couple uses of the "n-word," though with this topic matter, it is as you might expect. There is also some partial nudity, none sexual, and it could even be described as modestly done: one scene is a black woman being whipped, naked from the waist up, but her front is either away from view, or hid in the shadows. The overarching concern would be the brutality. There is no gratuitous violence – but there is violence. Altogether that would make this a book for older teens maybe 14 and up.

That target audience, teens, aren't always fans of history books, perhaps because they've been exposed to texts that make it all about dates and names. What a joy it is, then, to discover a page-turning biography like this.

IF WE SURVIVE

BY ANDREW KLAVAN

352 PAGES / 2013

"We came to Costa Verdes to build a wall. I just wish I could tell you that all of us made it out alive."

Will Peterson is a 16-year-old visiting a small Central American village with his church's mission team. They've rebuilt the local cinder-block school and are waiting in the cantina for the bus to take them back home when the room is suddenly filled with rebel soldiers and the pot-bellied, smiling waiter, who had been joking with them only moments before, is now on the floor, shot dead by the rebel leader.

What happens next is a not-so-unusual chase-type adventure, the church kids, along with an unexpected helper, barely staying ahead of these murderous bandits.

What makes this something special is the characters in it. The most intriguing might be Jim Nolan, a 16-year-old intellectual who has read the biography and op-ed articles of the country's rebel leader...and who believes everything he's read. When the rebels start killing people, Jim is still sure they're fighting for justice. And even when the guns are turned in their direction, he's just as sure that it's all a horrible mistake, and if he can only talk to someone, things can be straightened out. Author Andrew Klavan makes clear why Jim remains so steadfast: because a lot of what he's been reading, about how the government was oppressing the country's poorest, is entirely true. Klavan isn't taking a cheap shot at the naivety of liberals here – this is a more nuanced look that admits the problems the Left points out might well be problems indeed, even as the solutions they suggest are no solutions at all. Or, in the context of this story, just because the government is bad doesn't make the rebels good, and vice versa.

Will is another well-developed character. He came on the trip as a way of escaping his home life: mom

and dad are always arguing and, he thinks, on the path to divorce. But now, unbelievably, things have gotten a whole lot worse, and as Will and the others bounce from one crisis to another, he has to battle a very understandable sense of panic. He does so by remembering two things:

- 1 A Hemingway quote that cowardice is "a lack of ability to suspend the functioning of the imagination."
- 2 Advice from his youth pastor, who once told the group, "Don't worry about anything – pray about everything."

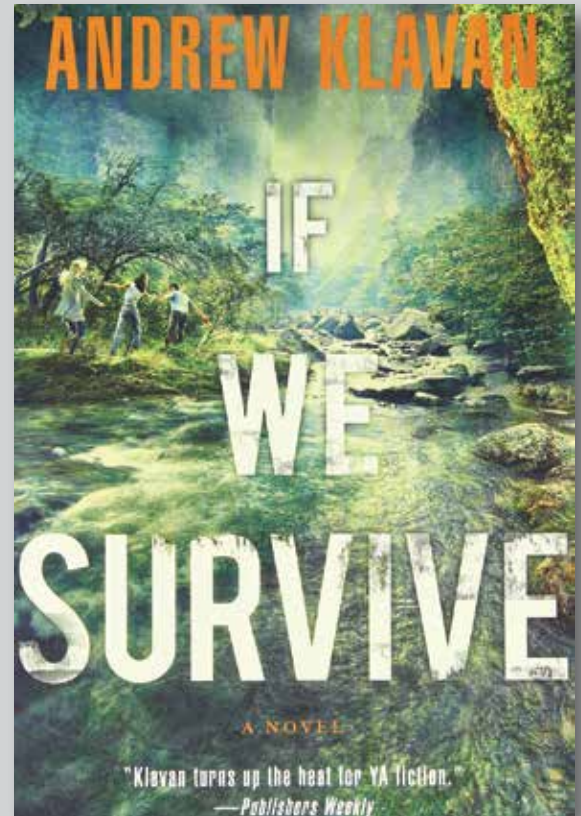
CAUTIONS

While praying is always good advice, the way Will's prayers are depicted in the story makes it seem like it is more the *act of praying*, and not the God he is speaking to, that really helps Will.

Another caution worth noting is that while the church mission group is Protestant (and seemingly some sort of conservative Evangelical) there are positive, if brief, portrayals of other religions. This includes Roman Catholicism, in which a priest has a key role in saving them, and the villagers' ancient spirituality, when the missions group is invited to sit in on a pagan festival of lights. However, in both cases Will keeps to the facts, describing what they saw, but not digging into what it all means. A discerning reader would have reason to presume Klavan believes Roman Catholicism isn't importantly different from Protestantism, but that isn't a message the author is trying to hammer home here.

CONCLUSION

This is a gripping read that any teenage boy would really enjoy, and dad won't mind either. And if dad does



join in, this could be a leap off point for some really good conversations about:

- The American role as policeman of the world
- One-sided news coverage, both from the Left and Right, and how that compares to what God tells us about the importance of hearing both sides in Prov. 18:17
- Courage and what it really involves
- What prayer to God is actually
- Why we find nice people following other gods, or worshipping God in wrong ways

What makes this worth reading is the lesson Klavan is preaching: teens (and many an adult too) will often stake their ground on a knee-jerk reaction against lies they've been able to see through. Christians need to understand that to simply react against one lie might well be to overcompensate and fall for an equally wrong but opposite error. So, overall, I'd recommend this for an older teen guy with a little discernment who enjoys talking things through with his parents.



CALVINISM IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

by Geoff Robson

When I was about nine or ten, at the height of worldwide panic about AIDS, I stumbled across a newspaper article that outlined the symptoms of the dreaded disease. I can still recall reading, to my horror, that one of the telltale signs was “thick, white matting on the tongue.” You see, I had a few small but obvious patches of white matter on my tongue. And my ten-year-old self became utterly convinced: I had AIDS. The fact that I was in the world’s lowest-risk category didn’t matter, nor did the fact that I was asthmatic and regularly took large doses of medication that left white deposits on my tongue. For at least a week, I was convinced that my end had come.

In my early 20s, it was a brain tumor. After all, I had a few really bad headaches on the way to university one week; what else could it be?

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve become slightly more sanguine, but I’m still highly susceptible to fear setting in. Honestly, I feel like I’m tempting fate (even though I totally don’t believe in “tempting fate”) by even writing this piece.

I am a card-carrying hypochondriac. So you can imagine how the last few

weeks have made me feel. I’ve had to dig in and battle hard to not give in to the paralyzing fear of the coronavirus

I’ve had to dig in and battle hard to not give in to the paralyzing fear of the coronavirus that’s been sweeping the globe.

that’s been sweeping the globe.

How have I fought this battle? I’ve armed my household with facts, vitamins, soap, and statistics (but no, not with extra toilet paper as yet – I live in New Zealand, not Australia). I’ve chewed off my wife’s ear about how the media is blowing it out of proportion, mostly preaching to myself in the process. But underneath all those strategies, I’ve fallen back on

one simple, underlying reality: God is completely sovereign.

GOD IS IN CONTROL

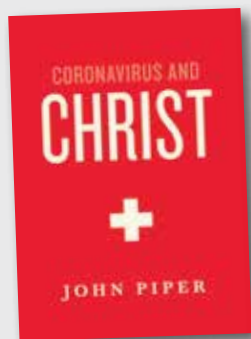
I’ve always found it slightly surprising that Christians find the notion that God is completely sovereign (sometimes called “Calvinism,” after theologian John Calvin) to be so controversial or complex. Maybe it’s the way Calvinism was initially taught to me when I was a young Christian. It was totally plausible, and just seemed the obvious, inevitable conclusion that anyone should reach from studying the Scriptures: God is completely in charge of everything, and nothing takes him by surprise.

Don’t get me wrong: I’m not belittling anyone who finds it hard to grapple with the many thorny issues that this topic raises. Far from it. A high view of God’s sovereignty doesn’t numb the pain of real life or provide cheap, easy answers. We should all sympathize with the Psalmists who bring their laments to God and cry out, “How Long, O Lord?”

But the basic concept itself has (thanks be to God) always just seemed obvious to me. Can I really conceive of the God who spoke the universe into existence now sitting fretfully on the

FREE BOOK:
**CORONAVIRUS AND
CHRIST**

BY JOHN PIPER
2020 / 112 PAGES



What Piper offers us in what he calls this “historic moment of bitter providence” is a lesson in how to be “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor. 6:10).

The secret of “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” is this: *knowing that the same sovereignty that could stop the coronavirus, yet doesn’t, is the very sovereignty that sustains the soul in it.*

Some Christians want to “rescue God from his sovereignty over suffering” – they want to say God is not responsible for the coronavirus. But, Piper notes, such a “rescue” can only be done if we also “sacrifice his sovereignty to turn all things for our good” – if God is not responsible for the coronavirus, then He is not really in control, and we can’t rely on Him to do as He has promised, turning all things to our good (Romans 8:28-30). However, God *is* in control. Therefore...

The very sovereignty that rules in sickness is the sovereignty that sustains in loss. The very sovereignty that takes life is the sovereignty that conquered death and brings believers home to heaven and Christ. It is not sweet to think that Satan, sickness, sabotage, fate, or chance has the last say in my life. That is *not* good news. That God reigns is good news. Why? Because God is holy and righteous and good. And he is infinitely wise.

We don’t know all the reasons God has brought the coronavirus. But we do know He values us, and loves us so much He gave His Son for us. We do know He is in control. So we do know He can and will do as He has promised, somehow, in some way, turning even this pandemic to the good of those who love Him.

Coronavirus and Christ is a short read, but an encouraging and also challenging one. It is also free, both as an e-book, and as a 2-hour audiobook. You can find it at:

DesiringGod.org/books/coronavirus-and-christ

– Jon Dykstra

edge of his throne, desperately hoping that everything will pan out? Can I picture the God who raised Jesus from the dead muttering, “That wasn’t supposed to happen! Oh well, I guess I’ll try again tomorrow”?

But more than that, I’ve also struggled to understand why some people see this as an obscure, irrelevant question – a topic for the “ivory tower” – rather than as a real-life game-changer. As I was once told, *there is nothing as practical as good theology*. The sovereignty of God has been an enormous comfort to me again and again and again in my life.

So while we may be tempted to think that the panic-inducing Covid-19 is no time to get all theological, nothing could be further from the truth. It’s moments like these where we need the deep realities about God to sustain us. If, like me, you’re even slightly given to extra nervousness at a time like this, it might be worth stepping back and planting your flag on some simple yet marvelous truths about our great, sovereign God.

- Remember, there is no such thing as “luck” – even moments that seem totally random are controlled by God (Proverbs 16:33).
- Remember, not even a tiny, insignificant sparrow falls to the ground without God’s say-so – and you are worth more than many sparrows (Matt 10:29-31).
- Remember, God shapes the decisions and the fate of the world’s most powerful people (Proverbs 21:1).
- Remember, whether or not your plans for tomorrow come to fruition depends far more on God than on you (James 4:13-15).
- Remember, God can do all things (that’s a lot of things) and no purpose of his can be thwarted (Job 42:2).
- Remember, God works all things (which, again, really is a lot of things) according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11).
- Remember, God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask him to do and all we think He can do (Ephesians 3:20).
- Next time you get sick, remember that God never faints or grows weary, not even for a second (Isaiah 40:28).
- Remember, God never sleeps or slumbers; He never takes a day off (Psalm 121:3-4).
- Remember, even the very faith that you place in Jesus is a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8-9), and God is in charge of the fruitful spread of the gospel (Mark 4:14-25).
- Remember, God forms the light and creates the darkness; He makes well-being and He creates calamity (Isaiah 45:7). And even if some things – including coronavirus – remain a mystery to us, we can trust that He’s using his sovereign power for our ultimate good. For He didn’t even withhold his own Son from us; we shouldn’t doubt that He’ll also give us the other good things we need. (Romans 5:6-8; Romans 8:32)
- Remember, the days God formed for you, were written in his book before you lived even one of them (Psalm 139:16).

BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

When the whole world is in a panic, when people are inexplicably hoarding in a desperate attempt to calm their fears, when our neighbors fear that the sky is falling, it's easy to join them and give in to anxiety. But it's unnecessary. And it's wrong. One of the best ways for Christians to love one another, love our neighbors and honor the Lord during this time is simply to :

be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:8-9)

That promise was to Joshua, but we have even more reason than Joshua to be sure that those words apply to us. We have the gospel of Jesus. We have a Savior who has promised to be with us, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). We have a loving God who is not far away, but who is *near* to all who call on him, and who is mighty to save.

Knowing all this, we are invited to entrust ourselves to God:


Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all

...while we may be tempted to think that the panic-inducing Covid-19 is no time to get all theological, nothing could be further from the truth.

understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Trust the sovereign Lord of the ages who is working out his plans and purposes for the world, and for you, moment by moment, even (especially) when things are scary or unknown. Tell your children that God can be trusted more than hand sanitizer. Boldly bear witness to a frightened world – a world that's having the deceptive veil of safety and security pulled back before its very eyes – that there is a genuine, lasting source of security and peace.

Take your stand on the Bible's great truths about our sovereign God, now and forever.

And try not to touch your face. 

This article first appeared at GeoffRobson.com and it is reprinted here with permission.

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"The organist, after hesitatingly running his fingers over the keyboard, started softly."

CRYING, "ABBA! FATHER!"

by Christine Farenhorst

I have a friend in a nursing home whom I visit regularly. Her name is Dinah and she is a widow. We met her through providence. A few years ago, her husband came to the house carrying both a friendly smile and Watchtower leaflets. He was a tall, thin and very elderly man. As we were just in the process of slaughtering our chickens, I did not have much time to speak with him. He was Dutch too, as it turned out, and told me that he was dying of cancer and therefore trying to witness to as many people as he could before he died. A heartbreaking confession! We visited his home, my husband and I, later that month before he and his wife moved into an old-age home where he subsequently died - died, as far as we know, still denying the Trinity. We have continued calling on his wife - on Dinah - and I have great conversations with her. That is to say, we get along fine on almost every subject except on that of the Trinity.

The Trinity is a difficult concept. Yet, the Trinity and the Gospel are one and the same. God saves us by sending his Son and His Spirit. As Galatians 4:4-6 explains:

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law,

so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"

To know God savingly is to know Him as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit.

There is a hymn known as "The Hymn to the Trinity." The earliest publication of this hymn was bound into the 6th edition of George Whitefield's 1757 *Collection of Hymns for Public Worship*. It is not known who wrote the words to this hymn but the melody was penned by Felice de Giardini. Because Giardini was Italian, this hymn is often referred to as "The Italian Hymn."

Come, thou Almighty King,
Help us thy name to sing,
Help us to praise!
Father all glorious,
O'er all victorious!
Come and reign over us,
Ancient of days!

Jesus our Lord, arise,
Scatter our enemies,
And make them fall!
Let thine Almighty aid,
Our sure defence be made,
Our souls on thee be stay'd;
Lord hear our call!

Come, thou Incarnate Word,
Gird on thy mighty sword -
Our pray'r attend!
Come! and thy people bless,
And give thy word success,
Spirit of holiness
On us descend!

Come holy Comforter,
Thy sacred witness bear,
In this glad hour!
Thou who Almighty art,
Descend in ev'ry heart,
And ne'er from us depart.
Spirit of pow'r.

To the great one in three
Eternal praises be
Hence - evermore!
His sov'reign Majesty
May we in glory see,
And to eternity
Love and adore!

My friend Dinah could never sing this song. As a matter of fact, because she is such a devout Jehovah's Witness, my belief in the Trinity makes me something of a polytheist in her eyes. I continually pray that God will open her eyes to the truth, beauty, and necessity of believing in the concept of our Triune God because only He can do that through the Holy Spirit.

AN AMERICAN HYMN TOO

The mentioned "Italian Hymn" first appeared anonymously in London, England around 1757. It was about this time that the singing of the anthem "God Save Our Gracious King" was also coming into fashion. The "Italian Hymn" could be sung to the tune of "God Save Our Gracious King." Perhaps that is why the author of the words of the "Italian Hymn" did not want to be known. The stanzas, you see, seemed to be somewhat of a defiant substitute for the words in the anthem which praised King George III of England. Things were brewing in the war department between the thirteen colonies and Britain and were leading up to the American Revolutionary War, (the war fought between Great Britain and the original 13 British colonies in North America from 1775 until 1783). The words to "God Save the King" were:

God save great George our king,
God save our noble king,
God save the king!
Send him victorious
Happy and glorious
Long to reign over us
God save the king!

The English anthem was often used as a rallying cry for the British troops. It aroused patriotism. There is a story associated with this.

One Sunday during the war, as the British troops were occupying New York City, and very much appeared to have the upper hand, a group of soldiers went to a local church in Long Island. Known to the people as "lobsters" or "bloody backs" because of their red coats, these soldiers were not welcome.

For the church members it would have felt akin to having Nazis sitting next to you in a pew during the Second World War in a city like Amsterdam. People were uncomfortable, glancing at the enemy who boldly smiled and flaunted their red coats as they sat in the benches. They obviously felt they had the upper hand. No one smiled back. Children leaned against their mothers, peering around at the soldiers. The tenseness was palpable.

A British officer stood up at some point during that service, and demanded that all of the folks present sing "God Save the King" as a mark of loyalty to Britain. People looked down at the wooden floor, their mouths glued shut. One of the soldiers walked over to the organist and ordered him to play the melody so that the singing could begin. The organist, after hesitatingly running his fingers over the keyboard, started softly. The notes of the "Italian Hymn" stole across the aisles. But it was not "God save great George as king" that then burst forth out of the mouths of the colonists. No, it was "Come, Thou Almighty King," and the voices swelled up to the rafters of the church and it was with great fervor that the Triune God was praised.

It's nice to reflect on a story like that - to perhaps ask ourselves if we would rather erupt into singing a patriotic hymn about the Trinity than to buckle under unlawful pressure.

Still, the Trinity is a mystery. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." (Deut. 29:29).

AUGUSTINE

Augustine of Hippo was fascinated by the doctrine of the Trinity. He pondered the mystery of the Trinity over and over in his head and wanted very much to be able to explain it logically. He even wrote a book on it. The book, entitled *De Trinitate*, represents an exercise in understanding what it means to say that God is at the same time Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Augustine had a desire to explain to critics of the Nicene Creed that the divinity and co-equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were Biblical. We often, like Augustine, want very much to explain God's tri-unity fully to people such as Dinah. We want to convince Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims of the truth and need for this doctrine. This, of course, we cannot do on our own, even though we should faithfully speak of the hope that is in us.

Augustine of Hippo was fascinated by the doctrine of the Trinity.

There is a story, a legend, that one day Augustine was walking along the shore of the sea, and that as he was walking he was reflecting on God and His tri-unity. As he was plodding along in the sand, he was suddenly confronted with a little child. The child, a little girl, had a cup in her hand and was running back and forth between a hole she had made in the sand and the sea. She sprinted to the water, filled her cup and then dashed back to the hole and poured the water into it. Augustine was mystified and spoke to her: "Little child, what are you doing?"

Smiling up at him, she replied, "I am trying to empty the sea into this hole."

"How do you think," Augustine responded, "that you can empty the immense amount of water that is in the sea into that tiny hole which you have dug with that little cup?"

She smiled at him again and answered back, "And how do you suppose you can comprehend the immensity of God with your small head?"

And then the child was gone.

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

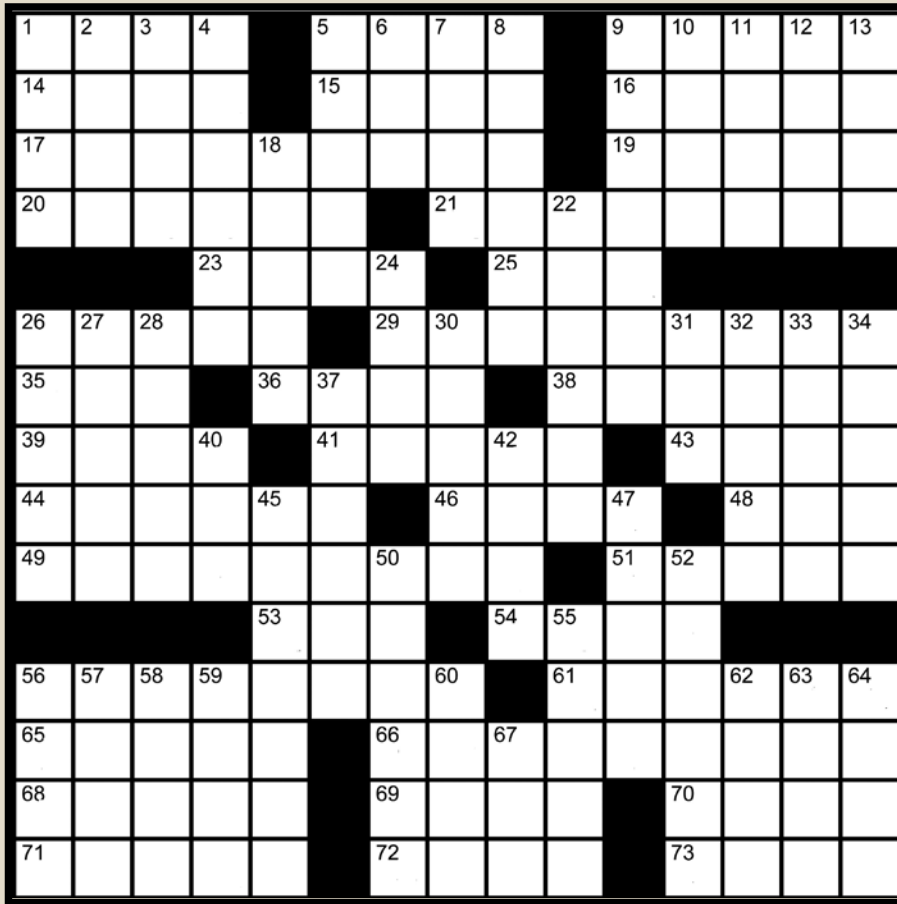
It is wonderful to ponder on the character of God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism's definition of God is merely an enumeration of His attributes:

"God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth."

Indeed, the benediction from 2 Cor. 13:14, "*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all,*" is a benediction that should fill us with wonder and thankfulness. RP

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA



SERIES 5-5

PUZZLE CLUES

ACROSS

1. Attach; append; join; connect
5. Civilian or military official in Ottoman Empire
9. They're tops in construction.
14. Referring to the laity
15. "sold... for a single ____" (Hebrews 12)
16. Someone living outside his native country
17. Opposite of 9 Down
19. "_____ that out" (Revelation 11)
20. Mockery of human nature or society
21. Christ was crucified under _____
23. Name of a woman or a star or kind of dog
25. Irk; irritate; infuriate
26. Look at that hunter _____ at the _____!

