

Reformed

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

JULY/AUGUST 2020
Volume 39 Issue No. 5

PERSPECTIVE

CELEBRATING 35+ YEARS



ANGRY?
But I'm not the
type...right?

NOTA
BENE

p. 8

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Reformed PERSPECTIVE

A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

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OUR KIDS ONLINE

...how to keep them safe

DOCUMENTARY
88 MINUTES / 2020
RATING: 8/10

reviewed by Jon Dykstra

Our Kids Online begins with a wake-up call: kids aren't just seeing graphic, dehumanizing pornography online, many are now imitating these acts, and even filming themselves at it.

That got my attention. It also got me wanting to turn the documentary off right there. It's too much, too dark, and I'd really rather not hear about it. The producers must have anticipated that feeling because right then, flashing across the screen, they shared the famous challenge, commonly attributed to Edmund Burke:

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

As one of the filmmakers noted, "Just hoping our kids won't be exposed is not an option....It's not a case of *if* they see it; it's a case of *when*."

So it was time to man up, keep watching, and trust that the promise in the documentary's title – that I was going to learn how to keep my kids safe – would be born out. And by film's end, I was glad I stuck with it.

A PARENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Filmmakers Rob and Zareen Cope are a couple of New Zealander parents who didn't want to tackle this topic either. But then their kids started pressuring them for more access to the Internet. And because they wanted to keep them safe, the Copes started investigating what the online dangers were, and what could be done about them. That quickly left them feeling overwhelmed.

Then they started doing what documentarians do: as Zareen explains it: "We got in touch with some of the

world's leading experts in this field and we hit the road." As we, the viewers, follow along, we get to listen in on some pretty insightful, sometimes devastating, and always eye-opening conversations.

PORN IS DIFFERENT TODAY

Many parents don't know what pornography is today: it isn't just some *Playboy*-type pictures. As Russ Tuttle, from the *Stop Trafficking Project*, explains, one six-year-old kid's very first exposure to porn was a *video*, and on it a woman was being hurt. Choking, and much worse, are becoming a "normalized" types of sexual violence presented in countless videos. That's what six-year-olds can stumble across now.

The Copes sum up another big difference as The Big 3 A's of *accessibility*, *anonymity*, and *affordability*. Whereas pornography in the past was limited to magazines sold in corner stores, the advent of the iPhone in 2007 means that kids now have 24/7 access on their phones and tablets and even gaming consoles, from the privacy of their own bedroom, and for free. Pornography has always been a problem, but it's these 3As that have made it the epidemic that it is today.

Another problem actually involves how wonderful and helpful the Internet can be. As Rob Cope puts it:

"We've taught an entire generation to just jump online when one has a question. It's brilliant. But what happens when their curiosity about bugs fully blooms into the curiosity about sex, and they type in 'sex' into Google?"

Consider also that it isn't just *what* our kids might stumble across, but *who* – the thousands of sexual predators online. In one of the film's scariest moments, a mom created two Instagram accounts, one in which she posed as a 15-year-old, and the second as an 11-year-old. Within an hour seven adult males had contacted her.

This scene drove home the point that parents need to know where our

children are when they are online. And for parents who don't feel comfortable monitoring their children's every online move, Russ Tuttle has this response:

"Let's even say you feel like you're invading their privacy. If you don't 'invade their privacy' I promise you a predator will. You choose."

WE SHOULD PLAN FOR OUR KIDS BEING CURIOUS ABOUT SEX

As another of the experts notes, it is a myth that good kids won't go looking for porn. Good kids are curious too. And then there is the added peer pressure we all remember of wanting to know what others know. The result? One statistic outlines the extent of the problem: public school officials in New Zealand have discovered that their country's 800,000 students are making more than 300,000 porn-related searches at school each month!

This is shocking, but the point is repeatedly made that this should also be expected. Parents who think that just because they have "good kids" they'll be immune from pornography have forgotten what it was like to be a kid. Rob Cope notes:

"Boys' testosterone levels skyrocket between 900% and 1,000% from the ages of 10 to 14 right when... professionals around the globe are seeing a massive increase in [sexual] assault. It's the worst possible time to give them unfiltered access to the Internet. And it is the exact time that we do."

Boys' testosterone levels skyrocket between 900% and 1,000% from the ages of 10 to 14...

Todd Olson, of the pornography addiction recovery network Lifestar, presents the problem another way:

"The prefrontal cortex is our brake system....The last part of our brain to develop is our prefrontal cortex so [until it does] mom and dad are their prefrontal cortex: *no you can't do that.*"

Pornography is a far bigger problem than what parents faced when we were kids, and our children desperately need our help.

PROTECTION

So what can parents do? The Copes list "four main ways to keep our kids safer online" and it is worth noting they say *safer* rather than *safe*. Not only do we want to do what we can to protect them from exposure, we need to equip them with what to do when it inevitably happens. The Copes encourage parents to:

- 1) Educate ourselves, to be able to address these threats head on
- 2) Educate our kids, to be able to deal with exposure
- 3) Put filters and monitoring apps into effect
- 4) Be aware of what our children are doing online

To put it another way, we need to be "learning, talking, updating technology, and staying involved."

1. Educating ourselves

One suggestion they offer for how parents can get educated is the website ProtectYoungMinds.org. Others that could be listed include the Christian organization CovenantEyes.com which, in addition to their monitoring software, offer a fantastic blog, and many free, very helpful e-books. And a specifically Reformed resource (though not free) can be found at SetfreeCourse.com.

2. Educating our kids

Some parents might find it disturbing to think about talking to our kids at 5, or 6, or 7 about pornography. That's what I

So if you're not going to teach your child about sex...they will be educated. You just won't be in charge of it."

was thinking – I mean, can't we just *let kids be kids*?

But as I saw my kids hanging out with children in the neighborhood who had their own phones it became clear I had to get them prepped. As *Protect Young Minds*' Kristen Jensen put it:

"There were a lot of people who were like, 'What, talk to a seven-year-old about pornography?!?' And I'm like, 'Well, 7-year-olds are on the Internet, right? I mean, they are on their devices....Then we have to warn them. Just like you warn a child about running out into the street.'.... It's important to talk to children earlier about sex so that you can give your version. You can teach them your ideals, your values about sex.... Sooner is safer. When you begin a conversation with a young child you are not ruining their innocence. You are simply giving them information that they need to be safe in the world that they live in."

The film recommends a number of books that parents can read with their children to get this conversation going. I'm only familiar with the ones by Jensen – *Good Pictures Bad Pictures jr.* and *Good Pictures Bad Pictures* – which I've used with my kids and recommend as well. Those two books teach a pretty simple, yet vital, concept. Todd Olson, co-founder of the *LifeStar Network*, sums up the lesson this way:

"We've all been trained as kids, *what if I catch on fire?* Stop, drop and roll. We know that, from just being trained on that. What's the stop drop and roll when you see pornography on the screen? Turn off the monitor, run and get mom, dad, and just leave this place, and they'll come and help fix it."

3. Filters and monitoring apps

The two filters they recommend are Safe Surfer and Disney's Circle, both of which are designed for ease of use – even non-techy parents should be able to manage them. For monitoring older children's devices they suggest Bark and Covenant Eyes.

4. Tracking our children

Kids might push back against mom and dad tracking where they go online, but as Todd Olson says, "This is not a trust issue; this is a put your seat belt on issue." It's simply what parents and kids need to do to be safe.

TALKING WITH OTHER PARENTS

We can get monitoring devices and filters for our own homes, but our kids are going to venture outside those doors. What can we do then? Zareen Cope shared that for her younger kids, they would talk to the other parents before arranging play dates.

"...we check in with the parents to find out what filtering and rules they have in place around devices and internet usage. It felt really weird at first but...as parents it's our responsibility to protect our kids regardless of how uncomfortable that may feel. What was awesome was that once we explained...about what we had learned other parents were really receptive to our request to have devices put elsewhere while the play dates took place. A lot of them, like us at the start, had no idea about all these dangers. We know a lot of parents that are now keeping devices out of bedrooms, in a communal area during meal times and while charging."

How about older teens? Their friends

also have phones, and they themselves are growing in ability and knowledge, so if they want to get around any protections you've put in place, they probably can. That's why it is important to keep talking with them. We need to communicate that we are in this together, and that, rather than hide what they are doing from mom and dad, they can turn to us for help. As Solomon describes in Eccl 4:9-12, it is a wonderful thing to have backup:

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.

CAUTIONS

This is not a Christian film – the Copes describe themselves as non-religious – so that limits *Our Kids Online* to being a practical, rather than spiritual examination of pornography's dangers. That also means that the solutions they offer are only of the practical sort – they never deal with pornography as a sin issue, or as the devilish attack that it is.

Still, they get a lot right intuitively, with a key insight being that it is families, rather than schools, that are the key to kids being able to resist pornography's pull.

But they also get a lot wrong. For example, Rob Cope makes light of looking through *Playboys*. While it isn't overtly stated, the Copes also don't have a problem with premarital sex, though they are very worried about the violent sort they have learned is happening these days. They've spotted a problem with what pornography is doing to sex. But they don't understand the solution to bad notions about sex is a better understanding of God's intent for it: to give pleasure certainly, but

in doing so, to bind husband and wife closer together, and to craft new life out of that union. It never really comes out in the film that the reason pornography is so fleeting, so unsatisfactory, is because pornography makes it about pleasure alone, and as such, misses out on the other two purposes.

The final caution is related to the topic matter. The Copes have done a good job of making a documentary about pornography as visually tame as you could ever hope for. But the verbal descriptions are – unfortunately and also necessarily – shocking. This is *not* a film you would watch with your kids.

CONCLUSION

Even in our Reformed circles parents will sometimes leave sex-ed to the school system. But what even the secular Copes understand is that schools can't fill this role; *we* need to protect our children. Steven Shields, cofounder of *Unashamed Unafraid*, spells out the alternative:

“So if you're not going to teach you child about sex, or about sexuality, or about how to treat the opposite gender... they will be educated. You just won't be in charge of it.”

What if you've gotten a late start to it? Maybe you're worried your kids are already looking at pornography and you're scared to even face the possibility. Then it's even more important to get to it. As Russ Tuttle shares:

“Parents tell me this all the time ‘My kid's now 14, 15, 16. I wish I had stated earlier. If I make changes now it's going be World War III.’ Yeah, you're probably right. But historically, World War I was worth fighting. And World War II was worth fighting. But they weren't fought as wars, they were taught as battles. One battle at a time.”

Our Kids Online can be rented online for \$5 US at www.ourkidsonline.info

and is worth every penny for being the eye-opening call-to-arms that it is. But Christians need to build on what's offered here, telling our children not simply what is wrong with pornography's portrayal of sex, but spelling out for them what God's good design for sex entails.

Parents need to step up. May God so enable us! RP



Jon Dykstra can be reached at editor@reformedperspective.ca.

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NOTA BENE

News worth noting
BY JON DYKSTRA

segregated bathroom, that brand new “girls go this way, boys go that way” bathroom, that brand new Hate Space. He is the one who *built* that standing affront to Moscow’s world-famous inclusive values.

And then, when the ad spot shows a young man going into the side *assigned to him by the city of Moscow*, and a young lady going into the side *assigned to her by the city of Moscow*, our mayor calls US out for our lack of inclusiveness. All we did was indicate — in that endearing little way we have — our agreement with the mayor in having built what he built. We are sorry that he feels bad about what *he* did now, but there it is.

In today’s culture wars Christians too often act as if *we’re actually worried God might lose this thing*. That’s why we are so angry and annoyed about what’s going on — we’re afraid. The folks at New Saint Andrews College are showing us what it would look like if we were eager to jump into the fray because we understand — because we are *certain* — that God had already been won. Then, understanding it doesn’t depend on us, we could be fearless and joyful, thankful for an opportunity to contend for the Truth to the glory of our God.

REFORMED COLLEGE AD CAUSES A WONDERFUL FUSS

When the Reformed college, New St. Andrews, in Moscow, Idaho, put out a recruitment ad starring their small town’s newly built washrooms, the local mayor felt the need to officially denounce it. What was so controversial? The unabashed common sense of it all.

The 22-second video conveyed its message via just a few captions.

The visuals were of a student couple walking towards the washroom’s entrance, and then separating so the boy can go to the boy facilities and the girl can go to the girl facilities. The captions then flash across the screen:

“We’re not science majors”

“But we know science”

“Even better than the Supreme Court”

The mayor wanted everyone to know that the ad, touting that there are two distinct genders, didn’t represent their little town. But as local pastor Douglas Wilson noted:

“That bathroom, for those of you who do not live here in Moscow, is *brand, spanking new*. It was built on Mayor’s Lambert’s watch. He was the one who built that brand new



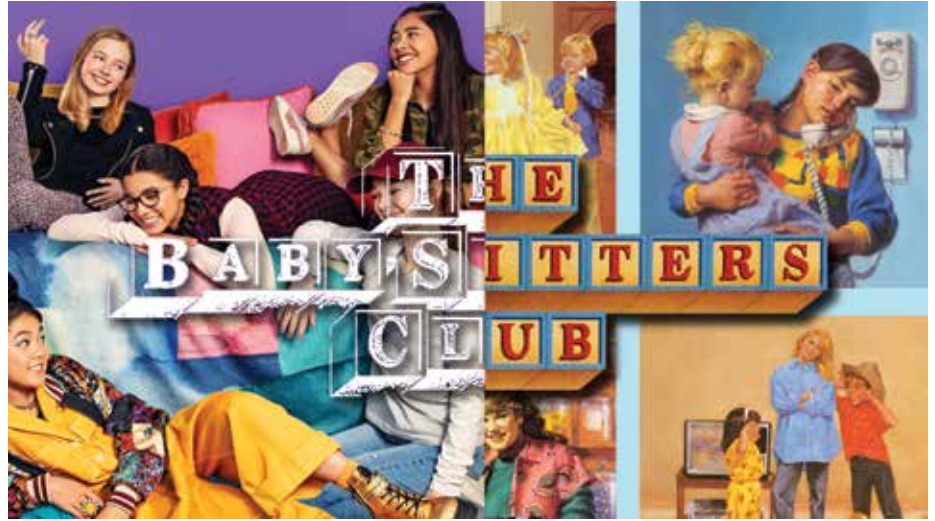
NETFLIX'S *THE BABY-SITTERS CLUB* SELLS TRANSGENDERISM TO A PRETEEN/TEEN AUDIENCE

From 1986 to 2000, the more than 200 *Baby-Sitters Club* titles sold more than 175 million copies to a target audience of teen and pre-teen girls. While God is absent from the series, the books were popular in many Christian households largely because of what else was absent: sex, vulgar language, and violence.

Still, dating, death, and divorce were recurring topics, and always addressed from an entirely secular perspective. That's why this was not a series to overindulge in; it was mostly inoffensive but also mostly empty calories.

In contrast, the Netflix version is poison. The kids are as sweet as ever but now the adults include several gay couplings. There is passing mention made about adult topics like *The Handmaid's Tale*, a menstruation sculptor, painting nude models, and the dating site Tinder. Then, in the fourth episode, Dawn teaches her friend Mary Anne that just like Mary Anne is right-handed and it would be weird to be forced to act left-handed, some boys know they are girls...and it would be just as weird to try to make them act like boys. Mary Anne takes this to heart, and when a doctor and nurse refer to the boy she is babysitting as a he, she asks them to stop this "misgendering" because he wants to be known as a girl.