29. Science of what we eat and its effects
35. "the ____ or kettle or... pot" (1 Samuel 4)
36. "down from Jerusalem to ____" (Acts 8)
38. "Most food you drop is... ____" (Dr. Oz)
39. Kevin ____ - Australia's 26th prime minister
41. Musical term indicating pace or speed
43. Loud ring of a bell (mostly repeated)
44. Enter forcibly or suddenly (mostly interrupt)
46. "fire has devoured your ____" (Nahum 3)
48. "followed... my ____ in life" (2 Timothy 3)
49. Pet or scientific testing subject (2 words)
51. (Mostly common) punctuation symbol
53. "on the day when I ____" (Malachi 4)
54. When the planes land (abbreviation)
56. A gentleman does not ____ his word.
61. So like an aria, but more so recitative
65. Dispatch boat; Spanish for *advice*
66. She often needs a minivan for the team.
68. Artifact or antique that attracts adoration
69. Data (short form)
70. I'll visit Man or Wight, it sounds like.
71. "_____ forth and cry aloud" (Galatians 4)
72. "Just a few ____ and I'll be with you!"
73. The largest organ of the body

LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTION



SERIES 5-4

DOWN

1. Brews served during hoppy hour?
2. Henry ____ (of *Two Years Before the Mast*)
3. Adam's was plants; Noah's included meat.
4. _____ and save
5. Ruler in Islamic country (variant spelling)
6. "rowed... to ____ back to dry land" (Jonah 1)
7. "_____ like women's ____" (Revelation 9)
8. Niche; nook; recess
9. Easygoing; laid-back
10. "Does one plow there with ____?" (Amos 6)
11. October's birthstone
12. Another name for *broad bean*
13. Fret about what to do with the broth?
18. Edvard ____ (composer of *Peer Gynt*)
22. You often see it in a shower.
24. Cutting tool (looks much like axe)
26. "take a ____ from the... cedar" (Ezekiel 17), or a ____ of parsley
27. World's smallest island nation
28. Large lemur (also called a babakoto)
30. Plural of *iamb*
31. Point; end; extremity
32. It's also called an H-beam.
33. What's made by scientist or accident victim
34. City at start of 1965 voting rights marches
37. "made a united ____ on Paul" (Acts 18)
40. *Book of the ____ Cow*, by Walter Wangerin
42. Young servant of a knight
45. "A ____ has fair feathers, but foul feet"
47. "you _____ and terrify me with..." (Job 7)
50. Drooping or falling of the upper eyelid
52. Egyptian "god" of death and the afterlife
55. Tortillas with varied fillings
56. Clothing (mostly Garbo's garment?)
57. "authority ____ the nations" (Revelation 2)
58. "my ____ is poured out" (Lamentations 2)
59. The largest continent
60. "And then there were ____"
62. Former capital of Siberia
63. "____ Deo Gloria" (*Glory to God alone*)
64. Portent; sign; token; harbinger; warning
67. Substance banned in 1980s (abbreviation)



FUTURE

MOVING FORWARD IN HOPE

As the coronavirus has made plain to everyone, there is a difference between Man's plans and God's plans. Solomon put it this way in Proverbs 19:21:

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Sickness, death, job loss, and restrictions on travel and assembly have followed closely after the virus's path. Hundreds of thousands are infected, tens of thousands have died, and there is no clear end in sight. While we might not understand the full *why* behind what is happening, we do know the *Who*, and so can respond to this virus in a very different way than the world. We can trust that whatever may happen, God will turn it to the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28).

That this good doesn't always happen in this life – many a Christian has had to look in hope to what comes after death – but it shouldn't surprise us when we can see God actively manifesting that good already now.

- Iran has temporarily released a third of their Christian prisoners as part of their plan to curb the spread of the virus.
- Roman Catholics have been told by the Pope that, if there are no priests available, they can confess their sins directly to God.
- While the State has largely co-opted

parent's educational role, it has now shifted back to the home front by the hundreds of millions. We can pray that parents embrace this role, and hold on to it.


- Christian post-secondary students now forced to study from home are gaining the distance-learning skills that may allow them to forgo their local Left-leaning university, and choose instead from more ideologically-agreeable online institutions.
- Google reports that the use of "prayer" as a search term has gone up dramatically.
- As the *American Thinker's* Gordon Wyson has noted, the hand-washing and sanitation precautions spawned by the virus will become a part of our culture. How many of our little kids knew how to really wash their hands before this? Better hand-washing will save lives in the years ahead by curtailing more "ordinary" but still deadly illness like the flu.
- Transgender amputations have been postponed, giving these individuals time to reconsider.
- More than 5,600 Planned Parenthood clinics around the world have closed indefinitely, and aborturies in Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, Texas, and even California have closed, being deemed non-essential.

God's blessings come in other forms too, one being clarity. A meme making the rounds notes that God, in shutting

downs sports leagues, theaters and even the economy, is showing that sports and movie stars, and money, are not idols worthy of our worship – we can't rely on them when the going gets tough.

Another sort of clarity is one that can be directed towards abortion advocates. When they say that a woman should be able to do whatever she wants with her own body, we can point them to this present reality, in which there is a recognition that when other lives are involved, there can be a reason for our freedoms to be restricted.

One blessing we've seen here in *RP*, is an uptick in interest for our online offerings, with both our website and Facebook traffic up. The quarantine has left people with more time on their hands, and at least some of that is being spent reading our Reformed resources.

We have ongoing plans to increase the number and type of those resources, by expanding into book publishing, and starting a number of podcasts but, of course, those plans may need some adjusting. In this economic upheaval, we've already had 10% of our monthly donors need to discontinue their support. Will others come forward to fill the gap? We don't yet know. But like all other worries and concerns, we do know Who we can take this to in prayer. God has already been showing us that in midst of troubles, He is turning bad to our good. And we can ease our anxiety, knowing that He will always do so. 



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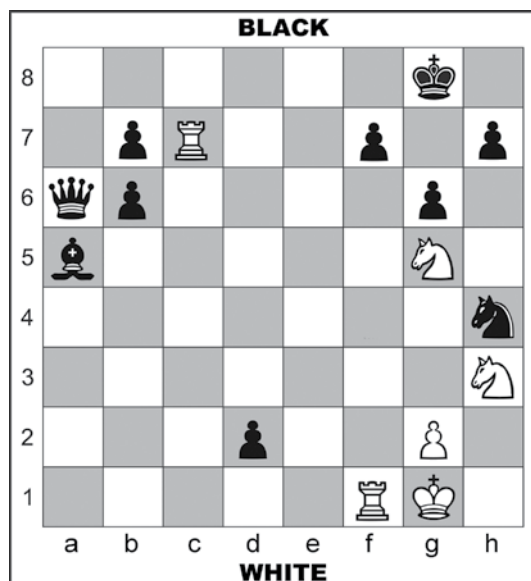
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ENTICING ENIGMAS & CEREBRAL CHALLENGES



Chess Puzzle #257



WHITE to Mate in 3

Or, If it is BLACK's Move, **BLACK to Mate in 3**

Riddle for Punsters

#257 – “No need to **DRONE ON** with instructions?”

When Boris purchased a drone for his technology-knowledgeable son he knew that the chances of his son causing it to crash were quite r _ _ _ _ _.

Problem to Ponder

#257 – “Taking the wrong tunnel would really ‘bite’?”

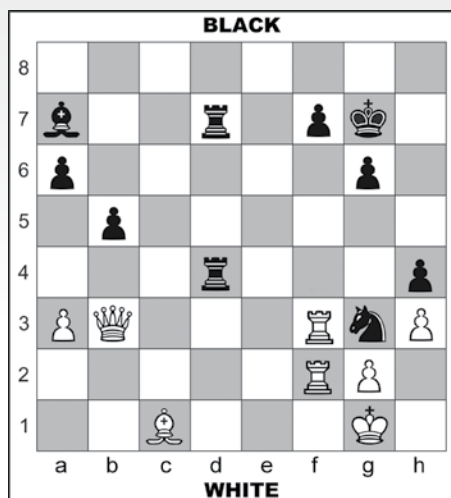
There are two brothers, Harry and Larry. One always tells the truth but the other (who has anger issues) always lies. There are two dark tunnels known to the brothers. One tunnel is perfectly safe but the other has many poisonous snakes in it. Jen wants to explore the safe tunnel. How can she determine which tunnel is safe to explore by asking one of the brothers one question? Will she then know which brother is Harry? Explain your answers.

Send Puzzles, Solutions, Ideas to Puzzle Page,
43 Summerhill Place, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4V4 or robgleach@gmail.com

Last Month's Solutions

Solution to Chess Puzzle #256

“The Power of Paired Rooks”



WHITE TO MATE IN 4

Descriptive Notation

1. QxP ch RxQ
2. RxR ch K-R1
3. R-B8 ch K-R2
4. R/B2-B7 mate

OR

1. QxP ch K-R1
2. Q-B8 ch K-R2
3. R/B3-B7 ch RxR
4. RxR mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Qb3xf7 + Rd7xf7
2. Rf3xf7 + Kg7-h8
3. Rf7-f8 + Kh8-h7
4. Rf2-f7 ++

OR

1. Qb3xf7 + Kg7-h8
2. Qf7-f8 + Kh8-h7
3. Rf3-f7 + Rd7xf7
4. Rf2xf7 ++

Answer to Riddle for Punsters

#256 – “A stalled relationship?”

Why was the stallion happy that an affectionate mare was moved into the stall beside him? He was hoping to have a stable relationship with a female horse but previous ones turned out to be nightmares.

Answer to Problem to Ponder

#256 – “Common North American Birds”

newr wren	broin robin	renoh heron
warrsop sparrow	draincal cardinal	hantthu nuthatch
barrlew warbler	drubblie bluebird	drikelle killdeer
chingflod goldfinch	prowedocke woodpecker	glintghaine nightingale
kecedaich chickadee	drubghimmin hummingbird	
lube yaj blue jay	blad leage bald eagle	
drace gwixwan cedar waxwing	ratmilebo loorie baltimore oriole	
ruppel mintar purple martin	rungomin vedo mourning dove	

BLACK TO MATE IN 3

Descriptive Notation

1. ----- R-Q8 ch
2. QxR RxQ ch
3. K-R2 R-R8 mate

[NOTE the rook on f2 is PINNED!]

Algebraic Notation

1. ----- Rd4-d1 +
2. Qb3xd1 Rd7xd1 +
3. Kg1-h2 Rd1-h1 ++

[NOTE the rook on f2 is PINNED!]

ON ANGELS AND GUARDIAN ANGELS

by Johan Tangelder

Does everyone have a guardian angel? Many people are convinced that they have an angel as their special protector. In the film *City of Angels*, actor Nicolas Cage plays a guardian angel who protects Meg Ryan, an overworked doctor who is caught in the tiresome repetition of everyday life.

This idea, of a guardian angel, offers comfort and solace. And efforts such as this, to capture angels on film, have enormous clout in shaping popular understandings of these spiritual beings. Can Hollywood convey a fair, helpful, or faithful presentation of angels?

Unfortunately, no. They have distorted Biblical truth and misled viewers about the nature, character, and purpose of angels. The concept of an individual guardian angel for each one of us taps into our popular, individualistic culture, which is searching for spiritual experiences, comfort, and hope.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND GUARDIAN ANGELS

When did the idea of guardian angels first come about. While the early Apostolic Fathers spoke of angels only incidentally, some of them had the opinion that every believer has his or her guardian angel. And very early in the history of the Church, the belief that an angel was assigned to each human being as a guardian gained currency.

The Roman Catholic Church deemed the angels' guardianship over mankind sufficiently based on revelation to demand belief. But as Roman Catholic scholar J. Huby points out, the most important "canonical books" for the knowledge of angels are Daniel, the apocryphal books of Tobias (aka Tobit) and 2 Maccabees, and the book of Enoch which is not in the canon of the Protestant or Roman Catholic churches.

The Roman Catholic Church claims



human life is surrounded by the watchful care and intercession of angels from infancy to death. Its catechism says,

Beside each believer stands an angel as protector and shepherd leading him to life.... The Church venerates the angels who help her on her earthly pilgrimage and protect every human being.

Pope Clement X set aside October 2 as a feast day in their honor, celebrating their protection of human beings from spiritual and physical dangers, and their assistance in doing good.

THE BIBLE AND GUARDIAN ANGELS

So what does the Bible say about each of us having a guardian angel who protects us? Very little! Some point to Matthew 18:10 to support the idea:

"See that you do not look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven."

This does speak to God caring for us through angels, but doesn't show that each of us is paired with an angel.

Another passage often pointed to is Acts 12, where Peter is freed from jail by an angel and, when he arrives at the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, those there couldn't believe it was him, and wondered if it was "his angel." This shows that people of that time may have believed everyone had their own angel, but it isn't the Bible endorsing the idea.

God's Word does not support the notion that each believer has his or her own personal guardian angel. And while it also doesn't speak clearly against the idea, Reformed theologian Wilhelmus a Brakel (d. 1711) has good guidance for how we should think on this matter: "God's Word does not say anything about it, and one must not be wiser than what is written."

But, again, the Bible *does* say that God cares for us through His angels. Their intervention is not an everyday occurrence, but occasional and

The history of missions records many authentic stories of heavenly assistance received in critical times.

exceptional – not as their own option, but only as it is permitted or commanded by God. It is sufficient to know that they are employed for the good of the Church. John Calvin comments:

For if the fact that all of the heavenly hosts are keeping watch for his safety will not satisfy a man, I do not see what benefit he could derive from knowing that one angel has been given to him as his especial guardian. Indeed, those who confine to one angel the care that God takes of each one of us are doing a great injustice both to themselves and to all the members of the church; as if it were an idle promise that we should fight more valiantly with these hosts supporting and protecting us round about! (Institutes I,xiv,7)

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

Angel appearances are not rare as we usually think. Many stories in the Bible reveal the visible and audible manifestations of angels. Repeatedly, we read of those surprised by them.

Yet we should not be surprised. Angels do minister to believers. “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Heb. 1:14). The Puritan theologian John Owen (d. 1683) comments on this text that God employs angels

“for the good of them that are heirs of salvation, to manifest unto them the greatness and glory of the work of the gathering, preserving, and redemption of his church.”

Angels have a special role in the execution of God’s providential care. God instructs His angels to keep vigil for our safety and to take care that harm will not come to us. In Psalms 35 and 91 we read that God will encamp around those who fear Him and guard them in all their ways. Even archangels have been put to

work in the interest of God’s elect (Luke 1:11-38; Jude 9).

In times of danger we may freely ask God to send an angel for our protection. And some have received the aid of an angel without even asking for it. When the prophet Elijah, exhausted with the relentless persecution he suffered from Queen Jezebel,

“lay down and slept under a broom tree...and behold an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ Elijah looked around, and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank... and strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God” (1 Kings 19:5-8).

When Dothan was surrounded by the Arameans, Elisha’s servant was deadly afraid. The prophet reassures him, “Don’t be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Then Elisha prays, “O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.” The servant is astonished to see the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Ki. 6:8-17).

Angels guarded Daniel who, when falsely accused, was thrown into the lion’s den. He told the king Darius, “My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight” (Dan. 6:22).

Although the Great Commission was given to the Church (Matt. 28:19-20), angels take an active part in the spread of the Gospel. They cooperated with the church in its mission outreach. They saw to it that unbelievers could hear the Gospel despite opposition to the Church.

In the book of Acts, the great missionary record of the early church, angels are mentioned 21 times. Angels displayed miraculous powers on behalf

of some of the apostles. Apostles were arrested and put into jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the jail doors and brought them out. “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell all the people the full message of this new life” (Acts 5: 17-20).

James and Peter were imprisoned for preaching the Gospel. Peter, expecting to be executed, was rescued by an angel. A heavenly light shone, an angel poked Peter and said, “Quick, get up!” He led him past two guards, through an iron gate, down the street, and to freedom. Only then did Peter realize that God had sent an angel to rescue him from King Herod’s clutches (Acts 12:1-11).

Philip, the evangelist, was preaching the Gospel in Samaritan villages, when an angel came and told him to “get up and go south.” Philip obeyed the angel, and explained to an important Ethiopian official the good news of the Gospel taught in the book of Isaiah, and led him to the Lord (Acts 8:26-40).

ANGELS TODAY

G. K. Chesterton said that the most wonderful thing about miracles is that they do sometimes happen. And this is true also of angels’ interventions today. Why should God not send His angels to minister to the saints in the third millennium? Centuries do not make any difference to the eternal and unchanging God.

Elizabeth Elliot tells about a blind man her father knew, who was to step into what he thought was his cabin aboard ship. It was in fact a hatchway, but he felt a hand on his chest pushing him back. He asked who was there. There was no answer. Was an angel sent to rescue him?

Dr. B. Wielenga in his book *Het Huis Gods* (The House of God) notes when the Secessionists were persecuted in 19th century Netherlands, it was a time of miraculous answers to prayer. Angels watched over the safety of the faithful believers in all their ways.

The history of missions records many authentic stories of heavenly assistance received in critical times. Missionaries have shared amazing experiences about the mysterious intervention of angels

when their lives were threatened. G. Van Asselt, a 19th century missionary in Sumatra recalled that one of the Bataks had seen a double row of guards surrounding his house. They stood hand in hand and had shining faces. The Bataks suspected that the missionary had hidden soldiers in his home during the day, but after he was allowed to search Van Asselt's house, he had to admit that he was wrong. When the Batak asked Van Asselt why he had not seen the guard of angels, Van Asselt replied that this was not necessary for those who trust in God's Word.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Many Christians have testified that in times of critical danger they suddenly felt an unseen hand. Some tell of a mysterious warning not to proceed with their travel plans and then to discover later that the plane they were booked to fly with had crashed.

Playwright Tony Kushner was greatly troubled by the belief that angels appear to some people and not to others. He said,

"I find that horrendously offensive. The question is, why are you saved with your guardian angel and not the woman who was shot to death shielding her children in Brooklyn three weeks ago? That suggests a capricious divine force. If there is a God, he can't possibly work that way."


Christians do not subscribe to a New Age theology which says that we live in a benign universe where all you have to do is ask an angel for help. Our view of angels and their activities is formed by Scripture. Any other view is either a fiction or a counterfeit.

Since the Bible teaches that God employs angels for our good, we know He uses them to guard us. As the Puritan Thomas Watson (d.1686) testified, "The angels are of the saints' life-guard...The highest angels take care of the lowest saints." But God does not always come to the rescue. Faith in Him does not depend on miracles and angelic interventions. Faith is a relationship to the sovereign

God through Jesus Christ, independent of the miraculous. Christians too get into fatal car accidents.

In the early church, the first martyr Stephen died by stoning, though God could have prevented it. James the brother of John was executed, though Peter was miraculously rescued from the same prison. But this same Peter, according to tradition, was crucified upside down in Rome. The apostle Paul died in Rome under the cruel persecution of Caesar, though John survived his exile on Patmos under similar persecution and came home to die of old age.

God's ways with His people are mysterious. They are beyond our human understanding. Christians don't pretend to know all the answers. Who can understand the mind and ways of God? (Rom 11:33ff). The Bible record of miraculous interventions enriches and encourages believers, as we can see in Hebrews 11:32-40, where we read of those "who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword," and of women who "received back their dead, raised to life again." However, "others were tortured and refused to be released." There were those who faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put into prison. They were stoned, they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword."

Some were rescued; others were not. Yet, they were all commended for their faith. They did not count the cost of their faith walk. They lived in complete obedience to their Lord. They were not preoccupied with the ministry of angels. Their faith was not shaken or weakened by the lack of divine interventions. They believed that they were not their own, but belonged body and soul, in life and in death, to their faithful crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ. 

A version of this article was first published in the March 2001 issue, under the title "Surprised by Angels."

Rev. Johan Tangelder (1936-2009) wrote for Reformed Perspective for 13 years and many of his articles have been collected at ReformedReflections.ca.



JENNY GEDDES:

THE REFORMER WHO LET FLY...

by James Dykstra

Our story is about what should have been a small thing. It wasn't such an unusual thing. You hear about it from time to time. Someone got upset and threw their stool. Someone got excited, got a little rowdy, and that was the end of it, right? Not quite.

The stool thrower was a certain Jenny Geddes. She wasn't a notable woman, merely running a fruit stall just outside the Tron Kirk, the main church in Edinburgh. Her stall was the 1600s equivalent of a hot dog stand. She wasn't the sort of person that you would expect to appear in the history books. She was average. Not unusual. Much like you or

me. But maybe that goes to show you that if the cause is important enough, the small can rise to do big things.

In 1635, Charles I, king of England and Scotland, had declared himself to be the head of the Scottish church. Not all the Scots were terribly happy about this. In the spirit of the Reformation, the Scottish church had gone a good ways toward removing Catholic influences and developing its own, distinctive, Protestant style of worshipping. There was quite a bit of fear that Charles would change all that. Charles wanted the Scottish church to be more like the English one, uniting religion in his kingdom.

CATHOLIC SUBTERFUGE?

Charles and the unpopular English Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, appointed a committee of, admittedly, Scottish bishops to develop a prayer book for use in the Scottish church. The Scots saw this prayer book as a way to make the Scottish church Catholic again by subterfuge. A lot of the more conservative Scots, the more Puritan leaning members of the church, were not impressed.

So when it came time to debut the new Book of Common Prayer in an actual worship service, tensions were running high. Sunday, July 23, 1637 saw Deacon John Hanna nervously ascend the pulpit at St Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh. Sitting in the back of the cathedral was Jenny Geddes. Interestingly, the women were required to sit at the back, and bring their own stools to sit on which undoubtedly has a fascinating story behind it. For our purposes, it's enough to realize that any stool light enough to be brought from home is also light enough to be thrown across the room.

At some point Geddes had had enough. She rose and colorfully accused Hanna of being a Catholic priest in disguise. She yelled "Devil cause you severe pain and flatulent distension of your abdomen, false thief: dare you say the Mass in my ear?" and then flung her stool across the room and at Hanna's head.

Cursing flatulence on someone and flinging your stool seems to have been the trigger for chaos. A



riot started in the church – possibly involving more flying stools – with the service ending up more like a barroom brawl than a place of worship. One worshipper who dutifully used the appropriate responses from the new Prayer Book was soundly thumped with Bibles. The riot spread out onto the street, even the city council chambers were besieged, and in time the authorities were called in to break up the chaos.

The ruling authorities in Edinburgh appealed to the capital in London to withdraw the new Book of Common Prayer, but the government of Charles I refused. The Scots responded by signing a National Covenant in February 1638, to make the Scottish church more Presbyterian and less Anglican, and later that same year tossed out the Scottish bishops who had written the new Prayer Book.


...any stool light enough to be brought from home is also light enough to be thrown across the room.

King Charles treated this as rebellion, and in 1639 launched the First Bishops War, the first in a series of wars with the Scots known as the Wars of the Covenant. These wars would tax his treasury, and, ultimately, lead to the confrontations with Parliament which would eventually cost him his head.