These exchanges are troubling because of just how compelling



they are. Dawn comes off as super cool – she dresses sharp, and talks with confidence. Mary Anne, in her confrontation with the nurse and doctor, is polite but firm – she displays the sort of courage we would love our kids to exhibit too. So this defense of transgenderism is...winsome.

It's only when we consider what Mary Anne is politely and courageous arguing *for* that we understand just how wicked this is: Mary Anne is encouraging the boy, Bailey, to embrace his delusion, she's pushing him down a path to sterilizing drugs and surgeries that will cut off healthy body parts. Hers is a "love" that leads to disfigurement (Prov. 12:10b). But that's not how the show's target teen audience is going to see it.

The Baby-Sitters Club is only the latest children's book series to get an

LGBT makeover. PBS's 2020 season of *Clifford the Big Red Dog* now has a recurring homosexual couple, and back in 2019, their *Arthur* series featured a homosexual "wedding." *Sesame Street* will feature the cross-dressing Billy Porter wearing his tuxedo dress in an upcoming episode. Amazon's *Pete the Cat* and *Bug Diaries* – both animated features aimed at the very youngest viewers – feature characters with two mommies or two daddies. And on both TV and in the comics, homosexuality has also become a part of the *Riverdale*/*Archie Andrews* universe.

Parents already know the TV doesn't make for a good babysitter. But whereas in the past it was more an utter waste of time, now it's intent on teaching our children that wrong is right.

ONE NBA PLAYER'S VERY DIFFERENT MESSAGE

Now that the NBA has resumed play, we're seeing jerseys that, instead of, or in addition to, the player's name, feature one of several approved "social justice" slogans. Most were uncontroversial.

Among the dozens of approved messages were: Education Reform, Equality, Vote, and Speak Up. The most controversial was probably the Black Lives Matter slogan, though only because the *organization* that goes by that name promotes homosexuality, transgenderism, and abortion. But as simply a *message*, who would oppose it?



A message that did cause some controversy, wasn't approved. Spencer Dinwiddie requested "trillion" which, coupled with his jersey number 26, would have been a reference to the size of the US national debt. Soon after making his request the Brooklyn Nets player tweeted:

"A lot of issues at the moment. I think the fact that the country is 26 (ironically) Trillion dollars in debt is high on the list."

In the end neither the message, nor the player himself made the cut, after Dinwiddie came down with COVID and had to sit out the conclusion to the NBA season.

{ IN A TIDBITS RELEVANT, AND NOT SO, TO CHRISTIAN LIFE } NUTSHELL

BY JON DYKSTRA

KEVIN DEYOUNG (AND JOHN FRAME) ON BIRTH CONTROL...

“You don’t have to be a fertility maximalist to recognize that children are always lauded as a blessing in the Bible. Maybe on another occasion I’ll write about the triumph of birth control in the 20th century and how it happened with little theological reflection from the church, but for now let me at least nudge you in the direction of John Frame:

‘It seems to me that birth control is permissible in many situations, but it bears a high burden of proof. It can be a responsible choice, but is probably overused.’”

A DAD JOKE

Question: What two body parts are able to both run and smell?

Answer: Your nose and your feet!

PENGUINS ARE SUPER COOL!

Did you know Emperor Penguins can fast for up to 115 days (waiting for their eggs to hatch) and can hold their breath for *as long as 18 minutes*?

A CHRISTIAN TAKE ON ART AND RIOTS TOO...

When it comes to all the various subjects taught in our Christian schools, there are a few where the question is more often asked, “How do Christians teach this subject any differently than non-Christians?” While Math might be at the top of that list, Art is another that might follow somewhere soon after. But as Rev. Carl Vermuelen noted in the June issue of *Una Sancta*, there is not only a distinctly Christian way to teach art, but a pressing need to do so. He points readers to Nancy Pearcey’s excellent book, *Saving Leonardo*, where the Pearcey describes how, as the West moved away from its Christian roots, its art changed too. Before, no matter how artists might have differed, all agreed that we had purpose and life had meaning, and that truth was discoverable.

But, “By the time of the impressionists, people no longer hoped to achieve the expression of an ideal universal order ... or universal knowledge.” She documents the development of these ideas through impressionism, Picasso’s cubism and geometric abstractionism, as well as through the pantheism of Van Gogh, and Kandinsky’s art infused with spiritualism. The ideas of these artists and others in their thought-world developed further into secular materialism, as well as pantheism and postmodernism.

The vicious attacks on Western civilization we see today are the direct result of these ideas. Many of the artists she discusses as she describes this revolutionary change in society (Mondriaan, Kandinsky, Monet, Van Gogh, Warhol, Picasso), are included in the list of recommended artists to

be studied in the arts curriculum at our [Christian schools].

That means the art teachers have a wonderful opportunity to show the children from the earliest grades the big narrative that has been shaping our society. What artists like Van Gogh,

Picasso and the Fauvres thought and expressed in their art is what we are seeing in action on the streets today. This is what our children need to understand. Then we won’t want them to paint like Picasso, but we will want them to understand why Picasso painted like he did. In this way, we will help them make sense of the George Floyd riots, the burning police cars and the looting.

WHY PARENTS HAVE TO BE TEACHERS

Our grandparents never had to be taught that homosexuality was wrong, or that there are just two genders. Now those two points are cultural battlegrounds. But are we, as parents, actively engaged in this fight? Two telling quotes, below, illustrate why we need teach our children what God has said on these subjects and more, and not simply assume they understand.

“One generation *believes* something. The next *assumes* it. And the third will *forget* and *deny* it.” – D.A. Carson

“What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace.” – commonly attributed to John Wesley

THE DEVIL IN STOCKING FEET

A friend recently shared an expression his grandfather used to say: in a compromising Christian school “the devil walks around in stocking feet,” while in the public school “he walks around in wooden shoes.” His point? In a seemingly Christian environment errors can be really hard to spot, and it had him more worried about children being sent to the “sort of” Christian school than to the obviously unchristian public school.

Thankfully, many of us have a third option: a solid, uncompromising, Christian school.

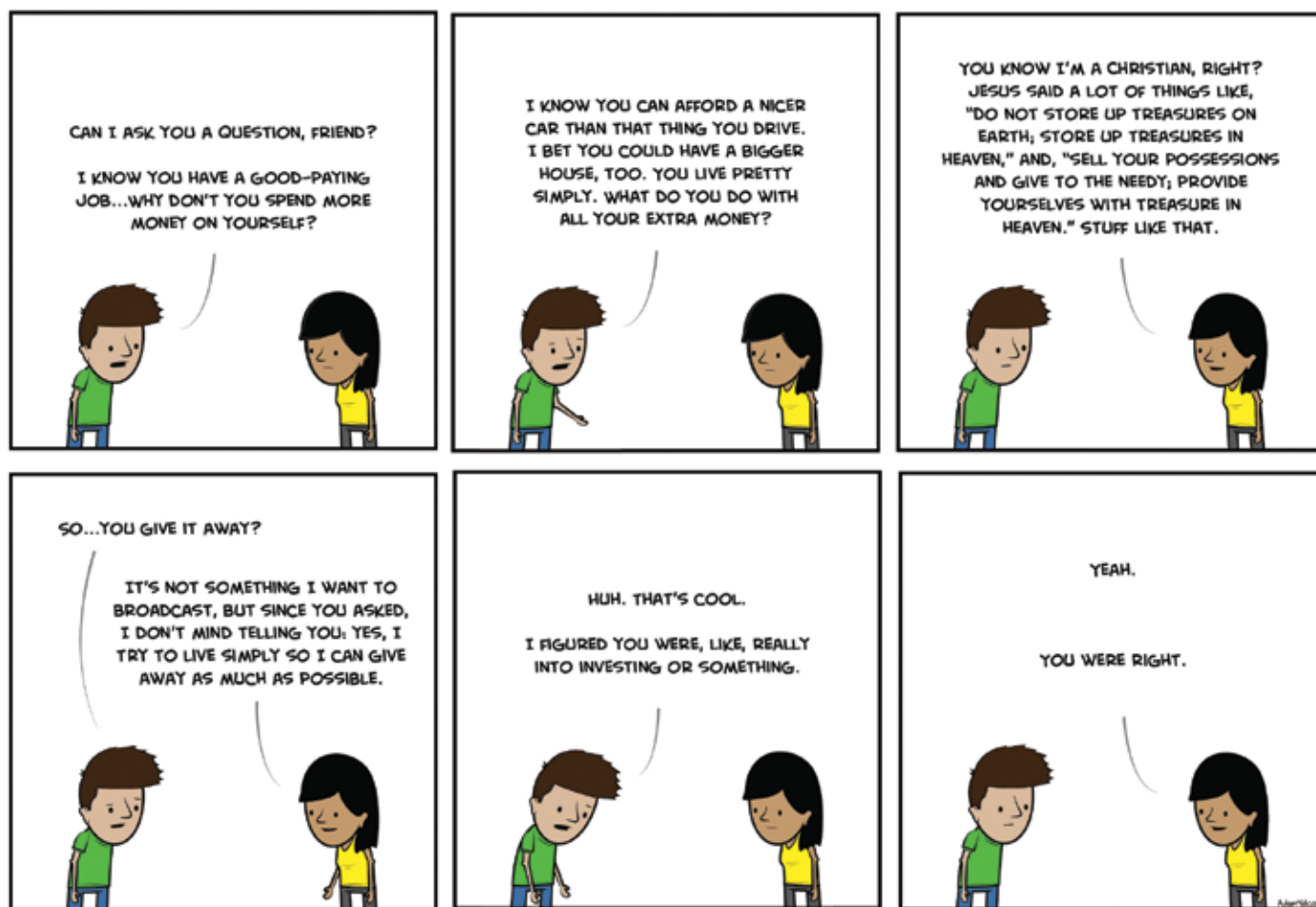
POPS TOP PROFS

“One father is more than a hundred schoolmasters.”
– George Herbert

THE 7 DEADLY MEDICAL CONDITIONS

“...the seven deadly sins were Pride, Greed, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Wrath and Sloth. It is not for me to discuss the status of these sins as ‘deadly’ or otherwise but Scripture confirms that all of these characteristics of a human being are sinful....It is noteworthy that these seven sins have, in the 21st Century, become one virtue followed by six medical conditions! Pride is the 21st century virtue, pride is being encouraged for all, raise your self esteem is almost a mantra of the age.”

– Dr. Hans Snoek, “The sin of gluttony” in the August 2020 *Faith in Focus*



C.S. LEWIS ON BEING FAR TOO EASILY PLEASED

"If you asked twenty good men today what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you had asked almost any of the great Christians of old, he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative idea of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love.

"The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and to nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.

"If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and to earnestly hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I suggest that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around

with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

– "The Weight of Glory" in the *Weight of Glory*

ON THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA ...AND MAYBE SOCIAL MEDIA TOO

These two quotes are all from a time before the Internet, but seem applicable to Twitter and Facebook too.

"Everything you read in newspapers is absolutely true, except for that rare story of which you happen to have first-hand knowledge."

– Edward Knoll, sharing what has been called "Knoll's Law of Media Accuracy." His point was that when we see a story we know about we'll be able to spot the faults in the reporting. But when it a story is about an event we don't know anything about, we'll often forget the errors in the previous account, and take this one as if it is fully reliable.

"If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed. If you do read the newspaper, you are misinformed."

– commonly attributed to Mark Twain though he seemingly didn't say it, which is a lesson in itself.



ANGRY?

by Clarence Bouwman

But I'm not the type...right?

“**A**ngry? No, not me. I’m not an angry sort of person.” Actually, I suspect very few of us think we are. So allow me to share a story.

Bob had been gone for some days, and couldn’t wait to see his wife again. On the ride home from the airport, he could already hear her enthusiastic hello, relish her eagerness to hear all about his experiences, and taste the tea and favorite bit of baking she’d prepared for him.

He hopped out of the car, dashed up the front steps, pushed open the door and hollered eagerly, “Lauren, I’m home!”

Silence.

He walked down the hall, looked around the corner, and there she was, ticking away on her laptop. Enthusiastically: “Hi, Lauren! I’m back!” Response: a mild, “Oh, hi, Bob” and her fingers kept tapping the keys....

RESPONSE

You’re Bob. How should Bob respond to this bucket of ice? How would you?

1. Bob could blow his stack and let Lauren know in no uncertain terms that this is no way to welcome your husband home.
2. Bob could remain very calm, and admonish her that the Lord is not pleased with her coolness to his return. (And, for the record, I’d argue there’s ample justification in the Bible that she ought indeed to welcome her husband with much greater enthusiasm.)
3. Bob could turn his back, disappear into his man cave, and bury his head (and his pain) in his project. “Be like that, then! See if I care....”
4. When a good buddy phones to welcome him back, he could let on that he feels badly hurt by his wife’s coldness.
5. He could even suggest that his buddy try to get *his* wife to have a chat with Lauren and make clear that her behavior just isn’t acceptable.

Losing it, righteous instruction, sulking, slander, manipulation: which response

is acceptable? For that matter: is there a common denominator under all five?

ANGER IS IN EVERYONE

I didn’t make the above story up. I actually heard it at a conference hosted by the Christian Counseling Center. Robert Jones came up to Ontario from the Carolinas to talk about anger, and somewhere in his presentation he told this story. We were asked to consider where the problem was in relation to Bob. Was he justified in giving Lauren a piece of his mind? Was he right to tell her what the Bible says about how she ought to welcome her husband? Was he justified in retreating within himself? Or in sharing his hurt with another, let alone gently manipulating another to set Lauren straight?

The thing is, of course, that each of us can relate quite well to every aspect of Bob’s response. That’s because anger is much at home in the heart of every sinner.

REALLY?

I’ll admit that when I entered the doors of the conference building, I

...anger is much at home in the heart of every sinner.

tended to define the term “anger” as a burst of outrage, be it slamming the door, pounding the table, shouting, and the like.

But our speaker made clear it that this was far too limited an understanding. The rage and the slamming and the pounding and the shouting are, in fact, expressions of an irritation rooted deep within the heart. That irritation is awakened by events (or words) that strike you as unfair or wrong or insensitive, etc. You can give expression to that irritation in various ways, be it blowing your stack or retreating within yourself, or slandering the perceived wrongdoer to your friend, or manipulating a third party to influence the wrongdoer, etc., and etc.

Anger is, biblically speaking, not first of all an action but is, instead, an attitude of the heart. Some bump in the road, some irritation, will cause the anger inside to express itself in some particular action...including Bob's various responses as outlined above. All are expressions of inner anger. And since inner anger is wrong, all these expressions of anger are wrong.

WHEN JESUS CHRIST WAS ANGRY

I was surprised to learn that the gospels record three incidents – yes, only three! – when Jesus became angry. That's when Jesus healed the man with the shriveled arm (Mark 3:1-6), when He received the little children (Mark 10:13-16), and when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple (John 2:13-17).

We might expect Him, instead, to become angry when they sought to stone Him, or when they associated Him with Beelzebub, or when they ridiculed Him. We'd expect Him to be angry when He was arrested, mocked,

spit upon, and crucified. But there's nothing of the sort in His reactions. The Scriptures tell us that He went like a lamb to the slaughter.

As to the instances when He did become angry, in each instance God's name was blasphemed through the hardness of human hearts, and that's what triggered anger on Jesus' part. His anger, then, was in tune with God's holiness and in step with God's own anger against sin. Never did the man Jesus become angry in response to feeling slighted or being sinned against. That's highly instructive, given that the child of God is meant to imitate Christ Jesus (cf Ephesians 5:1).