CONCLUSION

All this came about because one woman threw a stool. The funny part is that historians aren't even sure if Jenny Geddes was a real person, or just a wonderful element to throw into a pretty crazy story about religious

and political reform. Whatever the case, the riot was real, and it goes a long way towards showing that at the right moment, real, average, even boring, people can make a spectacular difference.

Sometimes it's not where you take your stand that matters, but where you take your seat. 

This article is taken from an episode of James Dykstra's History.icu podcast, "where history is never boring." Check out www.History.icu for more episodes as well as Spotify, Google podcasts, or wherever you find your podcasts.



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WHAT MUST BEN SHAPIRO DO TO BE SAVED?

by Tim Barnett



Does a person need to put their faith in Jesus to be saved? That was the underlying question conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro put to Roman Catholic Bishop Robert Barron in episode 31 of his Sunday Special. Ben Shapiro pulls no punches when he asks:

What's the Catholic view on who gets into Heaven and who doesn't? I feel like I lead a pretty good life – very religiously based life – in which I try to keep, not just the Ten Commandments, but a solid 603 other commandments, as well. And I spend an awful lot of my time promulgating what I would consider to be Judeo-Christian virtues, particularly in Western societies. So, what's the Catholic view of me? Am I basically screwed here?

SAME QUESTION, DIFFERENT RESPONSES

In asking this, Shapiro is asking the same question as the rich young ruler – albeit in a less elegant way. It's the most

important question a person can ask: *What must I do to inherit eternal life?*

Like the rich young Jewish ruler from the first century, Shapiro qualifies his question with a list of good deeds. Both young Jewish men boast of their religiosity and their sincerity to keep the Law.

Although their questions are similar, the answers they each receive are different.

In Jesus' response, He shows the rich ruler that he – like all of us – falls short of God's perfect standard (Mark 10:21). In fact, he has not even kept the *greatest*

Like the rich young Jewish ruler from the first century, Shapiro qualifies his question with a list of good deeds.

commandment to love God above everything else, including his wealth. Jesus' point is clear: You can't enter God's kingdom *by working*.

Paul makes the same point in his letter to the Romans. He says, "For by works of the law *no human being will be justified in his sight*, since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Paul adds, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, *to be received by faith*" (Rom. 3:23–25a).

In His short encounter with the rich ruler, Jesus illustrates how *not* to inherit eternal life. But, in an encounter with *another* Jewish ruler, He explains *how* to inherit eternal life.

Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that *whoever believes in him* should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Here's what we learn from Jesus' interactions with these two Jewish leaders. First, good works won't work. Second, eternal life is received by faith

– believing in Jesus. Contrast Jesus’ response to Bishop Barron’s here:

No. The Catholic view – go back to the Second Vatican Council [which] says it very clearly.

Christ is the privileged route to salvation. God so loved the world He gave His only Son that we might find eternal life, so that’s the privileged route. However, Vatican II clearly teaches that someone outside the explicit Christian faith can be saved. Now, they’re saved through the grace of Christ indirectly received, so the grace is coming from Christ. But it might be received according to your conscience.

So if you’re following your conscience sincerely – or, in your case, you’re following the commandments of the Law sincerely – yeah, you *can* be saved.

Now, that doesn’t conduce to a complete relativism. We still would say the privileged route – the route that God has offered to humanity – is the route of His Son. But, no, you *can* be saved. Even, Vatican II says, an atheist of good will can be saved.

The belief that someone can be saved today without explicit faith in Christ is called *inclusivism*. Barron does a good job laying out the inclusivist position – a position taught by the Roman Catholic Church. Unfortunately, Bishop Barron doesn’t give any *biblical* support for the view.

WHY I AM NOT AN INCLUSIVIST

There are a number of reasons why I am *not* an inclusivist. One of the most compelling arguments *against* inclusivism is found in the account of Cornelius. In Acts 10 and 11, Luke records what Cornelius is like.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, *a devout man who feared God* with all his household, *gave alms generously* to the people, and *prayed continually to God*. (Acts 10:1–2)

Cornelius seems to have a lot going for him. But he’s got a problem: *He’s never heard the gospel*. Knowing how Cornelius has responded to the light he’s been given, God gives him more light. He sends him a vision. In the vision, an angel tells Cornelius to send for a man named Peter.

And he [Cornelius] told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, “Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; *he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved*, you and all your household.” (Acts 11:13–14)

Notice the text says that Cornelius *isn’t* saved at this point. He has to hear “the message” by which he can be saved.

God-fearing? Yes.

Devout and sincere? True.

Generous and religious? Absolutely.

Even Peter is impressed by Cornelius’s spiritual accolades. Now notice what Peter *doesn’t* do. He doesn’t reassure Cornelius that he has been saved “by grace indirectly received” – as Barron put it. He isn’t saved by “sincerely following his conscience.” He doesn’t

speak of two routes to God: a “privileged route” received by faith in Christ and another route where faith in Christ isn’t required.

No, the text says Cornelius needed to hear a message “by which he will be saved.” What was *that* message? We are not left guessing. Peter tells us:

And he [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness *that everyone who believes in him* receives forgiveness of sins *through his name*. (Acts 10:42–43)

Even with all of his spiritual nobility and religious sincerity, *Cornelius was still lost and in need of salvation*. If inclusivism were true, Peter would not have needed to make a trip to Cornelius. But Peter had to make the trip because – as Paul says – “How will *they call on him* in whom they have not *believed*? And how are they to *believe in him* of whom they have *never heard*? And how are they to *hear* without someone *preaching*?” (Romans 10:14–15).

How can people call on Jesus if they have not believed in Jesus? The answer is, *they can’t*. How are people going to believe in Jesus if they have never heard of Jesus? The answer is, *they can’t*. How are they going to hear the good news if no one tells them the good news? The answer is, *they won’t*.

Paul’s line of thinking is clear and straightforward. If no one is *sent* to these people, then there will be no one to preach the good news. If no one *preaches* to these people, then they will not hear the good news. If these people do not *hear* the good news, then they cannot believe. And if they do not *believe*, then they cannot be saved.

ONE WAY TO BE SAVED

In sum, Paul tells us that the people need to hear and believe the gospel in order to be saved. *There is no other means of salvation*. By the way, this is consistent with Peter’s testimony. He says, “And there is salvation in no one

else, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Notice he doesn’t merely say that there is no other *savior*. He says there is no other *name*. His name – Jesus’ identity – seems necessary. That’s why Peter tells Cornelius, “Everyone who believes *in him* receives forgiveness of sins *through his name*” (Acts 10:43).

The story of Cornelius should be an encouragement to us because it shows the lengths to which God will go to make sure people seeking after God will hear the gospel so that they can be saved. God had given Cornelius *some* light – through creation and conscience – but this was *not* enough light to save him. Since Cornelius responded positively to the light he was given, God gave him *more* light – specifically, the gospel.

INCLUSIVISM IS A BAD IDEA

Ideas have consequences. And bad ideas have victims.

Inclusivism is a bad idea because it gives people – like Shapiro – false hope that they can have eternal life *without coming to Jesus on His terms*. Those who refuse to come to Jesus will not receive life (John 5:40). Jesus explicitly states, “I told you that you would die in your sins, *for unless you believe that I am he* you will die in your sins” (John 8:24).


Bishop Barron is wrong. Shapiro *cannot* be saved by “following the commandments of the Law sincerely.” Paul addresses this very thing in his letter to the Galatians. He says,

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in

order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal. 2:16).

Shapiro’s good works will never be enough. Only those who put their trust in Christ will receive eternal life.

The answer to Shapiro’s question isn’t hard. In fact, the apostle Paul answers the question “*What must I do to be saved?*” in a single sentence.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). 

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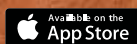
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The *Ruellia ciliatiflora* seedpod's prong protrusions serve to launch the Frisbee-like seeds with backspin.

by Margaret Helder

PLANTS THAT PACK AN EXPLOSIVE PUNCH!

Sometimes when my husband and I sit quietly in our house, maybe reading, or drinking coffee, we hear a barely audible “pop” followed by a tiny clattering sound of something hitting the floor.

MIND-BLOWING MECHANISMS

The “something” are seeds, each about two millimeters wide, landing up to a meter away from the plant that has launched them. This happens a lot in our house because we started with two such plants about 15 or 20 years ago, and now we have many of these *Euphorbia leuconeura* or “Madagascar Jewels.” Their seeds often land in their own pot

or in the pots of other plants where they happily germinate.

While the plant is threatened because of habitat loss in its native Madagascar, that is not so at our house! It grows well, up to six feet tall in areas that are not too bright. The angular stem looks something like a cactus, as do some other *Euphorbias*, and it contains a mildly toxic milky fluid which has never been a problem to us, our grandchildren or our pets as everybody “leaves” the plant alone.

The flowers of *Euphorbias* are all very small – the Madagascar Jewel has just tiny white flower clusters. The plant’s claim to fame, apart from its attractive

and unusual appearance, is definitely its habit of explosively dispersing its seed far and wide.

Flowering plants have been designed with various interesting seed dispersal mechanisms, everything from prickly burrs that ride along on passersby, to wings or parachutes attached to seeds to enable them to ride along on wind currents. Some seeds are even dispersed from the intestines of animals that ate the fruits. However the device of explosively ejecting seeds requires some fancier engineering than many seed dispersal mechanisms.

TOO FAST FOR THE NAKED EYE TO TRACK

One plant that has recently attracted attention in this regard is *Ruellia ciliatiflora* or “hairy-flower wild petunia.” *Ruellia* is no relation of real petunias. Rather hairy-flower wild petunia is classified in the family Acanthaceae, made up of mostly tropical herbs, shrubs and vines. The flowers in this family all develop into a two-celled fruit capsule that ejects seeds more or less explosively. *Ruellia* (named after a 16th century French botanist Jean Ruelle) may be toxic and it may be used in some medicinal applications, but, once again, its real claim to fame is the highly explosive ejection of its seeds from the fruit capsule.

Ruellia’s specialized seed dispersal has attracted the attention of a team of scientists¹ with fancy high-speed cameras. Their research consisted of setting up the camera near suitable plants and filming the release of the seed. They then analyzed the recording frame by frame, and from there they calculated velocities and other details. And what interesting details they found!

The seeds of the hairy-flower wild petunia are disk-shaped, about 2.5 mm in diameter and almost 0.5 mm thick. They are ejected from the fruit capsule at speeds of 15 meters/second, or roughly 60 kilometers per hour, faster than any other known natural projectile.

THEY’VE EVEN GOT BACKSPIN!

The plant achieves this extraordinary result by stabilizing the seeds so that they sit vertically in the air like bicycle tires. The disks spin backwards while moving forward on a rising trajectory. (It is their spinning which stabilizes their orientation.) The backspin was measured at an extraordinary 1660 cycles per second. The fact that the seeds spin backward means that drag on the surface is greatly reduced. The reduced drag means that the energy required to disperse the seeds is reduced by a factor of five. Thus the seeds are shot up to seven meters or 23 feet from the small low-lying parent plant.

These features of the hairy-flower



This picture depicts the travel of *Ruellia ciliatiflora* seeds after their seedpod explodes. In approximately a tenth of a second, the seeds travel the full 5 feet of the picture frame, moving at approximately 60 kilometers an hour. The dots up top are the seeds, while the stick-like figures lower down are the seed pods. To aid visibility, the seeds have been depicted at 3 times their regular size.

Picture is adapted from a video titled “Supplementary Video S2 from Gyroscopic stabilization minimizes drag on *Ruellia ciliatiflora* seeds” created by Eric S. Cooper, Molly A. Mosher, Carolyn M. Cross, and Dwight L. Whitaker and used under a Creative Commons 4.0 International license

wild petunia rightly amaze us when we consider where the energy comes from. Obviously, the energy comes from the design of the fruit capsule. It has to be so constructed that the capsule will open suddenly. This means that the connecting region between the two halves of the fruit develops a much weakened zone and a strong hinge to pull the halves apart quickly. Also the seeds have to be so shaped that they will spin and so loosely connected to their growth center in the fruit that they will be shot out spinning backward but moving forward. Any mechanical engineer will admit that the engineering of this system requires a lot of fine tuning in order to achieve these results. Such a fancy system did not just develop spontaneously (by chance) but exhibits the work of a supremely intelligent Designer. **RP**

END NOTE

¹ Eric S. Cooper, Molly A. Mosher, Carolyn M. Cross, and Dwight L. Whitaker. (2018). Gyroscopic stabilization minimizes drag on *Ruellia ciliatifolia* seeds. *Journal of the Royal Society Interface* 15 #140.

For more on exploding plants see “Imagine that” (create.ab.ca/imagine-that) from the October 2005 issue of “Creation Science Dialogue” at Create.ab.ca. That article is about the dispersal of pollen grains from Bunchberry (Cornus canadensis) which has similar amazing properties – it is because of this plant that I first learned what a French implement of war, the trebuchet, was!

HOW THE RULING PRINCES OF LIECHTENSTEIN DEFEATED THE ABORTION ACTIVISTS

by Jonathon Van Maren

As our rental car groaned up the steep mountain slope, I strained to see the landmark we were hunting for: Vaduz Castle, the permanent residence of the ruling princes of Liechtenstein. As we rounded a bend, it suddenly loomed up before us, a massive, sturdy structure, built to last centuries and the inevitable evils that history would bring. The ancient keep surged skyward, topped by a steeple.

First built in the 12th century, it was buttressed by an enormous circular tower topped by battlements and a more recently constructed roof. The first mention of this fortress was in

documents in 1322, and it was partially destroyed in 1499 during the Swabian War. Since 1938, however, the 130-room castle has been closed to the public, and only the royals walk its halls.

A COUNTRY LIKE FEW OTHERS

Liechtenstein, a tiny German-speaking country landlocked between Switzerland and Austria, is both the world's sixth smallest country and one of the wealthiest, a constitutional monarchy with one of the highest standards of living in Europe. The small city of Vaduz, which is nestled in a valley between gorgeous blue

Alpine peaks capped with pure white snow, serves as the capital. When we arrived at the castle, we gazed down at the valley, a patchwork of sunlight and shadow cast by the billowing white clouds passing overhead. The fields were gleaming green, and the brown trees were just about to bud. ("The trees are coming into leaf/like something almost being said," as Philip Larkin once put it.) A handful of trees near the base of the castle were just beginning to bashfully display their white blossoms.

Driving from a meeting with ProLife Europe in Austria and heading to another with Human Life International in Switzerland, stopping in Liechtenstein had been one of my goals. Very few pro-life activists know that the tiny nation of Liechtenstein also prohibits abortion – it is illegal in almost all circumstances, with the possibility of prison terms for those who decide to perform them. To get abortions, women must drive, in total secrecy, to either Austria or Switzerland. Perhaps it is Liechtenstein's size – 160 square kilometers with a population of only 36,000 people – but abortion activists rarely seem to bother mentioning this pro-life country.

ATTACKED BUT UNBOWED

Perhaps that is because the royal residents of Vaduz Castle have thus far



fended off all attempts to bring feticide to their nation. In 2012, Hereditary Prince Alois, a devout Roman Catholic, responded to a proposed referendum on abortion several weeks before it was scheduled to be held by announcing that he would exercise his royal prerogative to veto any change in law that relaxed restrictions on abortion. The referendum would have legalized abortion up until 12 weeks, as well as in cases of fetal deformity. Abortion activists, who had been confident that a referendum could produce the result they desired, were furious – it was the prince's intervention, they claimed, which resulted in a vote of 51.5% to 48.5% to keep abortion illegal.

In response to the prince's stand for the pre-born children of Liechtenstein, abortion activists launched a second campaign to target the 900-year-old dynasty, which has ruled the country ever since the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. In 2012, a citizen's initiative to curtail the power of the ruling princes was

put forward, proposing that their power to veto future referendums be limited or removed. Prince Alois was unapologetic, noting through his spokeswoman Silvia Hassler-De Vos that his statement had been a "clear signal that abortion isn't an acceptable solution for an unwanted pregnancy." If the citizens of Liechtenstein voted to limit his royal veto, he said, he would step down from his royal duties entirely.

The follow-up campaign resulted in a second bruising defeat for abortion activists. A full 76% of Liechtensteiners voted to uphold the prince's right to a royal veto, thus reaffirming the previous referendum on abortion yet again and confirming that the status quo banning abortion in their country would remain in place. The Royal Family had stood firm in defense of the smallest and weakest citizens of their tiny country, and they had prevailed. In fact, they had prevailed so totally that the end result of the campaign by abortion activists had actually been a rousing endorsement of their right to veto any attempts to

legalize abortion by a huge majority of Liechtensteiners.

AN EXAMPLE TO THE WORLD

The story of Liechtenstein's royal princes and its pro-life laws is always one I have found very encouraging. I wonder how much bloodshed could have been prevented across the Western world if more courageous and principled leaders had simply stood up when the mob began baying for blood and firmly, with the strength of faith and conviction, told them no – and exercised the full extent of their power and authority to protect those they were obligated by oath to defend. The royal princes of Liechtenstein have shown the world what genuine leadership looks like, and I hope that their story will enter the annals of pro-life heroism. RP

Jonathon Van Maren is the author of "The Culture War" and blogs at theBridgehead.ca where this post first appeared. It is reprinted here with permission.

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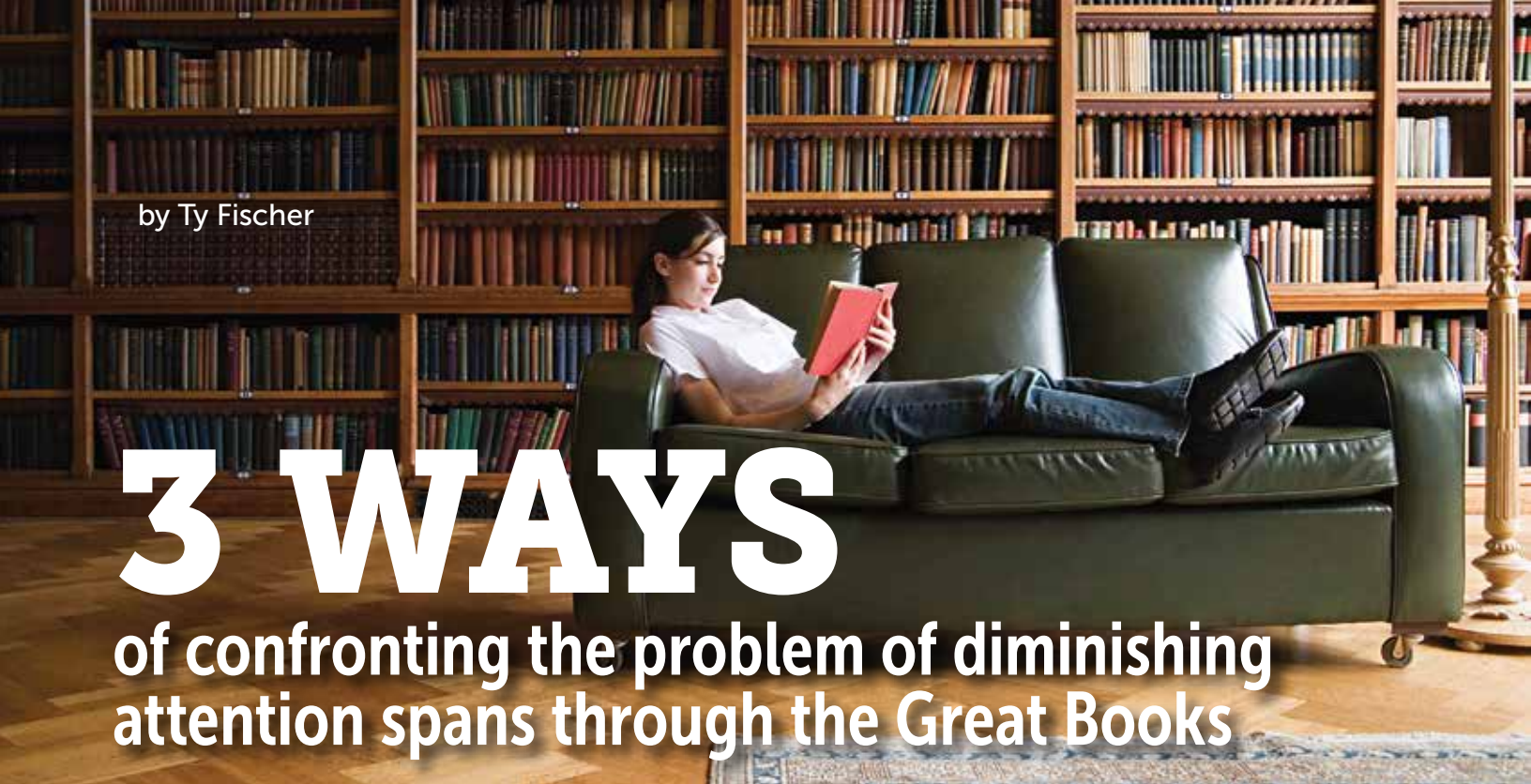


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A woman with dark hair is sitting on a green leather sofa in a library, reading a red book. She is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans. The library has tall wooden bookshelves filled with books in the background.

by Ty Fischer

3 WAYS

of confronting the problem of diminishing attention spans through the Great Books

How many books do you finish? How many blog posts do you really read? I am guessing that you, like me, are busy and are tempted to skim just about everything. In a world of touch screens and endless entertainment, our attention spans atrophy into something that might look like childishness to our ancestors. But how can we build up the attention spans that we need for sustained thought in the modern age.

Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay said that the audience that they contemplated while writing their masterful defense of the new US Constitution in *The Federalist Papers* was a farmer in Upstate New York. In our day, it seems that most every time a politician opens his mouth, we find that he could not match that 19th century dirt farmer.

Our attention spans are diminished and might, it seems, be extinguished completely, but I want to recommend a course of treatment. It is simple: read the Great Books [editor's note: "Great Books" is a term for the classics of Western Literature – for more see the footnote below*].

Here are three ways reading these books helps us confront the problem of diminishing attention spans.

1. THE GREAT BOOKS ARE A MIRROR THAT HELPS US SEE THE PROBLEM

The Great Books hold up a mirror that helps us see the extent of the problem (which is the diminishment of our capacity for sustained thought). Reading the Great Books is challenging. The first book I teach to our seniors each year is Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It is a challenge! Deep concepts, archaic language, demanding expectations (because Milton expects that you have read the other Great Books written before his – particularly the Bible).

This is difficult, but we need to understand one powerful fact: people in every generation prior to ours have mastered these books because they are so important! What is the mirror saying about our generation?

2. THE GREAT BOOKS REWARD SUSTAINED CONTEMPLATION

The Great Books reward sustained contemplation where the reading of "chapters" is necessary. Have you ever read a page or two, or a paragraph or two, of a book only to get distracted? You retain almost nothing.