BOB'S ANGER

So where's the wrong in Bob's situation? Could Bob rightly point a finger at his wife and insist the wrong lay fully and only with her? Could he plead that his response was a justifiable and righteous response to her failure?

Our speaker asked us to consider Mark 10:45:

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Here is the driving thought behind Jesus' conduct in life, and this is to be the driving thought in the lives of all His people. The application for Bob? He let his thoughts on his way home be self-centered, and so he expected his wife to be there for him. Since she didn't satisfy his expectation, he became angry, and that anger received expression in, well, any of the options listed above.

Had Bob, on the other hand, approached home seeking not to be served but to serve his wife, he would have been in the right frame of mind to reach out to her and perhaps support her in some burden unknown to him. Such a mindset would reflect the Lord Jesus Christ.

BACK TO CHRIST

But, we protest, we can't always *give*! Our speaker did an excellent job of

drawing out that we, in fact, have all we need in Jesus Christ. He mentioned 2 Peter 1: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (vs 3), and asked us to contemplate the force of the word “all.” In Christ we actually have *all* things that we require for this life! We say: but I *need* that kiss, that show of affection, that attention, that promotion, that.... And when we don't get it we get annoyed, exasperated, frustrated, irritated – all expressions of anger.... In our anger is an implicit criticism of God; He's not truly giving us what we need.

Paul responded differently. He wrote his letter to the Philippians while he was imprisoned (perhaps in Rome). But *from his cell* he wrote:

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (4:11).

“In whatever situation”?

Yes, he says yes. “I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (vs. 12). What is the secret? “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (vs. 13). So he tells the Philippians: “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (vs. 19). Note the word “*every* need.”

Irritated at a slight? Upset at a knockback? Peeved because you didn't get what you thought you should? Livid at a demotion? Anger will never do, because Jesus Christ gives me all I really need.

The question is: do I believe that? Or do I, in fact, believe that I actually need people's approval, because... well because the Lord, you know, actually disappoints....

ENTITLEMENT?

One little tangent before I sum it up.... The thought is alive and well in North American culture that we're *entitled* to happiness, satisfaction,

The thought is alive and well in North American culture that we're entitled to happiness, satisfaction, accolades, etc.


accolades, etc. – and actually entitled to our *own definition* of happiness. Because North Americans are not getting what we think we deserve, we end up with more and more frustrated and angry people across our continent. But that has enormous – and very devastating – social consequences. Behind marriage failure is the anger (or irritation, or frustration, or mention whatever parallel word you would) that results from not getting what we think our spouse should give us.

But the Christian may not think in

terms of entitlement. If anyone had an entitlement, it was the Lord Jesus Christ. But He did not cling to His divine glory, nor insist on what was His. He gave it all away, to redeem the undeserving. That's the Christian's example. As Jesus Christ did not come to be served but to serve, so the Christian does not think in terms of being served, but thinks in terms of how he can serve the other. That fight against selfishness will put a huge dent in the anger that stays too close to our hearts. And our culture needs guidance

and encouragement in that fight. That's the task (in part) of the Christian.

I'm grateful for the work done by Christian Counseling Center. It's good to be reminded that anger (be it quiet or loud) is actually an ungodly response to what the Lord puts on our path. With the exception of "righteous anger" – where one is angry because God has been blasphemed – anger is in fact sin, and so it needs repentance and then resistance.

That will be ongoing work for us all. 

Robert Jones' book on the topic, entitled "Uprooting Anger," published by P&R Publishing, is available in Christian bookstores or from Amazon. Rev. Clarence Bouwman is a pastor in the Smithville Canadian Reformed Church.

TulipSingles.com

*Love...
Devotion...
Commitment*

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

A Dating Venue for Reformed Christian Singles



by Charity Bylsma



EVEN HEROES CARVED IN MARBLE WILL HAVE FEET OF CLAY

This afternoon I was driving my son home from his work at a garden center. His job is ½ hour away from where we live but we have been more than willing to make the drive twice every day as many of the jobs high school students normally fill during our hot Ontario summers are not easy to come by in this post-COVID world. As we sped past farmland filled with newly planted crops we listened to *CBC* as the host fielded calls from Ontario listeners. The topic under discussion was the question of whether or not we should change the names of cities and streets if the current names had been adopted from those in history who might have had a shady record when it came to slavery.

The callers were passionate in their feedback, ranging from deep affront that our current society would disregard the past and in effect try to erase it, to emotional pleas from parents who, because of the color of their skin, found the memorializing of these names to be hurtful in the extreme and impossible to explain to their children. The host did her best, but it was clear she was not sufficient for navigating such tempestuous waters. The callers' responses led, in turn, to a compelling discussion between my son and me.

SEARCHING FOR A HERO

What was most remarkable in the entire radio discussion was how

disappointed everyone was to "discover" that their heroes were flawed; to learn that the men and women of the past had sticky records, with bad decisions and reprehensible viewpoints dotting their lives. My son noticed that there seemed to be more than disappointment in the voices of the callers, many were just plain outraged.

Why? Why are we shocked when the sins of our heroes materialize and besmirch what we believed were impeccable records? Why are we almost personally offended when we unearth brokenness in the lives of past men and women? Could it be that we are angry because we have placed our trust in cracked vessels, and now these men and women are failing the faith we have put in them? It appears that many of us are in an ongoing search for a truly great hero, for one who will not disappoint.

Perhaps the callers on the radio show were simply expressing a longing deep within every human heart. That we would find one who will not let us down. One who will not only measure up to every impossible standard that we set for others, (never for ourselves because we, of course, need grace), but one who will far surpass those expectations.

The good news is that there is a hero who shines through the mists of history. One who is truly faultless. And the true beauty of this One lies in the fact that our expectations of Him will never be enough; He is utterly and incandescently

lovely, and our hearts will never be disappointed when they rest in Him. Every time we think He cannot possibly be as heroic as our hearts long for, He will prove Himself to be more so.

The answer to the question of when to tear down statues or when to stand behind street names is complex, requiring both wisdom and determination. To his credit, the biblical Gideon tore down the high places his family members had built, being willing to shoulder their outrage rather than disobey God. And yet, to his fault, he later made an ephod in an effort to memorialize the triumph over Midian with the result that all Israel worshipped it – causing them to give honor to something detestable instead of what was true.

GRATEFUL

There are not always easy answers when we try to unravel what to do with the tangle of sin threaded through the lives of the various characters that line history's wall. But just as we have been thankful for the work that was provided for our son this summer, we can be even more thankful for the work that was accomplished by another Son thousands of summers ago. A work that covers the snarl of sin that is present not only in the lives of others but is also found starkly in our own broken hearts. And the work of that Son will never disappoint, for He will never fail. His name is Jesus Christ. RP

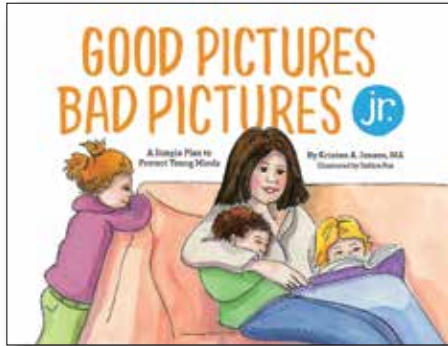
BOOKS

PICTURE BOOKS THAT INSPIRE & EDUCATE

By Jon Dykstra

GOOD PICTURES BAD PICTURES JR.

BY KIRSTEN A. JENSON
2017 / 40 PAGES



Talking with our kids about pornography on the Internet is not a conversation any parent *wants* to have. But we *need* to do it.

So when I saw this book online I ordered a copy, thinking it might make things easier. And it did.

This could probably be read in just 5 minutes, but the discussion it prompts took at least another 15.

We learned about how there are pictures all over, on our walls, on billboards, and on screens too. Some are good pictures, like pictures of puppies or family pictures or fun videos. "But some pictures," the author informs us, "are not good. They are bad for you." The definition given of a bad picture is very clear, and very G-rated: "Bad pictures show the parts of the body that we cover with a swimsuit. These parts are meant to be kept private."

I'd recommend *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures jr.* for kids 4-8, but note that if you don't already read to your kids regularly, don't launch into this one as one of your first. This can be an awkward topic but what'll make it a lot less weird is if mom or dad regularly read with their kids and talk about what they're reading.

HENRY SAYS GOOD-BYE

EDITED BY EDWARD T. WELCH
32 PAGES / 2019



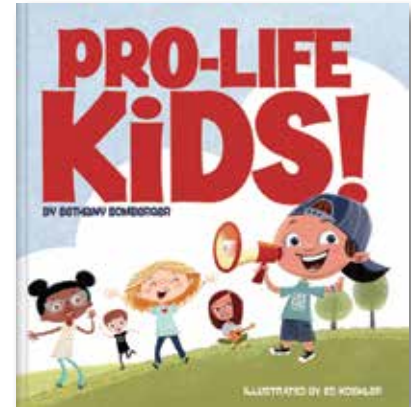
This book is part of an excellent series put out by the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF). Each addresses areas of counseling that might be of use to "little hearts" and in this one the issue is grieving the loss of a loved one.

Of course, they don't tackle the issue head-on – that would be abrupt, too distressing for the very children the book is intended to help. So instead of a person, we have Henry, a little hedgehog, and instead of the loss of a grandparent, or sibling, he is trying to deal with the death of his pet ladybug Lila. Sad and angry, and he doesn't want to be around his other friends, whose pets are all still alive. But what his parents model is how to take our grief to God. Henry's dad shares relevant Bible passages, pointing his son to the God who has promised to one day dry every tear.

It is a wonderful book, and brilliantly illustrated. It would probably be most useful if read before there was a need, but even after the death of a pet or loved relative, the book's Scripture citations, and instructions for parents, as found in the back, will be incredibly helpful. I would recommend it to parents of children 5-10.

PRO-LIFE KIDS!

BY BETHANY BOMBERGER
48 PAGES / 2019



What I most liked about this book is that my kids just picked it up and started reading it. This is the sort of book they really *ought* to read – it is educational, teaching them about the unborn, about what they can do to stand up for these babies, and about how the unborn are being dehumanized by those that want to kill them – but *educational* doesn't always mean *enjoyable*. So it was a very pleasant surprise to find out this one hit both marks.

Illustrator Ed Koehler's bright colors got them to open it in the first place, and then author, Bethany Bomberger's rhyming text kept their attention. One example:

Sadly there are those who
don't understand
That life has a purpose
whether planned or unplanned
Throughout history many believed a lie.
"You're not a person! No way!" they cried
Today many people think
that lie is still true
That babies in wombs
aren't people too....

After describing the problem, the book concludes with a rallying cry for all the readers to be:

...pro-life kids 'til injustice ends!
We are pro-life kids. It's life we defend!

I'd highly recommend this for every school or church library!

GOD MADE ME UNIQUE

BY JONI EARECKSON TADA AND FRIENDS

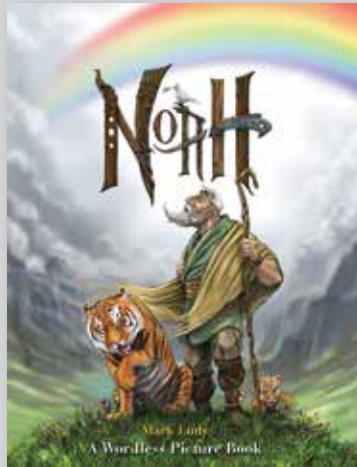
32 PAGES / 2019



Everyone is unique, but some of us are more unique than others. So how do we teach our children to embrace and include others who might act differently, or who might have different needs than their own?

This little picture book could be helpful for parents and teachers by making the unusual less surprising. The book is set in a classroom right before a new student with special needs is going to join them. The class is already made up of students who have disabilities and challenges, and by showing some of the many ways we can be different from one another – a child in leg braces, one in a motorized wheelchair, another who is deaf, and one who wears headphones because she doesn't like loud noises – our own children can get used to the idea that unique isn't that unusual after all. But this title's most important point, made repeatedly, is that we are all made in God's image.

Bright colors and rhyming text make this attractive for reading aloud with a class. I don't know if it is the sort of book children will read repeatedly on their own, so that might make it more of a church and school purchase, where it can be borrowed, than something for the home library.



NOAH: A WORDLESS PICTURE BOOK

BY MARK LUDY

60 PAGES / 2014

Mark Ludy's wordless account of Noah's life will fascinate young and old. There's so much to see on every page, and the wordless nature of it invites parent and child to discuss all that's going on.

The danger with such an account is that for some it might come to replace the original biblical version. As children

pore over this picture book's pages repeatedly, they could easily forget that even as it is reasonable to believe Noah might have made use of the strength of a dinosaur or two, the Bible doesn't actually say he did.

But what such a book can also do is help us re-evaluate some other non-biblical assumptions we might have inadvertently adopted.

Noah's wife is shown here as a lighter colored black, while Noah himself is maybe Grecian, Roman, or perhaps Sicilian. What both most certainly *are not* – and what they most probably *were not* – is a British or Scandinavian sort of white. That might bring questions for the many a child and adult who, having grown up with picture Bibles that have a white Adam and Eve, and a white Jesus too, have presumed Noah was white as well. But it is more likely that Adam, Eve, and maybe many of the generations that followed had some sort of middle brown skin, as that genetic coding can contain within it the possibility of both darker and lighter skin in the generations that follow.

Another corrective: while evolutionary theory portrays Man as being much simpler back in history, the Bible details some big advances being made from one generation to the next (Genesis 4:20-22). They were no primitive dummies so it is helpful to see Noah shown as living in a fairly advanced level of industry and technology. They aren't in a rocket age, but they also aren't living in caves either.

Finally, we also get a good idea of the sheer magnitude of the Ark, correcting the silly bathtub toy picture some might have stuck in their heads.

We shouldn't ever let this book overshadow the biblical account, but when we put it in its proper place – like that of a light and fun commentary that helps us reflect on what Genesis 6-9 is actually saying – then it can be a wonderful aid.

I'll offer a couple of critiques: while there's a dinosaur and some mammoths to be seen working on the ark's construction, neither can be found in it. Also, while animals two by two can be seen making their way to the ark, there don't seem to be any groups of 7 (Genesis 7:2). Of course, we don't see every animal arrive, so maybe we just missed those, and they'll be found in any expanded future edition of the book.

So who is this for? We probably all think of picture books as being for children, but I really think everyone will love it, from ages 3 on up to 103!



The hidden meaning of *The Chronicles of Narnia*

by Cap Stewart

What if there was a secret cipher that unlocked a meaning behind C. S. Lewis' beloved *Chronicles of Narnia*? What if Lewis used a concealed template to map out each book in the series, with a specific contextual aim that can be completely missed unless you know exactly what to look for? That is the intriguing premise of Michael Ward's much-praised book *Planet Narnia*.

As an unofficial Lewis aficionado, my wife recently read through Ward's book, pausing between chapters to relay what she had learned to me. The material in *Planet Narnia* provided for many a night of excitement, discovery, and discussion. Even as someone who has digested most of this book's thesis second-hand, I find myself convinced by Ward's paradigm-shattering work.

Understanding the key to Lewis's true and foundational intent for *The Chronicles of Narnia* unlocks the secret to numerous mysteries about the books:

- Why does Father Christmas make an appearance in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*?
- Why is there a bacchanal (i.e. a party very heavy on the wine) in *Prince Caspian*?
- Why is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* the only book with dragons in it?
- Why does Aslan never actually enter Narnia in *The Silver Chair*?

- What's the point of the emphasis on twins, doubles, and symmetry in *The Horse and His Boy*?
- Why is *The Magician's Nephew* more comical than any of the other stories?
- Why is *The Last Battle* the only book with an adult protagonist?