Emily and I had an embarrassing situation like this early in our marriage. We decided to read *The Lord of the Rings* together. So far, so good, right? Wrong! We decided that we would read it to each other when we went to bed. Our first daughter, Maddy, had just arrived. I was working hard at the school. We were both exhausted. It did not go well. We actually dreaded the elf poetry and songs that Tolkien inserts. That knocked us out every time. Because of the brokenness of the reading, we missed so much.

The Great Books reward sustained concentration and punish flighty drifting. Each year when I teach *Paradise Lost*, I tell the students that reading this book is like weightlifting. Reading it grows you. You leave it stronger than you began, but unless you devote yourself to reading a section, book, canto, or chapter your reward is diminished. This means that these books challenge their reader to make them a priority. They grow our attention span and by this they grow us toward fuller humanity.


Very few people do things just because they are difficult – and most of those people need help. Hard things should be hard for a reason. They should eventually result in happiness or the hope of happiness. The Great Books can be challenging, but they reward those who discipline both their tastes and abilities. The experience of the Great Books makes everything else better and sweeter. Every time I am watching a movie where a husband stands between his wife and evil men, my mind starts drifting off to Odysseus stringing the bow and restoring order to Ithaca. Your life is richer for reading *The Odyssey*. So, the discipline that reading the Great Books rewards actually makes life sweeter and better.

3. THE GREAT BOOKS MEASURE US

The Great Books measure us. We need to grow up to read them. We need to do this thoughtfully and with a sense of the frame of our students, but we should celebrate with them when they become men and women who complete the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid* or *Moby Dick*. As they accomplish this, they become a member of a community that stretches back in time to the beginnings of this civilization. They begin to love the same words that their grandparents and great-great-great (etc.) grandparents loved. Of course, the Scriptures are at the core of this “way of viewing the world.” In them, we find the stories that encompass our lives.

A number of years ago, Ken Myers of Mars Hill Audio was speaking at a conference and he made this point in a profound way talking about music, he said, “Tradition is something we have to live up to.” His point is mine. The great music of the past,

measures us. It is not that we cannot add to it, but to add to it, we should first master it. Mastering it prepares us to find our own voice and to find that we have a voice worth heeding. The Great Books are a tradition like this. We speak best when we are disciplined enough to master the tradition.

My hope is that you kept reading this post and that, hopefully, this post will encourage you set aside some time to devote yourself to reading the Great Books. Start by doing the reading. It will stretch you and grow you, but you will find yourself stronger and wiser as you devote yourself to this worthy task. 

Ty Fischer's article first appeared on the Veritas Press blog (VeritasPress.com) and is reprinted here with permission. Veritas Press has a number of homeschooling resources built around a Great Books curriculum.

WHAT ARE THE “GREAT BOOKS”?

by Jon Dykstra

There is no one list of “Great Books,” but the term is meant to describe a compilation of classics from Western Literature. Some such lists are very long, topping hundreds of books, while others limit themselves to as little as 50 titles. But the idea behind all of them is that these are foundational books – read these and you will have a better understanding of some of the key ideas shaping the world today.

A Christian Great Books list will look different than a non-Christian list, though a Christian list should contain non-Christian books. These are supposed to be influential books, so placement is as much or more about a book’s impact as it is about its genuine insight, so infamous titles like *The Communist Manifesto*, or Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, could still show up on a Christian list. To give a better idea of what exactly might be on such a list, here is an example:

1. *The Unaborted Socrates* by Peter Kreeft
2. *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis
3. *Chosen by God* by R.C. Sproul
4. *Macbeth* by Shakespeare
5. *Beowulf*
6. *The Pilgrim’s Progress* by John Bunyan
7. *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom
8. *The Heidelberg Catechism*
9. *Orthodoxy* by G.K. Chesterton
10. *Time Will Run Back* by Henry Hazlitt
11. *The Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
12. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
13. *Divine Comedy* by Dante
14. *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien
15. *Animal Farm* by George Orwell
16. *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels
17. *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen
18. *Christianity and Liberalism* by John Gresham Machen
19. *Gulliver’s Travels* by Jonathan Swift
20. *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson
21. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
22. *Art and the Bible* by Francis Schaeffer
23. *Desiring God* by John Piper
24. *Aesop’s Fables* by, well, Aesop
25. *Death on the Nile* by Agatha Christie
26. *City of God* by Augustine
27. *Here I Stand* by Roland Bainton
28. *The Prince* by Machiavelli
29. *1984* by George Orwell
30. *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* by Verne
31. *95 Theses* by Martin Luther
32. *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer
33. *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky
34. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain
35. *The Republic* by Plato
36. *The Koran* by Mohammad
37. *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith
38. *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
39. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
40. *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* by Solzhenitsyn
41. *The Odyssey* by Homer
42. *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe
43. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*
44. *Competent to Counsel* by Jay Adams
45. *Till We Have Faces* by C.S. Lewis
46. *John Adams* by David McCullough
47. *Hamlet* by Shakespeare
48. *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift
49. *Ivanhoe* by Walter Scott
50. *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin



EVOLUTION AS A GRAVEDIGGER

Theistic evolution undermines God's Truth,
but it's only continuing what
Old Earth Creationism began

by John Byl

Christian philosopher J.P. Moreland has recently published an excellent article, "Theistic evolution, Christian Knowledge and Culture's Plausibility Structure," in the *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* (Volume 2, Issue 1:1-18, 2017). In it he reflects on the broader cultural implications of adopting theistic evolution as a means to integrate Christianity and science.

KNOWLEDGE AND PLAUSIBILITY STRUCTURES

Dr. Moreland notes that our Western society is highly *empirical*. Our culture presumes that valid knowledge can be acquired only through science (*scientism*), whereas non-empirical claims concerning values, ethics, spirits, and the like, are merely personal opinions (*cultural relativism*).

Today, the central issue is not whether Christianity is true, but whether it can be known to be true: Does Christianity have a valid source of knowledge? Knowledge is defined by Dr. Moreland as "*true belief based on adequate grounds*."

He contends:

The deepest issue facing the church today is this: Are its main creeds and central teachings items of knowledge or mere matters of blind faith – privatized personal beliefs or issues of feeling to be accepted or set aside according to the whim of individual or cultural pressures? Do these teachings have cognitive and behavioral authority that set a worldview framework for approaching science, art, ethics – indeed, all of life?

Or are cognitive and behavioral authority set by what scientists, evolutionary biologists, or the members of BioLogos say? Are the church's doctrines determined by what Gallup polls tell us is embraced by cultural and intellectual elites? Do we turn to these sources and set aside or revise two thousand years of Christian thinking and doctrinal/creedal expressions in order to make Christian teaching acceptable to the neuroscience department at UCLA or the paleontologists at Cambridge?

The question of whether or not Christianity provides its followers with a range of knowledge is no small matter. It is a question of authority

for life and death, and lay brothers and sisters are watching Christian thinkers and leaders to see how we approach this matter. And, in my view, as theistic evolutionists continue to revise the Bible over and over again, they inexorably give off a message about knowledge: science gives us hard knowledge based on evidence and with which we can be confident, and while theology and biblical teaching do not give us knowledge, they provide personal meaning and values for those with the faith to embrace them.

Every culture, Dr. Moreland writes, has a *plausibility structure* – a set of background assumptions that determines what ideas people are willing to entertain as possibly true. Our current Western cultural plausibility structure elevates science, and bans Christianity from serious consideration. Such cultural bias makes effective evangelization difficult.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION AS A GRAVEDIGGER

Dr. Moreland contends that the acceptance of theistic evolution by many

Christians has greatly contributed to the undermining of Christianity as a source of knowledge:

In my view, there are certain contemporary currents of thought that risk undercutting Christianity as a source of knowledge, and I shall argue that by its very nature, theistic evolution is the prime culprit. It is one of the church's leading gravediggers...

The term "gravedigger" (from Os Guinness's 1983 book *The Gravedigger File*) refers to Christians who, though well-intended, adopt views that eventually undermine the church.

Dr. Moreland raises three concerns:

1. Theistic evolution reinforces scientism. It exemplifies the notion that, when science and the Bible clash, we revise the Bible, not science, since scientific truth claims exhibit solid knowledge based on facts.
2. Such willingness to revise Biblical interpretations held for 2000 years implies that Biblical teaching is tentative.
3. The most pervasive form of theistic evolution holds that God's involvement in evolution is undetectable, so that it is in practice indistinguishable from naturalistic evolution. Most theistic evolutionists are opposed to Intelligent Design, the notion that God's hand can readily be discerned in nature.

According to Dr. Moreland:

Theistic evolution is intellectual pacifism that lulls people to sleep while the barbarians are at the gates. In my experience, theistic evolutionists are usually trying to create a safe truce with science so Christians can be left alone to practice their privatized religion while retaining the respect of the dominant intellectual culture.

...Sometimes theistic evolutionists claim that by embracing evolution, they are actually contributing to the plausibility of Christianity by removing an unnecessary stumbling

Theistic evolution is intellectual pacifism that lulls people to sleep while the barbarians are at the gates.

block – the rejection of evolution – before one can be a well-informed Christian. In my experience, nothing could be further from the truth. While there are exceptions, my experience with theistic evolutionists is that they have a weak faith, do not see many answers to prayer, and lack a vibrant, attractive Christian life. Ideas have consequences, and if one knows he had to revise the early chapters of Genesis, it will weaken his confidence in the rest of the Bible...After all, if we have to provide naturalistic revisions of the Bible over and over again, why take the yet-to-be-revised portions of scripture seriously? This approach significantly weakens the cognitive authority of the Bible as a source of knowledge of reality...

Given scientism, theistic evolution greases the skids towards placing non-scientific claims in a privatized upper story in which their factual, cognitive status is undermined...

Dr. Moreland expresses particular concern about the readiness of some Christian scholars to abandon belief in the historical reality of Adam and Eve. Given our culture's current plausibility structure, this contributes to the marginalization of Christian teaching. He comments:

If I am right about the broader issues, then the rejection of an historical Adam and Eve has far more troubling implications than those that surface in trying to reinterpret certain biblical texts. The very status of biblical, theological and ethical teachings as knowledge is at stake in the current cultural milieu as is the church's cognitive marginalization to a place outside the culture's plausibility structure. Those who reject a historical

Adam and Eve inadvertently harm the church by becoming its gravedigger.

Finally, Dr. Moreland notes that evolution entails that we are purely physical beings, and that an immaterial soul is no longer considered plausible within our modern culture. He deplores the fact that a number of Christian philosophers have adopted a *physicalist* view of humans.

RESPONDING TO CULTURAL CHALLENGES

How should Christians respond to our culture, with its anti-Christian plausibility structure?

Dr. Moreland urges that we should not cave in to the prevailing contemporary currents of ideas. Instead, Christians should hold their ground, "*eventually winning the argument due to hard-hitting scholarship and confidence in the Bible*":

Accordingly, it is of crucial importance that we promote the central teachings of Christianity in general as a body of knowledge and not as a set of faith-practices to be accepted on the basis of mere belief or a shared narrative alone. To fail at this point is to risk being marginalized and disregarded as those promoting a privatized set of feelings or desires that fall short of knowledge...

I want to win people to Christ and to "*bring down strongholds*" that undermine knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:3-5), to penetrate culture with a Christian worldview and to undermine its plausibility structure which, as things stand now, does not include objective theological claims.

He stresses the importance of apologetics, especially scientific



"Old Earth Creationism.... exemplifies the notion that, when science and the Bible clash, we revise the Bible, not science..."

apologetics, such as is done by the Intelligent Design movement (ID). The church should seek ways, such as a scientific critique of naturalist evolution, that may help to modify a person's plausibility structure so as to create space in which Christianity can be seriously entertained.