So, what is the key that unlocks these (and many other) questions? Simply this: the seven Narnia books are heavily – indeed, primarily – influenced by the concept of the Seven Heavens. In medieval cosmology, there were seven planets, each with its own personality and characteristics. In Lewis' view, these planets embody spiritual symbols of permanent value.

As Ward explains, the seven planets determine,

“the basic plot of each story, countless points of ornamental detail, and, most significantly (from the theological point of view), the presentation of the Christotypical figure of Aslan.”

The planet Lewis assigned to each book, as laid out by Ward, is as follows:

1. Jove (Jupiter): *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*
2. Mars: *Prince Caspian*
3. Sol (the Sun): *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*
4. Luna (the Moon): *The Silver Chair*
5. Mercury: *The Horse and his Boy*

6. Venus: *The Magician's Nephew*
7. Saturn: *The Last Battle*

Of course, it takes Ward an entire book to lay out the evidence and make his case. And a convincing case it is.

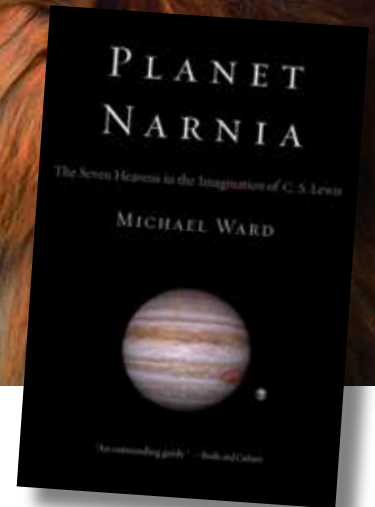
RIDDLES IN THE DARK

Without reading the book, though, one might (rightly) ask, “If the Seven Heavens was so integral to the creation of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, why has no one noticed before?” Ward addresses this specific question. One reason, he says, is this:

“...many readers were content to accept that the [series'] apparent lack of [structural consistency] was evidence of hasty writing, not a sign of an unidentified inner meaning. Since Tolkien dismissed the [*Chronicles of Narnia*] as a mishmash it is hardly surprising that many critics have done the same.”

Another reason is this:

...those critics who *were* looking for a third level [of meaning]...may not have been as open to the subject of astrology as [Lewis'] work really requires, for, as I have pointed out,



astrology, a subject disdained by academics, tends to be given a doubly wide berth by Christian academics. Since most Lewis scholars have been Christian or well-disposed to the Christian tradition, there was an in-built improbability that researchers would fully understand his most successful work...

The apparent connection between Lewis' beloved fantasy series and astrological elements is a concept that many Christians might find troubling.

HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD

This connection, Ward explains, need not trouble Lewis' Christian readership:

It must be emphasized that the pre-Copernican model of the cosmos was a Christian model for all its acceptance of astrological influence. As Lewis points out in [his book] *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, astrology and astronomy were not really distinguishable until the Copernican revolution and no Christian theologian before that time denied the general theory of planetary influences or the significance of constellation.

Furthermore, as Lewis himself said in *The Discarded Image*,

"Orthodox theologians [in the medieval Church] could accept the theory that the planets had an effect on events and on psychology, and, much more, on plants and minerals. It was not against this that the Church fought. She fought against three of its offshoots."

Lewis goes on to describe the three offshoots of medieval astrology that the church rightly opposed:

1. Astrologically grounded predictions (i.e., horoscopes).
2. Astrological determinism. (i.e., the idea that the planets affected one's personality to the point of overriding

his or her human responsibility and free will. A modern equivalent of this determinism might be using your Myers-Briggs personality type as an excuse for your faults – i.e., "I can't help criticizing you all the time; it's just who I am.")

3. Any practice that would "imply or encourage the worship of planets."

Lewis' inclusion of the Seven Heavens avoided all three of these heretical dangers. Ward explains:

"...the [medieval] Church was content to sanction what we would now call 'astrology.' After all, the Bible appeared to support the belief that there were seven planets and that they possessed influences. . . . The author of the Book of Job as translated in the King James Version mentions the 'sweet influences of Pleiades' (38:31). . . . And throughout the Bible the stars are seen as 'signs' – most notably at Bethlehem, signifying the birth of Christ – and sometimes as a celestial court or angelic choir. Christ himself is shown in the Book of Revelation (1:16, 20; 2:1) holding the seven stars – that is, the seven wandering stars, the planets – in his right hand, a vision that Austin Farrer, Lewis's close friend and an expert in apocalyptic imagery, understood to be a portrayal of Christ's lordship over time, 'for it is after these seven that the weekdays are named.' Saturn gives Saturday its name, the Sun Sunday's, the Moon Monday's, and so on."

As such, Lewis' use of medieval cosmology falls well outside the scope of what modern-day Christians would condemn as astrology.

WIDESPREAD PRAISE

Another factor promoting the legitimacy of Ward's work is the praise it has received from all across the political and theological spectrum. Below is just a sampling of the endorsements *Planet Narnia* has received:

- "My own [skepticism] was gradually but utterly demolished as I read this


thoughtful, scholarly, and vividly-written book." – Alan Jacobs, Professor of English, Wheaton College and author of *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C.S. Lewis*

- "Planet Narnia is...utterly convincing and compelling." – N. T. Wright
- "I cannot contain my admiration. No other book on Lewis has ever shown such comprehensive knowledge of his works and such depth of insight." – Walter Hooper, Literary Adviser to the Estate of C.S. Lewis
- "Planet Narnia...is one of the best books I have ever read." – Douglas Wilson, author of *What I Learned in Narnia*

FURTHER UP, FURTHER IN

Historically, I have dismissed *The Chronicles of Narnia* as being based more on themes and ideas rather than well-defined story arcs. Michael Ward's insights have shown that I was both right and wrong. Rather than a sloppy mismatch, the Narnia tales comprise a carefully and meticulously crafted set of stories, much more rich in structure and meaning than I ever gave them credit. *Planet Narnia* has been instrumental in giving me a fresh perspective and a fresh interest in the world of Narnia.

I have only scratched the surface and if you want to learn more, I recommend checking out Ward's work through his website PlanetNarnia.com, or books *Planet Narnia*, or *The Narnia Code* (which is Ward's shorter, simpler version of *Planet Narnia*, designed for consumption by the general public).

Ward has laid the groundwork to help us, in the words of Reepicheep in *The Last Battle*, "Come further up, [and] come further in" to what Lewis has accomplished. 

There is also a documentary about Michael Ward's discovery, called "The Narnia Code," which is reviewed at ReformedPerspective.ca. This article first appeared on Cap Stewart's blog (CapStewart.com) where he loves "to write about the arts and theology." It is reprinted here with permission.

MORE BIRDS THAN BELIEVERS IN CHURCH

by Jason Van Vliet



When it comes to holding church services during a pandemic, which commandments should we listen to?

#4 - Remember the Sabbath Day?

#5 - Honor those in authority?

#6 - Don't kill (or seek the harm of) your neighbor?

Dr. Jason Van Vliet provides us with some solid biblical direction.

This past Sunday I had the privilege of leading worship in my home congregation just outside of Hamilton, Ontario. I arrived about ten minutes before the service began. Everyone was already in church ... all three of them! One elder, one brother taking care of sound and video, and one sister playing the piano. No more fellow believers joined us in the church building, although with a congregation of some 450 members, many were joining us from their homes via a livestream connection.

Alas, we have been living with this reality for about ten Sundays in a row here in Ontario. It is much the same in many other – but not all – places. To curb the spread of COVID-19, governments around the world have restricted large public gatherings. In Ontario (at the time of writing), no more than five are permitted to gather

publicly. That is why there were only four of us in church.

But what about the birds? As I entered the building, one brother cheerfully quipped, “You have competition this morning. The birds are back.”

You see, at present our congregation worships in a gymnasium. Resourceful feathered creatures somehow discovered a little gap somewhere up there in the roof. Are you also thinking of Psalm 84 in the *Book of Praise*?

The sparrow finds a home to rest
The swallow builds herself a nest

By the volume of sound coming from that avian choir in the rafters, I would hazard an uneducated guess that there were more birds than believers in church this past Sunday.

In Article 27 of the Belgic

Confession, we affirm that the church is “a holy congregation and *assembly* of the true Christian *believers*.”

When more birds than believers have assembled in a church building on Sunday, we have reason to grieve.

CAUGHT BETWEEN COMMANDS?

At least three divine commandments intersect in this circumstance.

4th Commandment

As part of the fourth commandment, we confess that we must “diligently attend the church of God to hear God’s Word, to use the sacraments, to call publicly upon the LORD, and to give Christian offerings to the poor” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 38). So long as you have a good Internet connection and your local congregation has livestreaming equipment, you can still see the preacher and hear the

At least three divine commandments intersect in this circumstance.

preaching quite well. Similarly, the minister can still lead us in public prayer, and by sending an e-transfer we can still give Christian alms. All of this is not nothing.

But so much is missing as well. In places where the restrictions are more severe, it is well nigh impossible to administer the sacraments. We sing psalms and hymns in our homes, but it does not even come close to the uplifting experience of singing together with hundreds of fellow believers in a building that is acoustically alive.

In short, did we “attend the church of God”? Well, sort of but not really. Psalm 122 rings in our ears and weighs down our hearts: “I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the LORD,” not stay in our own houses.

5th Commandment

At the same time, in the fifth commandment, the LORD requires us to respect and obey our governing officials. Consider the words of Romans 13:1-2

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.... Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

Those words are both blunt and inspired.

This command still applies when governing authorities are unjust or unwise. The apostle Peter wrote, “Be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust” (1 Pet 2:18). But there is a limit to this, as well, for the same apostle said to the Sanhedrin, “We must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29). Do we have to break the fifth commandment and contravene the restrictions on public gatherings in order to keep the fourth commandment

and assemble in church to worship God?

6th Commandment

Answering that question is already complex, but now add the sixth commandment. This command not only prohibits murder but also calls us to “protect [our neighbour] from harm as much as we can” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 40).

What now? If we fulfill the fourth commandment and attend the church of God, do we (potentially) break the sixth commandment by putting fellow believers, and by extension others with whom they may have contact, in harm’s way?

We feel caught between the commands. Our consciences are hung up on the horns of a three-way dilemma. What is a sincere Christian to do?

SOME HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

As the Preacher teaches us, nothing is new under the sun (Eccl 1:10). Serious pandemics have afflicted the world before. For the sake of public health, governments have shut down church buildings before.

For example, between 1576 and 1578, during the plague of Milan, fifteen percent of that city’s population died. At the peak of the infection curve, the city closed all “non-essential shops” and put into effect a “general quarantine,” which also meant that public worship services were not permitted.¹ Sound familiar?

The archbishop, a certain Carlo Borromeo, co-operated with local officials and organized the publication of booklets containing penitential Bible passages, prayers, and songs. These were then distributed, free of charge, to the citizens. At set times, when the church bell rang, everyone was to come to the doors and windows of their

homes. Together the city recited prayers and sang songs. The cobbled streets of Milan, rather than the marbled nave of its cathedral, resounded with congregational singing. Can you imagine?

Similarly, in the fall of 1918 the so-called Spanish flu ravaged Philadelphia. On October 3, the city officials closed all schools. On October 4, they closed all saloons, theaters, and churches as well. For the balance of the month, everyone lived through a complete lockdown, other than doing what was necessary to feed their families and care for the sick, the dying, and the dead.

By the end of the month, though, the infection rate subsided and things opened up again. As a sure sign of a different era, “the *first step* in removing the ban allowed churches and synagogues to open,” although, at least in the case of the churches, “...without Sunday school.”²

History is interesting and instructive. We are certainly not the first generation to live through times like these. Still, history is not authoritative. The question remains: in the sight of our God, what are sincere Christians to do?

DO NOT SUBDIVIDE THE COMMANDS

Difficult circumstances can either push us apart or pull us together. Let us earnestly pray that it would be the latter. It is hard, though, to keep our minds simultaneously focussed on *all* the commands involved.

One believer quickly zeroes in on the fourth commandment: God calls us to assemble for worship, therefore, we *must* assemble for worship.

The heart of the next child of God, though, is gripped by the truth of the fifth commandment. God warns that if we resist the authorities he has put in place, we will incur judgment. Surely we need to take that seriously, don’t we?

Then, yet another brother or sister in the Lord feels the burden of the sixth commandment, being concerned that he or she might seriously endanger someone else’s health. Asymptomatic

transmission is a reality, after all.

Different people emphasize different commands, and if they do it too aggressively, they may inadvertently push us apart from each other. We will need to have patience with each other and be mindful of each other's consciences.

Beyond that, though, be assured that there is no three-way dilemma in the Word of our God. Just as surely as Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35), it cannot be sub-divided either. The whole law is fulfilled in one key word: love (Matt 22:37-40; Gal 5:14; Lord's Day 2). Intertwined love for God and our neighbour will provide the unifying departure point for us all.

WALK FORWARD IN LOVE

"I love the Lord" (Ps 116) and "I love your saints" (Ps 16) are the twin-engines of holy desire that propel us out of bed, into our cars, and on toward our church buildings twice a Sunday. Right? But that plush recliner in my family room is more comfortable than the oak pew in church, isn't it? And an extra hour of sleep on Sunday morning is rather nice, too, isn't it?

The Lord can, and will, use the COVID-19 pandemic to refine our love-filled loyalty to him and burn away all dross of custom, superstition, or hypocrisy in our obedience of the fourth commandment. If our souls are yearning to be back in the courts of our God with our fellow believers (Ps 63), then our God is fulfilling his promise to take evil and turn it to our benefit.

Next, holding the fourth and sixth commandments together is already familiar territory for us. I long to attend the church of God, but if I'm seriously sick with an infectious disease I'll have to stay home or take other significant precautions so that I don't harm others. In such a case I am not breaking the fourth commandment in order to keep the sixth. Why not? Because in God's law love for him and love for the neighbour do not compete; instead, they complement.

For example, in the OT when some of his own people had serious diseases,

God himself quarantined them "outside the camp," thereby also keeping them away from public worship (Lev. 13, 14). To be sure, these laws were more than a public health matter. They also involved other, deeper, spiritual lessons. But as a loving Father, our God also ensured that public worship gatherings would not become seedbeds for the spread of serious sickness. Under certain circumstances, then, loving *both* God *and* our neighbour means we may need to stay away from public worship.


These biblical principles also apply as we deal with COVID-19. On the one hand, excessive fear of viruses should not stop us from assembling for worship. The Holy Spirit teaches us that the wise man will not be immobilized by unwarranted fear of lions on the road or, by extension, of viruses in the pews (Prov. 26:13). On the other hand, love for the neighbour and for our heavenly Father who upholds our neighbour's health will compel us to exercise all due caution. In short, love and wisdom pave a path that holds the fourth and sixth commandments in harmony.

Fulfilling the fifth commandment in these present circumstances is more challenging but not impossible. In the final words of his *Institutes*, John Calvin reminds us that government officials may well have to correct some of their fellow officials when they act unjustly or unwisely (*Institutes* 4.20.31). Faced with the double affliction of both plague and persecution, Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor, also recommended working through the "lower magistrates" in order to redirect "higher magistrates," who may fail to uphold what is right and wise in the eyes of God.

This approach fits well with Romans 13. In verses 1–2, we read how the Lord instituted "governing authorities," not authority. The plural noun is significant. Not one single person in authority embodies all the wisdom required to rule, especially in challenging circumstances like COVID-19. If some governing officials are acting unwisely or unfairly toward

the church, even if their intentions are noble, then believers can work with and through other officials in order to promote the necessary corrective re-balancing. In this way, we honour *all* the authorities in their God-given calling and in doing so, honour God himself. Again, love for the neighbour and love for God cohere rather than conflict.

Thankfully, in some areas, we even have members of our Reformed congregation serving as government officials in town councils, provincial, and federal parliaments. Without denying the value of other efforts and initiatives, let us earnestly support and spur on these fellow believers, as well as any other elected representatives who will lend a sympathetic ear. The goal will be that, under the Lord's blessing, as soon as it is safe to increase the size of public gatherings, the church will be the first in line to benefit, not the last. This approach also holds together the fourth *and* fifth *and* sixth commandments.

May our God swiftly bring the day when the believers again far outnumber the birds in church. And may our chorus of congregational praise soon drown out their beautiful little chirps with a mighty sound that shakes the ground (Psalm 150, *Book of Praise*)! 

ENDNOTES

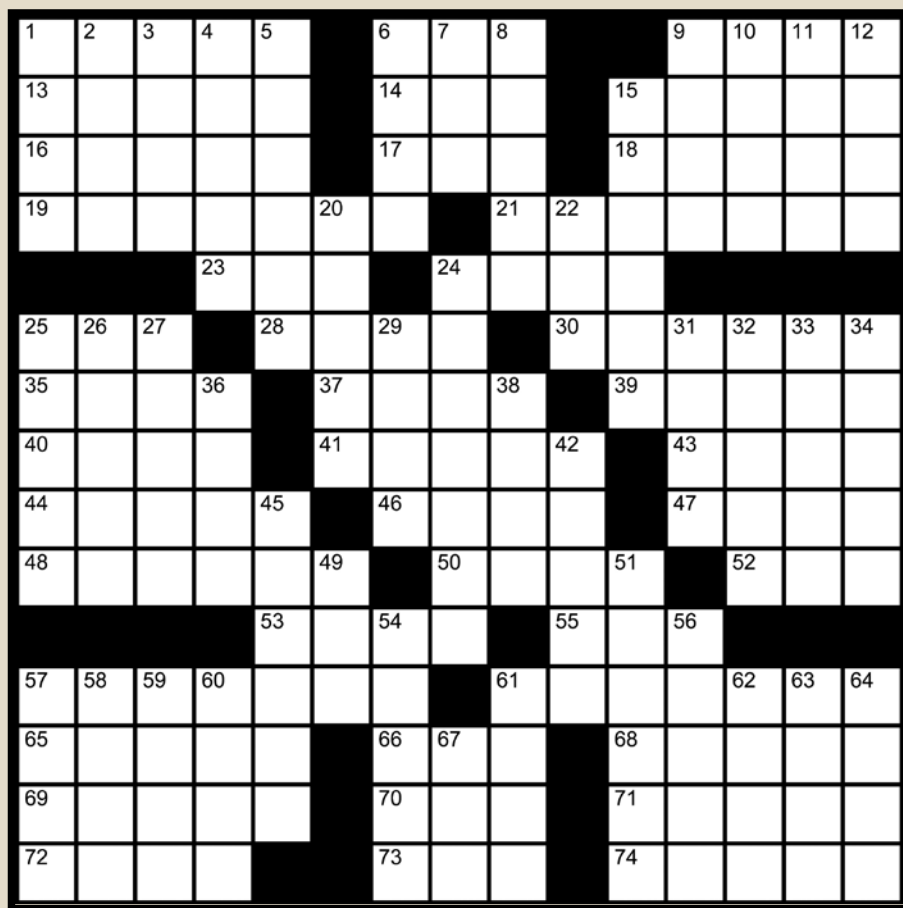
¹ Chiu, Remi. "Singing on the Street and in the Home in Times of Pestilence: Lessons from the 1576–78 Plague of Milan," in *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Corry, Maya (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 28.

² Stetler, Christina M. "The 1918 Spanish Influenza: Three Months of Horror in Philadelphia." *Pennsylvania History* 84, no. 4 (2017): 477.

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CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA



SERIES 6-1

PUZZLE CLUES *Find this issue's solution on page 2*

ACROSS

1. Wanderer (no insane one, either)
6. Deep frying pan (found on your walk?)
9. "living waters shall ____ out" (Zech. 14)
13. Astound (while in a maze?)
14. Historical period of time
15. "____ the Raven 'Nevermore.'"
16. "now ____ and eat" (Gen. 27)
17. ____ rally ("Rah, rah, sis boom bah!")
18. Loosen laces (not unite them)
19. Draw in, lure (to a tract of land?)
21. Foresee; forecast; prophesy
23. Mess up; mistake; misspell
24. Smear generously (makeup or paint)
25. Someone helpful in finance (abbr.)

28. Outfit for a ballerina (not a muumuu)
30. They're in between species and families.
35. ____ around (loiter; linger lazily)
37. Formerly, formerly
39. Unconscious states
40. Sheltered from the wind
41. Type of printmaking (shortened form)
43. What the tide does on the way out
44. Battery type (partly found in nice ad?)
46. Final biography (short form)
47. Oil change brand word (shortened form)
48. "he preached the ____" (Acts 8)
50. "she went ____ captivity" (Nahum 3)
52. "who ____ on their thrones" (Rev. 11)

53. "what ____ do you do...?" (John 6)
55. An inflated one shows conceit.
57. Small, wiry, game, fearless dog
61. Rushes in forcibly or violently
65. Love in Paris; romance in Quebec
66. Opposite of 9 Across
68. Join up; enlist in; sign up for
69. Jason ____: author of *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*
70. "You ____ what you eat."
71. La ____: Milan opera house, Winnipeg café
72. Most populous indigenous groups in Canada
73. Graduation wear (short form)
74. Ambush, being framed or bushwhacked

LAST ISSUE'S SOLUTION



SERIES 5-6

DOWN

1. A spacey organization (abbr.)
2. Leave out
3. New Testament book (abbr.)
4. "Ringed with the ____ world" (Tennyson)
5. "____ from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2)
6. "And Hezekiah ____ bitterly." (Is. 38)
7. Resource needed for city in *Settlers of Catan*
8. Sportswear brand named after Greek letter
9. Mutual ____ (one way to invest)
10. Plural of *lotus*
11. Relating to the ear
12. Hone; sharpen (especially on a stone)
15. Where Wolfe and Montcalm met
20. Brutal; harsh
22. "she covered him with a ____" (Judges 4)
24. "the ____ of history!" (Leon Trotsky)
25. "How they ____ and clash..." (E. A. Poe)
26. Jonas Salk developed a vaccine against it.
27. Smart ____ (not truly wise guys)
29. Kingston ____ (three 1960s folk singers)
31. French for *Christmas*
32. Board a bus

33. What Jesus' disciples called Him
34. Entry from 25 Across on the positive side
36. Look before you ____
38. What Gen. 41's cows and ears were
42. It lives in the sea or a North American river.
45. "the evil ____ of his soul" (Micah 7:3)
49. "to ____ to the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 5)
51. Man-eating female giant
54. "For I am a ____ King," (Malachi 1)
56. Amount of prevention in the old saying
57. Soft mineral used in powder for skin
58. Muslim ruler (sounds like a mere chief)
59. By another name, it smells as sweet (Juliet)
60. "elders who ____ well" (1 Tim. 5)
61. Type of wild goat found in Deut. 14
62. One who takes the fall, in British slang
63. Fragrant brown balsam, or gift tag for Little Lulu (two words)
64. Scornful open-handed hit (Matt. 26)
67. Julius Caesar's disloyal 'friend' (short form)



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Different mediums have their advantages: our website, ReformedPerspective.ca, and Reformed Outfitters app allow us to reach the furthest corners of civilization – anyone with a computer or smartphone can now read more than 1,000 articles on fantastically diverse array of topics.

Meanwhile our print edition keeps coming out issue after issue, and laid out on the coffee table, it's the perfect conversation starter at family gatherings.

But different mediums also have their weaknesses too: it's just not safe to drive and read, and running and reading has its limitations too – you aren't likely to set a personal best if you head out the door holding your water bottle in one hand, and the latest issue in the other.

That's why RP is now expanding into audio, with our two new podcasts, *Focal Point* and *Real Talk*. We're still finding a suitable corner on the website to host them, and there are other wrinkles to iron out, but we already have a half dozen episodes available for you to check out. Here's a quick introduction to what we have on offer.

FOCAL POINT

Focal Point is our first original podcast, featuring our new full-time Executive Director Chris deBoer. Like the magazine, topic matter will cover all things

theological, socio-economic, and cultural, and always from a solidly Reformed biblical worldview. Chris will explore current issues, sometimes with special guests, staying faithful to Scripture, and seeking to echo and apply the Word of God wisely. Episodes to date have tackled:

- the COVID-19 crisis
- Racism and the BLM protests
- What does it mean to be Reformed?

You can find them all on the video tab at Facebook.com/ReformedPerspectiveMagazine or in the Focal Point playlist at the Reformed Perspective Foundation YouTube page.

REAL TALK

Real Talk, in the words of its hosts Lucas Holtvlüwer and Tyler Vanderwoude, is:

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CONCLUSION

As we expand into other mediums, the goal remains the same: to equip and encourage Christians to think, speak, and act in accordance with our confession, and to the glory of our God. But now that encouraging and equipping can happen even when the dishes beckon, or it's time to drive to work, or you're heading out for an early evening jog.

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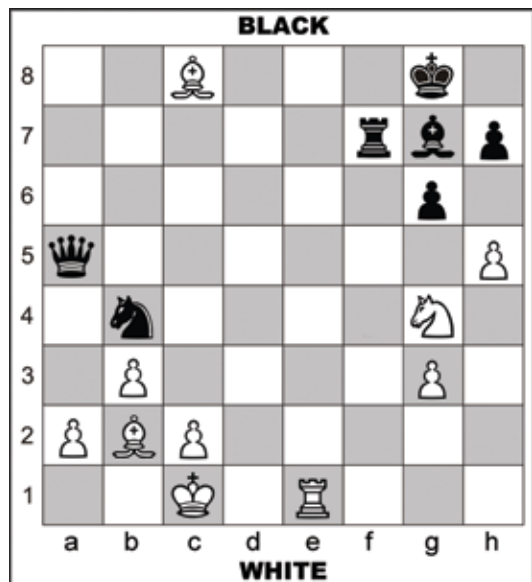
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ENTICING ENIGMAS & CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

Chess Puzzle #259



WHITE to Mate in 3

Or, If it is BLACK's Move, **BLACK to Mate in 4**

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

Riddle for Punsters

#259 – "The Budgie Fit Her Budget!"

Old Mrs. Van Nestegg, a widow, stayed continually in her home and was often lonely. A kind neighbour gave her a budgie to keep her company. What a tw ___ t thing to do! One day the bird became sick so the widow phoned a vet who told her that it sounded like a common illness quite tw ___ able by changing the budgie's diet. She was glad that the vet had been honest and not c ___ ey since he did not suggest an expensive treatment. Mrs. Van Nestegg did as the vet suggested and soon she s ___ d great improvement in the bird. Again the budgie would sing to her all day long and did so for the r ___ st of its life.

Problem to Ponder

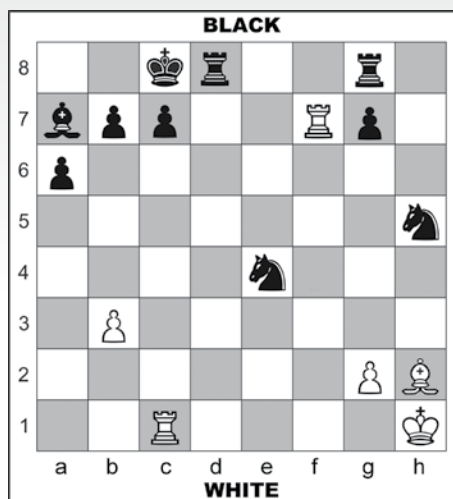
#259 – "All of the players won trophies!"

Three scientists, named Ben and Jen and Ken, played a science game on their day off. One was a physicist, one a biologist and the third was a chemist. By the end of the game, one had captured the Galileo trophy, another captured the Einstein trophy and the third player captured the Newton trophy. The Galileo trophy was the most valuable and the Newton trophy least valuable in the game. Determine the name of each scientist and determine who captured each type of trophy, using the following clues.

- The physicist, much to his chagrin, did not capture the Einstein trophy, nor did the chemist.
- Ben had a better trophy than Ken and lesser trophy than Jen.
- Jen did not capture the Einstein trophy.
- Neither the biologist nor the chemist captured the best trophy.

Last Month's Solutions

Solution to Chess Puzzle #258



WHITE TO MATE IN 2

BLACK TO MATE IN 3

Descriptive Notation

1. KRxBP ch K-N1
2. R-B8 mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Rf7xc7 + Kc8-b8
2. Rc7-c8 ++

Descriptive Notation

1. ----- N/R4-N6 ch
2. BxN R-R1 ch
3. B-R2 N-N6 mate

or

3. B-R4 RxB mate

Algebraic Notation

1. ----- Nh5-g3 +
2. Bh2xg3 Rg8-h8 +
3. Bg3-h2 Ne4-g3 ++

or

3. Bg3-h4 Rh8xh4 ++

Answer to Riddle for Punsters

#258 – "Social Distancing at the Library?"

Why was the library book unwilling to share its cover with any of the other books that had been placed on a table? It was a very **shelfish** book.

Why did the library book not want any other books but itself in a photo it was taking? It was **shelf**-centered and wanted to take a **shelfie**.

Answer to Problem to Ponder

#258 – "Are they 'decked out' in fine clothing?"

It may be useful to know from the start that John's female parent is affectionately called "mom" by her four children. "Mom" likes to play bridge while the "dad" designs bridges. The youngest child, Jack, is 10 years old. His only sister, Queen, is 12 years old. The next oldest child, King, is 14 years old. The oldest child's age is **three times the difference in age between the oldest and the youngest**. What is the name of the oldest child and what is his age? Also, if the mother's age, nine years after King was born, was five times Queen's age at that time, how old is "mom" **now**?

The oldest child's name is John, given at the beginning of the problem. Let J be John's age and 10 is given as the age of the youngest, Jack. Thus **J = 3(J - 10)** so J = 3J - 30 so J + 30 = 3J so 30 = 2J so 15 = J so **John is 15 years old**. King is 14 years old so 9 years after he was born he was 9 **so 5 years ago**. Queen's age at that time was 12-5 = 7 years old. At that time the mother was therefore 5 x 7 = 35 years old. Since that was 5 years ago, **the mother is at present 35 + 5 = 40 years old**.

TWO TREES AND THE BIG STORM:

A PARABLE FOR CHILDREN ABOUT COVID-19

by Rodney Vermeulen

Editor's note: Parents, what follows is a devotional, in two parts, to help explain COVID-19 to children, by assuring them of God's continued control and care in this ongoing crisis. There are questions at the end of each part to help your children bring their own questions and concerns to you.

**He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does he prospers.
The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff
that the wind drives away.
– Psalm 1:3-4**

PART 1

Dear boys and girls (and everyone else),

In Tree-land, as you can imagine, there were lots of trees. And ruling over all the trees was Tree-lord. He had made all the trees and now he was busy making sure that all the trees grew. There were all sorts of different trees, some growing here, others growing there. Some trees looked healthier than others. Some were bearing delicious fruit, others didn't seem to be.