How should conflicts with science be handled? Dr. Moreland advises that we should not be hasty to revise Scripture. Rather:

No, we should be patient, acknowledge the problem, and press into service Christian intellectuals who are highly qualified academically, have respect for the fact that scripture presents us with knowledge (not just truth to be accepted by blind faith), and who want to work to preserve the traditional interpretation of scripture and avoid revisionism. These intellectuals should be given the chance to develop rigorous models that preserve historical Christian teaching, unless, in those rare cases, our interpretation of scripture has been wrong. These intellectuals are heroes because they value loyalty to historic understandings of scripture over the

desire to fit in with what scientists are currently claiming. The Intelligent Design movement is just such a set of intellectuals...

Rather than tucking their tails between their legs at the first sign of a conflict between the Bible and science, and standing ready (even eager) to let the scientists tell them what they must revise, the members of the ID movement have the intellectual courage and confidence in biblical teaching not to back down. Rather, ID advocates "deconstruct the pretentiousness" of truth-claims that go against biblical assertions that are properly interpreted (and they don't grab for an interpretation that, all by itself, gives in to the other side of the conflict.) And they don't make excuses for the Bible; they advance arguments in its support.

DIGGING DEEPER

There is much in this article that I can heartily endorse. I fully concur with Dr. Moreland that theistic evolutionists help dig the church's grave by promoting modern culture's plausibility structure, which has no place for Biblical knowledge. Allowing science

to change our views on Adam and Eve is certainly a prime example of this danger. Further, it is commendable that the Intelligent Design movement exposes the weaknesses of naturalist evolution, and seeks to show that nature exhibits many marks of an Intelligent Designer.

Yet, in stressing scientific argumentation, and rarely referring to Scripture, the ID movement itself may be contributing to scientism. Moreover, many proponents of ID do not consistently exhibit great confidence in the Bible as a source of knowledge. For example, most of them-- including Dr. Moreland--accept an ancient age for the earth, as given by mainstream geology. This obliges them to revise the traditional reading of Genesis 1-11, regarding such things as the creation days, the physical extent of Adam's Fall, Noah's Flood, the genealogies of Gen. 5 & 11, etc. For more discussion on this issue, see my article: "The Cost of an Old Earth: Is it Worth it?"

Indeed, the plausibility structure reigning in most of Christian academia is such that it scorns those rare Christian academics who still promote traditional Biblical history.

Old Earth Creationism is subject to the same concerns that Dr. Moreland raises regarding theistic evolution, namely:

1. It reinforces scientism. It exemplifies the notion that, when science and the Bible clash, we revise the Bible, not science, since scientific truth claims exhibit solid knowledge based on facts.
2. Such willingness to revise Biblical interpretations held for 2000 years implies that Biblical teaching is tentative.

Moreover, the Biblical Adam, though an essential part of traditional Biblical history, becomes blatantly implausible when thrust into the setting of mainstream geology and paleontology, which traces modern humans back at least 300,000 years, with much earlier ancestors, exhibiting suffering and death from the beginning, etc.

Consequently, a plausibility structure

Theistic evolutionists are merely deepening the grave already substantially dug by Old Earth creationists.

that includes mainstream geology, and correspondingly downplays Biblical ancient history, paves the way for plausibility structures that exclude further Biblical teachings, such as the historical Adam.

I have a high regard for Dr. Moreland. He has written much worthwhile material, and made important contributions to Christian scholarship. Nevertheless, I believe that he has been inconsistent in upholding his own standards, thereby inadvertently contributing to grave digging. Theistic

evolutionists are merely deepening the grave already substantially dug by Old Earth creationists.

In his article Dr. Moreland cautions:

It should be clear that naturalism is not consistent with biblical Christianity. If that's true, then the church should do all it can to undermine the worldview of naturalism and to promote, among other things, the cognitive, alethic nature of theology, biblical teaching and ethics. This means that when

Christians consider adopting certain views widely accepted in the culture, they must factor into their consideration whether or not such adoption would enhance naturalism's hegemony and help dig the church's own grave by contributing to a hostile, undermining plausibility structure.

Wise advice! Perhaps Dr. Moreland should heed it by reconsidering his own plausibility structure. RP

This article first appeared as an Oct. 24, 2009 post on Dr. John Byl's blog Bylogos.blogspot.com and is reprinted here with permission. Dr. John Byl is a Professor emeritus for Trinity Western University, and the author of "God and Cosmos: A Christian View of Time, Space, and the Universe" and "The Divine Challenge: On Matter, Mind, Math & Meaning."

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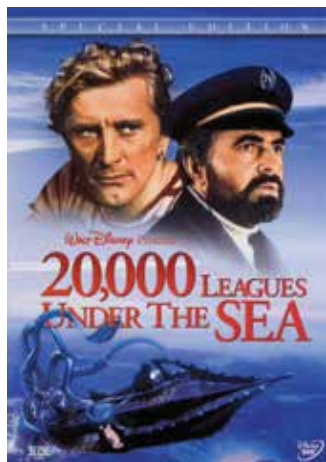
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"It is not good for the man to be
alone; I will make him a helper
suitable for him." Genesis 2:18

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20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

FAMILY / CLASSIC

1954 / 127 MINUTES **RATING 7/10**



In 1868 rumors of a gigantic sea creature are disrupting shipping across the Pacific. The US government asks if oceans expert, Professor Pierre M. Aronnax, and his assistant Conseil, will join a Navy expedition that has the goal of either disproving the creature's existence or, if it is real, killing it. To that end, harpooner Ned Land is also invited along.

But Ned's harpoons are no use against the creature's hide because this is not something made of flesh and bone but of iron and steel! What's been destroying the ships turns out to be a submarine. When the sub destroys the Navy's ship, only these three – the professor, Conseil, and Ned – survive and end up being taken on board.

The only caution I'll share is in regards to the good guys' morality – the three shipwreck survivors don't agree on much, including what they think about the psychotic submarine captain holding them captive. For any kid used to films where right and wrong are easy to distinguish, this will be different, and they'll benefit from mom or dad hitting the pause button to create some time for discussion.

While the pacing is a little calmer than modern fare this is a classic for a reason – it definitely stands the test of time!

THE AMAZING ADVENTURE

DRAMA / FAMILY

1936 / 61 MINUTES **RATING 7/10**



Ernest Bliss is a young man with a lot of inherited money. He has a very nice house, can buy whatever he wants, and never has worry about working.

Yet he's nervous, can't eat, and can't sleep. When he goes to a specialist and is diagnosed with "self-indulgence" Bliss is both offended and intrigued. What's the prescription then? The doctor tells Bliss to earn his own living for a year and then dismisses him with a wave, knowing that this pampered socialite would never follow his advice. But Bliss ends up making the doctor a bet: if Bliss does it, then one year from now he'll expect a handshake and an apology, and if he loses, then he'll give £50,000 for the doctor's downtown charity clinic.

The general plotline is as you might expect: Bliss learns some lessons about just how it can be for a regular Joe, and it isn't too long before he's secretly using his connections and money to help the struggling people who have befriended him. Predictable, but delightful, our whole family enjoyed it. We did have to pause it a few times to answer questions from our 6-year-old who otherwise wouldn't have been able to follow it.

Because the film's copyright wasn't renewed it is available for free viewing, including on ReformedPerspective.ca.

CURIOUS GEORGE: ROYAL MONKEY

ANIMATED / CHILDREN'S

2019 / 86 MINUTES **RATING: 7/10**



In this *Prince and the Pauper* homage, George accidentally switches places with Philippe, the kingdom of Simiana's "royal monkey." While the two could be twins, they couldn't act more different: George is all fun-loving and childish irresponsibility, and Philippe is reliable and downright somber.

This is the fourth Curious George feature film (though there is no number, the events take place right after *Curious George 3*) but it's second only to the original in charm. Even as my kids absolutely loved this latest edition, I would have enjoyed seeing George get himself into a few more tight spots. However, even a relatively calm George is a very fun George, and sure to be enjoyed by the whole family.

Without giving too much away I was amused at the one-sidedness of the lessons learned here. George teaches the royal family to be less uptight, and the man in the yellow hat teaches Philippe to be less uptight too. Was there a lesson for George to learn? If there was, our monkey friend missed it. Oh well. I guess that just means there'll have to be a *Curious George 5*. And I'm looking forward to it.

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OVERCOMER

DRAMA / FAMILY

2019 / 119 MINUTES **RATING: 7/10**



This was going to be John Harrison's year. The high school basketball coach had all his best players returning, ready to make a legitimate run at the championship. But then the local steel manufacturing plant closed and took their 6,000 employees, and most of his players, out of town. So what's a basketball coach to do when he has no team? How about switching to a new sport? But when the school principal convinces John Harrison to give coaching cross country a try, his new team turns out to be just one student, Hannah...and she has asthma.

This setup allows for a generous dollop of humor in this drama, but the best part of this film is more serious. Producers, the Kendrick Brothers, are known for packing messages into their movies, and they do so once again, making this film/sermon about finding our identity, not in our job, spouse, political party allegiance, or what ethnic group we're part of, *but in Who we belong to*. That's a message worth hearing, and they deliver it well.

I'll note a moment or two of explicit Arminianism pop up. More notable is a scene in which Coach Harrison, for the best of intentions, undermines parental authority by going behind a guardian's back. But mom and dad can address this by hitting the pause button to discuss.



RIOT AND THE DANCE: WATER

DOCUMENTARY

2020 / 84 MINUTES **RATING: 8/10**

Biologist Gordon Wilson has produced another beautiful ode to God's creation. *The Riot and the Dance: Water* explores how gloriously the Lord has made life in the lakes, rivers, oceans and ponds of the world. Wilson's narration is at times playful, at times serious, but always joyfully awestruck at what God has made.

"Water is full of death. Water is full of life. It forms another world inside our own....we will enter the liquid world and we will reemerge a little bit changed, with eyes that see this creation differently, with a little more knowledge of the artist who made it all."

Wilson swims with sharks, snorkels with manatees, scubas with alligators, and wades in a slimy swamp, all in the quest to chronicle life underwater. Off the coast of Oahu, he finds green sea turtles, Galapagos and sandbar sharks, moray eels, and spinner dolphins.

Why do spinner dolphins spin as they playfully leap from the water? "Because it's fun. Because it's fantastic. Because it pleases God." Another leaper found off the California coast is the humpback whale, expending tremendous energy to push its massive, 60,000-pound body out of the water in a display of power and joy.

While exalting the beauty of created life, Wilson also explores the horrors of death, which is such a part of our fallen world. Chum salmon by the thousands die as they flail and flop on their journey up freshwater creeks and rivers. A giant water bug captures a much larger frog, pierces its victim's skin with a sharp beak, and literally sucks the life out of its prey (yes, this scene is pretty chilling, and perhaps a bit too graphic for youngsters).

The biologist also muses on what nature will be like in the next life:

"We see that all of creation is going to be redeemed, and some of the greatest threats that we see in the animal kingdom... they are going to be redeemed, and they can be redeemed without becoming tame. I'm not even going to guess what it's going to be like, but it's going to be glorious!"

The camera work is wonderful, the vistas and scenery are inspiring, and Wilson's thoughtful narration brings a sense of wonder and adventure. It is very refreshing to watch a nature documentary without having to ignore secular commentary on evolution and billions of years. We can heartily recommend this film to Christians of all ages... although some might wish to skip the giant water bug scene!

You can rent and stream this online for \$1 US at VidAngel.com.

— MARTY VANDRIEL



MAY 14, 2020

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