Among all the trees in Tree-land, there were two trees that, at a glance, looked much the same. But their names were different, very different. Mind you, they both loved their names but for completely different reasons. You see, one was called *Righteous*. He loved his name because it had been given to him by Tree-lord. He was truly thankful to

have been chosen by Tree-lord to receive such a special name.

The other one, though, was called *Wicked*. He loved his name too, but not because it was given to him by Tree-lord. It wasn't. Tree-lord would never give such a name to one of the trees he had created. No, *Wicked*, loved his name because he had chosen it himself. He was proud of it. He thought it was a wicked name... really cool.

There was something else that *Righteous* loved. He loved the place where Tree-lord had planted him. It was right by a stream of beautifully clear and fresh water. He loved the fact that he could suck up as much water as he needed through his roots. On a bright clear morning, he loved opening up his bright green canopy of leaves to the sun and just feeling himself getting stronger and healthier. Between that water, the sun and the rich soil there along the stream he had everything he needed.

Oh, it's true, he did at times have to admit that he was just a little jealous of *Wicked*. When *Righteous* watched *Wicked* from his place there next to the stream he sometimes wished he was like him. *Wicked* always looked like he was having so much fun. He never stayed planted in one place for long. He'd be in one place for a while enjoying that little bit of soil, but before long he'd be up and walking around with some other tree friends. Then he'd stop wandering around and plant himself in another part of Tree-land with some other friends.

But *Righteous* noticed something as he watched from his place by the stream. *Wicked's* friends were just like him. They, too, had chosen their

own names, names like *Sinner* and *Scoffer*. Their ringleader called himself a prince. It was a horrible name. He called himself the *Prince of Darkness*. Whenever *Wicked* walked around and wherever he planted himself, *Wicked* was always hanging around with those guys.

Sure, they looked to be having fun bullying other trees, drinking water from one stream and then from another, wandering here and there. But the more that *Righteous* watched them, the more he realized that they never really sent their roots down deep into the soil so that they could start being proper trees and bearing some good fruit.

And *Righteous* noticed something else too. *Wicked* and his friends didn't do so well when the weather turned bad. On a windy day, their leaves blew off much quicker than his. And once, when there was a huge hailstorm and he had lost a few leaves, *Wicked* and his friends had almost been stripped bare. It wasn't pretty to look at. But *Wicked* and his friends didn't seem to care. After a storm, they just kept right on with their fun, games, and stupidity.

Seeing all of that, it dawned on *Righteous* that the problem with *Wicked* and his friends was that they simply ignored everything that Tree-lord had told them was good for trees. He had said, "Stay close to this stream; drink this water and only this water; let your roots go down nice and deep; listen to me and obey me so that you become strong trees and bear beautiful delicious fruit." But *Wicked* and his friends would have none of it.

Understanding that made *Righteous* realize how incredibly blessed he was.

It made him look up at his huge canopy of branches and leaves and fruit, and realize how beautifully he'd been made and how much he'd grown since being planted here by the stream. He felt down to his roots and was happy to tell that they went down deep into the soil. All in all, he knew that he had a lot to be thankful for.

Well, In Tree-land life was going on pretty much as normal. Righteous and his friends kept enjoying the blessing of where they had been planted. They enjoyed listening to Tree-lord and his wisdom about how to live as a tree. At the same time, Wicked and his friends kept on ignoring Tree-lord and lived life the way they wanted to.

But then one day, a day when no one was expecting it, a huge storm came up. It started in one part of Tree-land far away, but soon covered the whole of Tree-land. It was a storm like never before. And it didn't seem to let up. It kept on raining and raining. The winds blew harder and harder. And the lightning and thunder made the trees really worried. It affected Wicked and his friends but it also affected Righteous and his friends. No tree was left untouched by the storm.

The trees got together and gave the storm a name... a strange name... they called it COVID-19.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILDREN:

1. What does Tree-land represent?
2. Who is the Tree-lord?
3. What does the stream represent?
4. Who is the Prince of Darkness?
5. What do the names "Righteous" and "Wicked" tell you about those trees?
6. If you were a tree in this story, would you like to be "Righteous" or "Wicked"? Why?
7. Why was it important for Righteous to stay close to the stream?
8. What do you think is going to happen next?

Parents, you can stop now to wait until tomorrow to read Part 2 with your children, or you can continue on now.

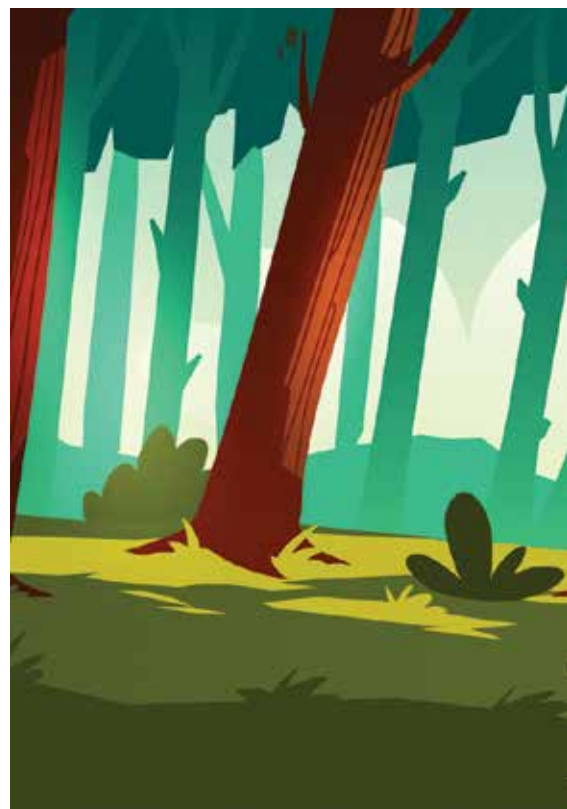
PART 2

The trees got together and gave the storm a name... a strange name... they called it COVID-19.

Not that there hadn't been storms before in Tree-land. Of course, there had. But this storm with its strange name had the trees worried more than ever before. Never before in Tree-land had all the trees been talking about the same thing all at the same time. And the more the trees talked about it, the more afraid of the storm they became. In the meantime, it kept on raining and hailing. The thunder and lightning didn't stop; night and day it stormed; on and on it went. The important trees in Tree-land tried to find ways to stop the storm. Most of them thought they were smart enough to work out a way to make the storm go away. But they couldn't.

And Wicked and his friends? Normally when a storm came, they just shrugged it off and kept right on living their lives once the storm had blown over. Even during a storm, they normally didn't worry too much. But this storm was going on for so long and was so bad that Wicked and his friends couldn't keep living the way they were used too. And that got them really worried... scared even. Wicked and most of his friends felt like they were going crazy.

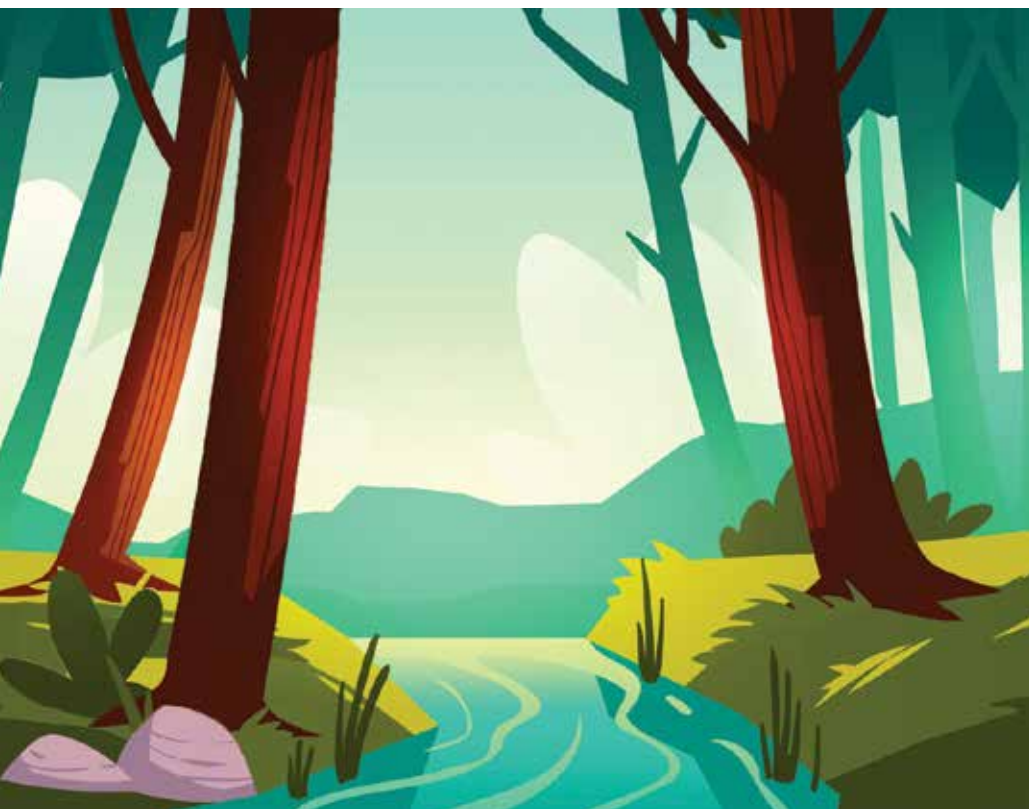
They could talk about nothing but the storm. They wondered where the storm came from. They talked on and on about how long it would be before the storm stopped. They kept looking at the dark grey sky. Every time there was a loud thunderclap they wrapped their branches around their trunk to block out the horrible sound. Every time there was a bolt of lightning they ducked down close to the ground, scared that they were going to get hit. What was even worse was the wind – it blew off their leaves! It was blowing so hard that Wicked and his friends were finding it really difficult to stay standing upright. They could feel that their roots didn't have a good grip on the soil, and they



kept worrying that at any moment a huge gust of wind might topple them over and blow them away.

Righteous was feeling the storm too. "This sure is a bad one," he said to himself. But because Righteous had been planted close to the stream and had spent years listening to Tree-lord's wisdom he knew something that Wicked and his friends didn't know. He knew that Tree-lord, the one who had made all the trees in Tree-land, and who had made Tree-land itself, was in control of the storm. He knew something else too. He knew that sometimes Tree-lord would send the storms into Tree-land. He would do that to make all the trees think about how important it was to stay planted by the stream that Righteous and his friends were planted next to. Righteous knew that Tree-lord wanted all the trees to realize that their roots had to go down deep into that soil and drink water from that stream.

And thinking about that made Righteous feel especially blessed and thankful for where he had been planted.



He called up his friend *Holy* who was planted further down the same stream. “What’s the storm like out your way?” he asked.

“It’s pretty bad and it’s been going on for so long,” replied *Holy*, sounding a bit tired.

“You standing strong?” asked *Righteous*. “Have you been damaged at all by the storm?” Right then and there, a huge rush of wind like nothing *Holy* had ever felt before suddenly blew up against him. His leaves were flapping back and forth furiously; his branches were creaking and bending; the fruit hanging from his limbs were bobbing around like crazy.

Righteous could hear it all through the phone. “*Holy*,” he called out, “you still there?”

“Yes, I am,” called back *Holy* over the noise.

“Aren’t you a bit worried?” asked *Righteous*, anxiously.

“A little,” replied *Holy*. “But remember, *Righteous*, that *Tree-lord* has promised us that if we stay planted by his stream, if we make sure that our

roots are always deep into the rich soil he has put there, then no storm, not even this one, will be able to blow us over.”

“I know, it’s amazing isn’t it?” said *Righteous*. “We do need to remember that. And I’ve noticed something else. Even now, even though this storm has been going on for a long time, and even though I am feeling it in my branches, my leaves are still staying green. And do you know what else I’ve noticed, *Holy*?”

“What’s that?” gasped *Holy*, as he strained under the power of the storm.

“My fruit is still growing... even now, it’s still getting bigger and juicier! Isn’t that incredible?!”

“I had noticed that too,” said *Holy*, “although I thought it might just be my imagination. But it isn’t, is it? It’s true! My fruit ...” he paused to take a breath, given the wind... “my fruit is still growing too!”

“I knew it would be,” laughed *Righteous*. “It’s because *Tree-lord* planted us next to his stream. It’s here, and only here, that trees can stay strong and have their roots deep enough to be

able to stand up against the biggest of storms.”

Holy laughed with happiness too. “Well,” he said, “let’s make sure that we keep drinking our water from this stream. Let’s keep listening to *Tree-lord* and then we don’t ever have to be scared, doesn’t matter how long this storm goes on for, or how much worse it gets.”

“It’s true,” said *Righteous*. “We know that *Tree-lord* is in control of the storm and will always be there for all of us who are planted along this stream. He knows us, he knows what we are going through with this storm, and he will always give us what we need.”

“Thanks for the reminder, *Righteous*, I appreciate it very much,” said *Holy*. “Let’s keep in touch and remember, never uproot yourself from next to that stream!”

“Thanks,” said *Righteous*, “I won’t. This is by far the best stream in the whole of *Tree-land* and with *Tree-lord*’s help I’ll stay here forever.” RP

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILDREN:

1. Why does God sometimes send terrible things, like disease, into our world?
2. It sounds like *Holy* was having a hard time with the storm. How come he could stay standing?
3. It’s amazing that even in the storm both *Righteous* and *Holy*’s fruit kept on growing. How was that possible?
4. What do you think the fruit on *Righteous* and *Holy* represent? What fruit do you have in your life?
5. Your Dad and Mom probably talk a lot about COVID-19. Are you scared? Why don’t you have to be?
6. Right at the end of the story, *Righteous* says that he is going to stay next to the stream “with *Tree-lord*’s help.” What does that mean?

*Rev. Rodney Vermeulen
is the pastor of the
Attercliffe Canadian
Reformed Church.*



ARE BANS ON CONVERSION THERAPY ACTUALLY BANS ON RELIGIOUS CONVERSION IN DRAG

by André Schutten

An ongoing concern for international religious freedom advocates is the existence of laws banning conversion from one religion to another. For example, it is illegal to convert a Muslim to Christianity in Pakistan, to convert a Buddhist to Christianity in Myanmar, and to convert a Hindu to Christianity in some states in India.

In Canada, with its Christian roots, we understand that while faith includes outward observance, Christianity is ultimately a matter of the heart, a matter of Whom we love and trust. From that springs the understanding that the civil government cannot compel belief by force or law, and it is fruitless to try. At least, that is how it used to be.

AS NATIONALISM RISES, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FALLS

Meghan Fischer, writing of this phenomenon in the *Penn State Journal*

of Law & International Affairs, explains the international consensus that there is (or ought to be) a right to change one's religious beliefs. There is also an internationally recognized right "to try to convert others by means of non-coercive persuasion."¹

But Fischer suggests that there are growing nationalist impulses in Southeast Asia such that "conversions away from the majority religion... are [seen as] a threat to the country." Laws banning religious conversion are then selectively enforced only to ban conversion from the majority religion to a minority religion.

Heiner Bielefeldt, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief from 2010 to 2016, notes that violations of the right to convert have "become a human rights problem of great concern." He explains that religious freedom is abused

...in the interest of promoting national identity or protecting societal homogeneity, or under other pretexts such as maintaining political and national security... In addition, the rights of converts or those trying non-coercively to convert others are sometimes questioned in principle.²

Such bans on religious conversion result in stories such as this one,

Three Christians were arrested in the village of Vadi in [India] on December 16th after fellow villagers accused them of practising illegal medicine. They spent 11 days in jail before being released on bail. Pastor Mukam Kiraad, along with two members of his church... were shocked to learn they were charged with medical malpractice after praying for physical healing.³

CANADA'S VERSION?

This story of Christian prayer resulting in criminal charges reminded me of the conversion therapy bans that have been proposed or passed in Canada at all three levels of civil government. And I wondered:

Are bans on conversion therapy a species of religious conversion bans?

In order to answer this question, we need to investigate and understand:

- 1) what the majority religion in Canada is,
- 2) what true conversion is and how it is brought about in Christianity; and
- 3) what conversion therapy bans in Canada are actually proposing to do.

When we put these three things together, we can answer our question.

1. Canada's established religion

While Canadians follow many gods (theistic or material like money, sex, or sports), there is one dominant religion. And it isn't Christianity or Islam.

To understand what it is, we can look to the opening chapter of Nancy Pearcey's excellent book *Love Thy Body*, where she explains the "radically fragmented, fractured, dualistic view of the human being" that has developed in Western culture. She calls it *personhood theory*.

Personhood theory says the true "you" – the actual person – is not the *body* you have but what you *feel* you are, your *sense of self*. If you feel you are mostly female but have a male body, the important part of you is that inside sense of who you are. The body is secondary, and so it can be mutilated and chemically altered to conform to the "real" you. This type of thinking slips into Christianity too, where some well-meaning Christians have embraced the idea that your soul might be female while your body is male, for example.

This is a dualistic understanding of the human person that, instead of viewing our mind and our body as an integrated whole, sees them as two

separable pieces. It declares: you are your mind; you are not your body.

It's also a deeply religious view, isn't it? You can't prove in a science lab that the "soul" or your "internal sense of self" is actually female when the biological body is genetically and anatomically male. You have to accept it on *faith*.

And yet the idea that the *human* person – who you really are – is something wholly different from the human *body* is taken as an article of faith by the legal, political, academic, journalistic, and (increasingly) economic leaders of our Western culture.

Take, for example, the argument that the pre-born child is "human" but not "a person." That's a religious claim. It takes blind faith to agree (as most pro-choice advocates do) that the pre-born child is a complete and a unique living human being, but not a person deserving rights. A Christian would respond that the pre-born child is a person *because* they are human – an observable, provable, biological fact – and therefore should be afforded the same protection in law as any other human.

Or consider the British Columbia Court of Appeal in the *A.B. v. C.D.* case: the court assumed and adopted the language at the beginning of the hearing that a biological female was, *in fact*, a boy, despite this being contested by the father of the child.

Philosopher Robert P. George, in a long-form article titled "Gnostic Liberalism," explains that this separation and elevation of the mind or the soul over the body is actually the outworking of the millennia-old heresy of Gnosticism, back in new clothes. It sees the soul as a "ghost in a machine." George says that in this new version of the Gnostic religion, "the body serves at the pleasure of the conscious self, to which it is subject."⁴

Your religious view on the nature of the body and the soul has implications for all kinds of social, legal and moral issues, like transgenderism and sex-changes. The Christian view, says Robert George, is that "respect for the person demands respect for the body, which rules out mutilation and other direct attacks on human health... Changing sexes is a metaphysical impossibility because it is a biological impossibility." Pearcey agrees, writing, "Christianity holds that body and soul together form an integrated unity – that the human being is an embodied soul."

Robert George concludes that this Gnostic view of the human being (he also describes it as "expressive individualism") is now the dominant orthodoxy among Western cultural elites. It

provides the metaphysical [i.e. religious] foundation of the social practices against which Orthodox Jews and faithful Christians... contend today: abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, sexual liberation, the redefinition of marriage, and gender ideology.

There should be no doubt in our minds: *Canada has a dominant religion*. That religion has various names, but biblical Christianity is not one of them. Neo-Gnosticism, secular humanism, expressive individualism, or moral therapeutic deism; all describe the dominant religion, a belief system with a destructive view of mankind that stands in sharp contrast to the beautiful truth of the biblical view of man: human beings created as either male or female – body and soul, an integrated whole – in the image of God.

Now let's explore the concept of true conversion and then apply it to this dominant religion.

Canada has a dominant religion. *That religion has various names, but biblical Christianity is not one of them.*

2. The true conversion of man

In a word, conversion is change. Theologian Steven Lawson explains,

In the biblical sense, conversion means a turning—a spiritual turning away from sin in repentance and to Christ in faith. It is a dramatic turning away from one path in order to pursue an entirely new one. ...The entire person—mind, affections, and will—is radically, completely, and fully changed in conversion.⁵

The true repentance or conversion of man, explains the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 88-90), “is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new.”⁶ The dying of the old nature “is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin, and more and more to hate it and flee from it”⁷ and the coming to life of the new nature “is a heartfelt joy in God through Christ, and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.”⁸

So, for those who convert to Christianity from Hinduism or Islam or atheism (and there are plenty of biographies describing these conversions), there is a radical break – emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, volitionally – from the ideas and practices of the previous religious system to love and embrace and follow Jesus Christ as Lord in every aspect of life. This pattern of conversion is also true for those who convert to Christianity from the mainstream religion of Canada: the secular humanist and Gnostic religion. A convert will come to reject the ideas, practices, and affections of the false religion and embrace instead the person and work of Christ Jesus. *They will change.*

Now, total change might not be immediate and will involve struggles of various kinds. Fellow Christians must love and walk alongside a new convert, encouraging them day by day to engage the struggle and embrace their newfound freedom in Christ. And the change will result in changes of lifestyle, of identity, of affections, turning away from the Gnostic religion’s

view of humankind and embracing the Christian understanding.

What is also important to know is how conversion is brought about. It is not forced; it cannot be. The Canons of Dort (at ch. 3/4, art. 16) puts it beautifully:

this divine grace of regeneration does not act upon men as if they were blocks and stones and does not take away the will and its properties, or violently coerce it, but makes the will spiritually alive, heals it, corrects it, pleasantly and at the same time powerfully bends it (Psalm 51:12; Philippians 2:13).

Conversion is a wonderful work of God, by His Spirit, begun usually through the sharing of the gospel “which God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul” (Canons of Dort, ch. 3/4, art. 17). The gospel is spread by word and example, not by sword. When the Church fulfills her calling to go and make disciples of all nations, preaching the gospel to all people, the Spirit is at work changing hearts.

3. What conversion therapy bans in Canada do

Across the country, in various provinces and municipalities, and in Parliament as well, conversion therapy bans have been proposed (and most have passed), outlawing so-called “conversion therapy.” As ARPA Canada explains in our policy report on conversion therapy, the devil is in the details: how one defines conversion therapy determines how bad such a ban would be. And it also determines whether it might rise to the level of a religious conversion ban.

Kristopher Wells, an outspoken activist on conversion therapy, defines conversion therapy this way:

Conversion “therapy” (also known as “reparative therapy,” “reintegrative therapy,” or “sexual orientation and gender identity change efforts”) is any form of treatment, including

individual talk therapy, behavioural or aversion therapy, group therapy treatments, spiritual prayer, exorcism, and/or medical or drug-induced treatments, which attempt to actively change someone’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Notice what this very influential activist has done. He intentionally and deceptively combines prayer and talk therapy with long-discredited and generally unacceptable practices like aversion therapy (think electric shock therapy). And yet his definition has been used in modified forms in both the City of Calgary’s recently passed bylaw and in Bill C-8, the federal government’s proposed criminal ban on conversion therapy. ARPA Canada’s ongoing concern with both laws is that the definitions of conversion therapy are incredibly broad and misleading. At the Calgary City Council deliberations over their bylaw, multiple lawyers, pastors, and citizens (same-sex attracted and otherwise) expressed grave concern that the bill would prohibit the advertising, teaching, or application of parts of the gospel: the Christian understanding of man, including sexual ethics, sense of self, the effect of sin on human nature, and so on. Yet the bylaw passed with no real opposition within city council.

When asked, some defenders of these bans, like federal Justice Minister David Lametti, explain that anyone who has “non-judgemental” or “open-ended” conversations about identity would not be captured by such prohibitions. But who judges what is “non-judgemental” or “open-ended”?

Another troubling aspect is that many conversion therapy bans only prohibit “conversion” in one direction: they ban reducing homosexual activity or desire and reducing gender dysphoria. That is the explicit language of Bill C-8. This raises huge practical questions: if a teenager is consuming an inordinate amount of pornography, can they be told to “reduce” this behaviour only if involves heterosexual



pornography? A plain reading of the proposed law would prohibit an experienced counsellor from helping a child struggling with gender dysphoria to be comfortable with their body. And there are enough documented cases of school teachers encouraging children to “explore” or question their sexual identity. Why should that be permitted, but not vice versa? These one-directional prohibitions are steeped in the neo-Gnostic religion.

SO, ARE BANS ON CONVERSION THERAPY BANNING RELIGIOUS CONVERSION?

Conversion therapy bans do not outright ban religious conversion from neo-Gnosticism to Christianity in the same way that converting someone from Hinduism to Christianity is banned in parts of India.

But these conversion therapy bans definitely impede the ability of the

Christian community (whether pastors or counsellors or even parents or friends) to persistently teach the Christian sexual ethic and to explain how the good news of the gospel applies to all of life. Banning advertising or defining businesses to include churches in the context of conversion therapy bans are examples of the civil government limiting the reach of the gospel to people within the LGBTQ+ community. “How then 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). If bylaws and criminal prohibitions make the Christian community think twice about sharing the gospel with someone who currently embraces the Gnostic religion, then conversion therapy bans seem to be a sub-species of religious conversion bans.

...these conversion therapy bans definitely impede the ability of the Christian community to persistently teach the Christian sexual ethic.

This said, it is helpful for us, as Christians, to remember the approach we take to conversion. Nancy Pearcey says it well:

As we work through controversial moral issues, it is crucial to bear in mind the main goal. It is not first of all to persuade people to change their behaviour. It is to tear down barriers to becoming Christian. No matter who we are addressing, or what moral issue the person is struggling with, their first need is to hear the gospel and experience the love of God. (*Love Thy Body*, p. 260)

When we start with that, and pray and trust the Spirit to do his work, we should be confident that God will convert those whom he wills, no matter what the Gnostics plan to ban. RP

ENDNOTES

¹ Meghan G. Fischer’s “Anti-Conversion Laws and the International Response” in the *Penn State Journal of Law & International Affairs*, Volume 6, Issue 1

² United Nations, General Assembly, *Elimination of all forms of religious intolerance: Interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief*, A/67/303 (13 August 2012), at para. 15, available from undocs.org/en/A/67/303

³ ““Illegal Practice of Medicine” Charges for Praying” posted to *VOMCanada.com* on January 9, 2020

⁴ Robert P. George’s “Gnostic Liberalism” posted to *FirstThings.com* in December 2016

⁵ Steven Lawson’s “What is true conversion?” posted to *Ligonier.org* on Apr 3, 2017

⁶ Rom 6:1-11; 1 Cor 5:7; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5-10

⁷ Ps 51:3, 4, 17; Joel 2:12, 13; Rom 8:12, 13; 2 Cor 7:10

⁸ Ps 51:8, 12; Is 57:15; Rom 5:1; 14:17; Rom 6:10, 11; Gal 2:20

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THE SON OF THE CLOTHMAKER

– a slice of the English Reformation

During the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553), Maurice Abbot, a clothmaker in Guildford, Surrey, England, and his wife Alice, became committed Protestants. And during their lifetime it wasn't always easy to be so.

Edward, the boy king, tubercular and frail, had the distinction of being the first English king who was raised Protestant. Zealous for the Reformed cause, if he had lived longer, the Church of England might well have become more explicitly Protestant. But God took him at the tender age of sixteen. After Edward's death it became difficult for Maurice and Alice to confess their faith publicly because Edward's half sister, "Bloody" Mary Tudor, came to power. She vigorously tried to overturn the Reformation, and during her five-year reign, over 300 Protestants were burned at the stake.

But times of persecution vanished when Elizabeth I ascended to the English throne in 1558. The Abbots rejoiced in her coronation. They breathed a sigh of relief as they resided peaceably in a cottage nestled beneath some trees in close proximity to the Wey River, openly able to practice their faith.

QUITE THE FISH STORY

Then, in the year 1562, Alice Abbot was heavily pregnant. Uncomfortable and unable sleep one night, Alice

eventually fell into an uneasy slumber and into a strange dream. She dreamt that if she but ate a jackfish, (a fish of the pike family), the baby she carried would become a great person and rise to a situation of prominence. A peculiar dream indeed!

Maurice Abbot worked diligently at his trade but when all was said and done, clothworking was not a profitable business. The finishing of woven woolen cloth, was hard labor and paid very little. Alice related her unusual fish dream to Maurice and he shrugged. A few weeks later, due to give birth any day, she fetched a pail of water from the nearby Wey River. Sweating with exertion, she lifted the pail out of the water, and was amazed to see a jackfish splash about in the bucket. Having had a craving for jackfish ever since her dream, she went home, cooked the fish and ate it. Maurice shrugged again. But the narrative became known about town. Folks enjoy a good story.

As it is with good stories, this one circulated outside the perimeters of the town of Guildford. After the baptism of the child, a few wealthy persons called on Maurice and Alice, offering to be patrons of the newborn baby who had been named George. Considering their low-born and rather impoverished condition, as well as the fact that they had little hope of sending their children to school, the couple

thankfully accepted the provision.

Now whether or not George's fortune would have prospered were it not for the jackfish tale is a matter of providential dispute. At any rate, George, as well as his older brother Robert, attended the free Royal Grammar School in Guildford and were taught reading, writing and Latin grammar. The school was free in name only; pupils consisted of those who could afford to pay the fees.

Because they were healthy, good-natured and of quick minds, the patrons sent the boys on to higher education. To make a long story short, George eventually graduated from Oxford. The school was a Puritan stronghold at that time, with teachers who admired Calvin and Augustine. Grounded in Reformed theology, George felt called to become a minister. Regarded as an excellent preacher, his sermons drew large, listening crowds.

ARCHBISHOP GEORGE!

The years flew by and in 1611, George the clothmaker's son, rose to the rank of Archbishop of Canterbury. A bit of a gargantuan step - from the humble cottage on the banks of the Wey to Lambeth Palace on the banks of the Thames. His father and mother had died by this time. Dying within ten days of one another, they had been married for fifty-eight years. Perhaps it can be argued that their passing was an

even more gargantuan step than that of their son George - from the humble cottage on the banks of the Wey to Everlasting Joy on the banks of the River of Life.

Prior to becoming archbishop, George had been selected by King James I of England, together with other scholars, to translate the Bible.

Calvinistic in theology, favoring the Puritans for their simplicity in worship, George Abbot remained within the Church of England. He never married and was a solitary man. Some considered him of a gloomy nature, unsmiling and rather somber; others counted him true to his principles and kind.

Having attained to the highest church office in England, that of archbishop, George now lived in Lambeth Palace in London. Wealthy, respected and honored, he became a personal adviser to King James I. James had been brought up as a member of the Protestant Church of Scotland and often heeded the archbishop's advice.

But this "Reformed" advice did not make George popular with those who had Roman Catholic leanings and at times put him out of favor with the king as well.

For example, in 1618 James I published "the declaration of sports." It was a declaration that allowed for Sabbath amusements. The archbishop regarded this declaration a clear temptation to break one of the Ten Commandment. James I had ordered this decree to be read out loud from the pulpit in all of England's churches. George willfully disobeyed his earthly king's order. He forbade the reading of the proclamation in his parish church. James I, rather fond of George, ignored his resistance, but it was not an easy time for the archbishop.

A year later, in 1619, George founded a hospital. Resolved within himself to devote some of his wealth to benefit others, he remembered with fondness and nostalgia the town of Guildford where he had been born and bred. He meant to

create work opportunities for his home town and he desired to support the elderly people living there. The health center was named Abbot's Hospital, or the Hospital of the Holy Trinity. Handsome inside, portraits of Abbot himself, of Wycliffe, of Foxe and of other Reformers, hung in the dining room.

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

Over the years the effects of being harassed by those who disliked him, physically wore George down. Being a large and rather sedentary man, his doctor advised him to get more exercise. Consequently, he often walked about for recreation. Hunting was in vogue and even an archbishop was able to partake in that sport. As a matter of fact, the gay, hallooing troop of huntsmen rarely left the courtyard without an ecclesiastical person present among them.

One night in July of 1621 found the archbishop in his library among all his

books. However, he was not reading but cleaning his fowling piece. His crossbow, as well, lay nearby on the heavy oak library table. One of his servants inquired whether or not he was planning on going hunting.

"Yes," he answered, "Lord Zouche has invited me to Bramhill House in Hampshire to hunt in his park there. It would be discourteous of me to refuse and the exercise will almost certainly do me some good." The next morning his servant saw him off. A groom rode at his side.

AN ARROW DEFLECTED

However, in the providence of God, a sad mishap occurred at Bramhill. While hunting with his crossbow at Lord Zouche's estate, the archbishop aimed and shot a barbed arrow at a deer. One of the gamekeepers, eagerly but carelessly beating the bush so that an animal might jump out for the hunters, suddenly appeared in the path of the party. The arrow which George



The arrow which George Abbot had just discharged, went awry.

Abbot had just discharged, went awry. Deflecting off a tree limb, it hit the gamekeeper.

The man, whose name was Peter Hawkins and who had been warned more than once to keep out of harm's way, was wounded. The arrow had lodged in an artery in his left arm. Within one hour the man had bled to death.

Horried, the archbishop was thrown into deep despair. Walking up and down the apartment he had been given, he refused to speak to visitors, constantly repeating: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." There was nothing anyone could do or say to comfort him.

Although the death was deemed an accidental homicide by all who had been present, George Abbot required the king's dispensation and pardon before he could resume his duties. Some of those who hated his Protestant policies sought his removal from office, insisting that a commission of inquiry be convened to examine what had happened in the accident. And

She dreamt that if she but ate a jackfish, (a fish of the pike family), the baby she carried would become a great person and rise to a situation of prominence.



A conscience is a gift from God and George Abbot had a strong one.

such was the devastation, grief and guilt that George felt that he withdrew from public life during the inquiry. He refused to preach, ordain, baptize, or pray publicly in a service, depressed and sick at heart. Many of his friends began to avoid him, a number claiming that one who had killed another man should not hold the highest church office in England.

Throughout the remainder of his life, George observed a monthly fast every Tuesday, the weekday on which the accident had taken place. He also settled an annuity of twenty pounds on Mrs. Hawkings, the gamekeeper's wife, an amount which soon brought her another husband.

Although eventually, George Abbot received a full royal pardon, the incident was not forgotten. In the

ensuing years, he also increasingly disagreed with the king's more liberal policies. Consequently, his influence at court dwindled. Although he still crowned Charles 1 in 1626, his became a minor role. More and more thwarted in leading the church, he was forced into early retirement although he remained as archbishop until his death.

A TWITTERING MOB

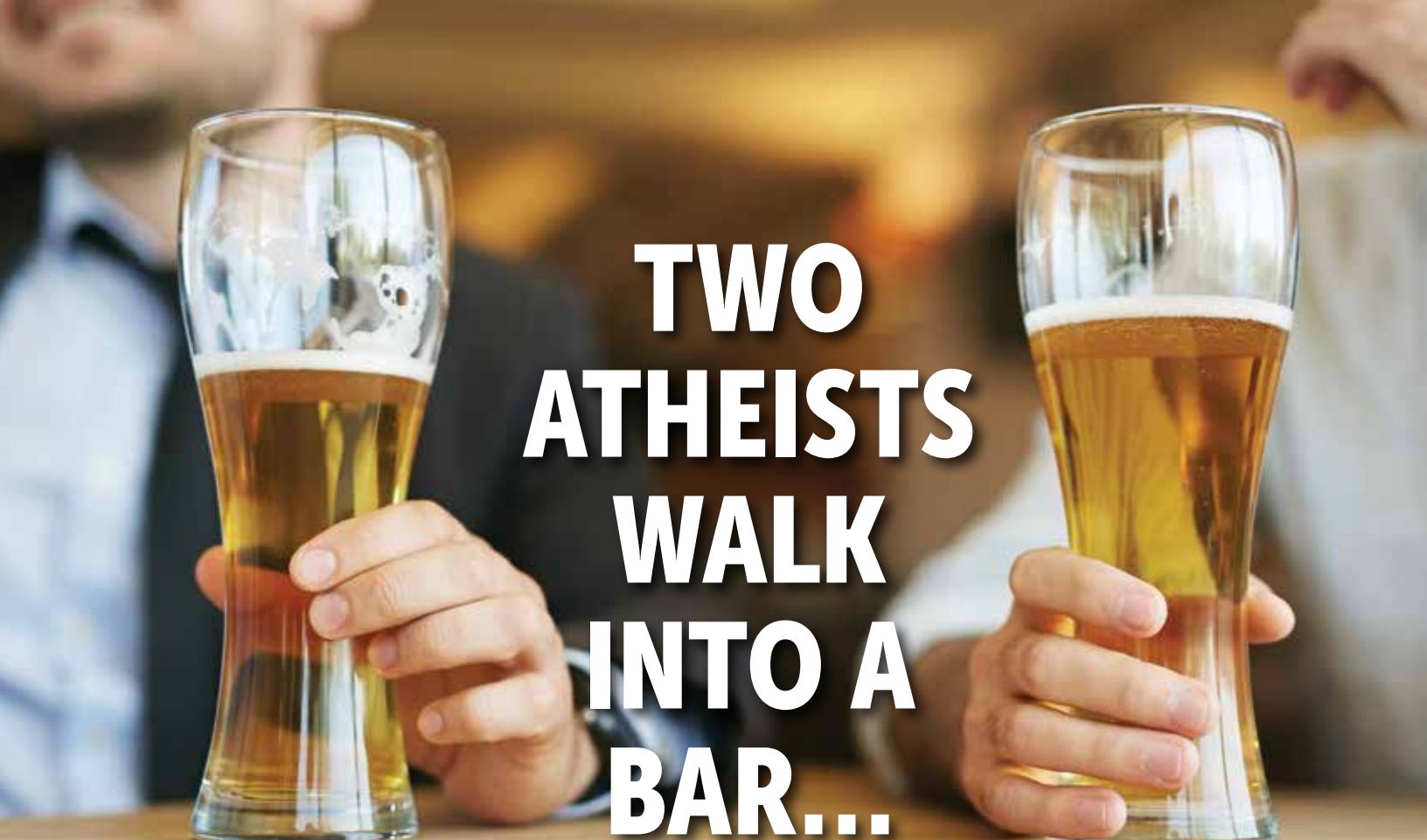
There is a story told of his last years. He was traveling by coach to his home, when a group of noisy women surrounded his carriage, harassing him with shouts and insults. Upon his entreating them to leave, they shouted: "Ye had best shoot an arrow at us then."

George Abbot, the clothmaker's son and Archbishop of Canterbury died in 1633 at age 71. He was buried at the Guildford Church. Throughout his life he acted according to his God-given conscience and was not afraid of opposing kings when Biblical principles were at stake.

A conscience is a gift from God and George Abbot had a strong one. Often suffering from depression, one of his major misdeeds seemed to haunt him right to the grave. Yet do all believers not have major misdeeds? For who has not had a hand in killing the Vinekeeper's Son? And who can plead the excuse of accidental homicide?

George Abbot was a clothmaker's son, but he was actually more than that. Alongside him, believers do well to remember that all who believe in Jesus Christ as their only Savior are, like George, Soulmaker's sons. RP

"...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." Gen. 2:7

A photograph of two hands holding tall, elegant glasses of beer with a thick head of foam. The background is blurred, showing other people in a bar setting. The title text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

TWO ATHEISTS WALK INTO A BAR...

by Gary DeMar

If there is no God, can there be morality?

I'm not asking whether atheists are moral people and do moral things. They do, but by what unimpeachable and ultimate standard?

An atheist might say that certain laws are good for the advancement of the species. But let's not forget that as an evolved species (according to atheism), we got here "red in tooth and claw." We evolved upward through violent means. We ascended the evolutionary ladder on the weaker evolutionary elements going back to the first signs of organic life that struggled to survive. Why has that process suddenly become immoral? Famed atheist Richard Dawkins wrote in his book *The Selfish Gene*, "We — and that means all living things — are survival machines programmed to propagate the digital database that did the programming."

According to Dawkins, the goal of genes is to survive so they can be

passed on to the next generation. *The Selfish Gene* has been described as "a disturbingly persuasive essay arguing that living things are little more than corporal vessels impelled to heed the primal dictates of selfish genes hellbent on their own replication and propagation."¹

These "selfish genes" don't have a moral compass. They are like the Terminator. Their only goal is to survive and replicate and pity the poor organism that stands in their way. Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson contend that:

"We need something to spur us against our usual selfish dispositions. Nature, therefore, has made us (via the rules) believe in a disinterested moral code, according to which we *ought* to help our fellow.... [E]thics as we understand it is an illusion fobbed off on us by our genes to get us to cooperate."²

Notice the equivocation: *as we understand it*. They don't know this. Furthermore, even if our genes evolved to do this (and there is no empirical evidence that they have), it does not mean that we are obligated to do what they have "fobbed off on us." Evolution is not about cooperation. It's about the survival of the fittest.

A few years ago, a group of atheists ran an ad campaign with this banner: "Relax: hell does not exist, or heaven either, enjoy your life." Who defines what gives someone joy and on what basis? The Declaration of Independence mentions "the pursuit of happiness." One person's happiness could be another person's dread. How do we know? The Declaration of Independence gives us a hint by stating that we are endowed by a "Creator with certain inalienable rights." There are moral boundaries to life, liberty, and happiness. We are not at liberty to do what we want to do because it makes us happy.

TWO ATHEISTS WALK INTO A BAR....

First Atheist: I noticed your banner that I should enjoy life because there's no hell. Do you mean that after death there won't be a God to judge me for what I do or don't do while I am alive?

Second Atheist: Yes. In fact, there won't be anyone or anything to judge you and me. There's no karma or transmigration of the soul. As the song says, "All we are is dust in the wind." Furthermore, God is a fictional character that humans created a long time ago to give meaning to life before there was science. When something in the world could not be explained, humans attributed the unknown to supernatural entities like gods and devils, spirits and sprites. Since the advent of science, we know that only matter matters. If it can't be seen under a microscope or its properties can't be measured, it doesn't exist. Invisible beings like gods, ghosts, and goblins can't exist in a world that is now defined by the physical sciences.

First Atheist: So, if I can't see it or examine it, it does not exist. If a claimed entity does not have any physical properties, it does not exist.

Second Atheist: Yes. Science has come a long way to remove all religious superstitions of the past. They're still with us, but our organization is working overtime to eliminate every vestige of religion and the supernatural from our world.

First Atheist: I'm so relieved. All my life I was taught that there was a divine being who brought the world into existence, expressed His character in a specific moral code, and one day would judge me based on how I measured up to that moral code. So, you're saying that no such entity exists and I'm free to enjoy life on my terms. I want to be sure about this. There's a lot riding on your belief system.

Second Atheist: Yes. As our banners say,

"Relax: hell does not exist, or heaven either, enjoy your life."

First Atheist: I'm so glad you said that. Your banner caught my attention and makes my life worth living. I have a purpose for living in the now. Any guilt I had is gone. Now give me all your money and the keys to your car. I also want the PIN numbers to all your accounts. If you don't do what I say, I'm going to blow your brains out.

Second Atheist: We are free to enjoy life as long as our enjoyment does not infringe upon the rights of others.

First Atheist: Who says? On what basis is this true and obligatory?

Second Atheist: It's common decency.

First Atheist: Who gets to determine what's decent?

Second Atheist: It's wrong to steal and murder.

First Atheist: No. At this moment in time, it's *unlawful* to steal and murder. Laws are social conventions that are a holdover from our superstitious religious past. Survival of the fittest is the true basis of non-religious evolutionary origins. Laws are constantly changing. That shows that there are no eternal moral absolutes. As atheists, we can't prove that moral absolutes exist since no one has ever seen a moral absolute or has been able to study one. They're like the phantasms we dismiss as being unreal.

Second Atheist: But there all kinds of moral absolutes that can be studied.

First Atheist: Show me one. You said that only the physical is real. God is not a material entity that can be studied by the standards of science, so He cannot exist. That's what we atheists claim. Show me the physical laws against murder and stealing. Of course, you can't because they don't exist given our materialist assumptions.

ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF EVOLUTION AND ATHEISM

William Provine (1942-2015) was an American historian of science and evolutionary biology, and more upfront than most on the implications of atheism.

"Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear — and these are basically Darwin's views. There are no gods, no purposes, no goal-directed forces of any kind. There is no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be dead. That's the end for me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning to life, and no free will for humans, either."

"No inherent moral or ethical laws exist, nor are there absolute guiding principles for human society. The universe cares nothing for us and we have no ultimate meaning in life."

Second atheist: Reason tells us that murder and stealing are wrong.

First Atheist: That's the best you can come up with? Reason? I think it's very reasonable to take your stuff because I'll enjoy all of its benefits. Your sign tells everyone to enjoy themselves. This is how I want to enjoy myself. Anyway, whose version of reason should I follow? Yours?

It seems reasonable to me to take your stuff since you aren't really being consistent with your belief system. You're holding on to the remnants of religion and the fictional worldview that it spawned. Every so-called tyrant (atheism can't say if anything is tyrannical) believed he was being ultimately reasonable. Adolf Hitler didn't believe he was being irrational. Neither did Lenin or Stalin, and they killed (not murdered) millions for what they claimed were very rational reasons. The French fought a revolution for the absoluteness of reason. Guess what? They took people's stuff and killed people in the name of reason and called it "virtue."

Second Atheist: But civilization depends on laws and morality.

First Atheist: A consistent atheist cannot account for meaning, morality, or rationality. If there is no judgment after death, then there is no difference between Adolf Hitler who killed 6 million Jews or Sir Nicholas Winton who organized the rescue of more than 600 Jewish children from the Nazi death camps. At death, given atheist assumptions, they are equal, nothing more than dust in the wind. Mao Zeong and Josef Stalin would argue that they were working for a world that they believed would bring the most joy for themselves and those like them. . . . Now that I think about it, I don't like this atheism thing. If I can rob and kill you with no eternal consequences, then other people can do the same to me.

Your banner is stupid. You need to think through your belief system before you end up like atheist

Madalyn Murray O'Hair "In 1995 she was kidnapped, murdered, and her body mutilated, along with her son Jon Murray and granddaughter Robin Murray O'Hair, by former American Atheist office manager David Roland Waters."

Waters must have said to himself, "Relax: Hell does not exist, or heaven either, enjoy your life." RP

This article first appeared on the website of American Vision: A Biblical Worldview Ministry (AmericanVision.org) and is reprinted here with permission.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ "Revolutionary Evolutionist" *Wired Magazine* (July 1, 1995).
- ² Michael Ruse and Edward O. Wilson, "Evolution and Ethics," *New Scientist*, 208 (October 17, 1985), 51.

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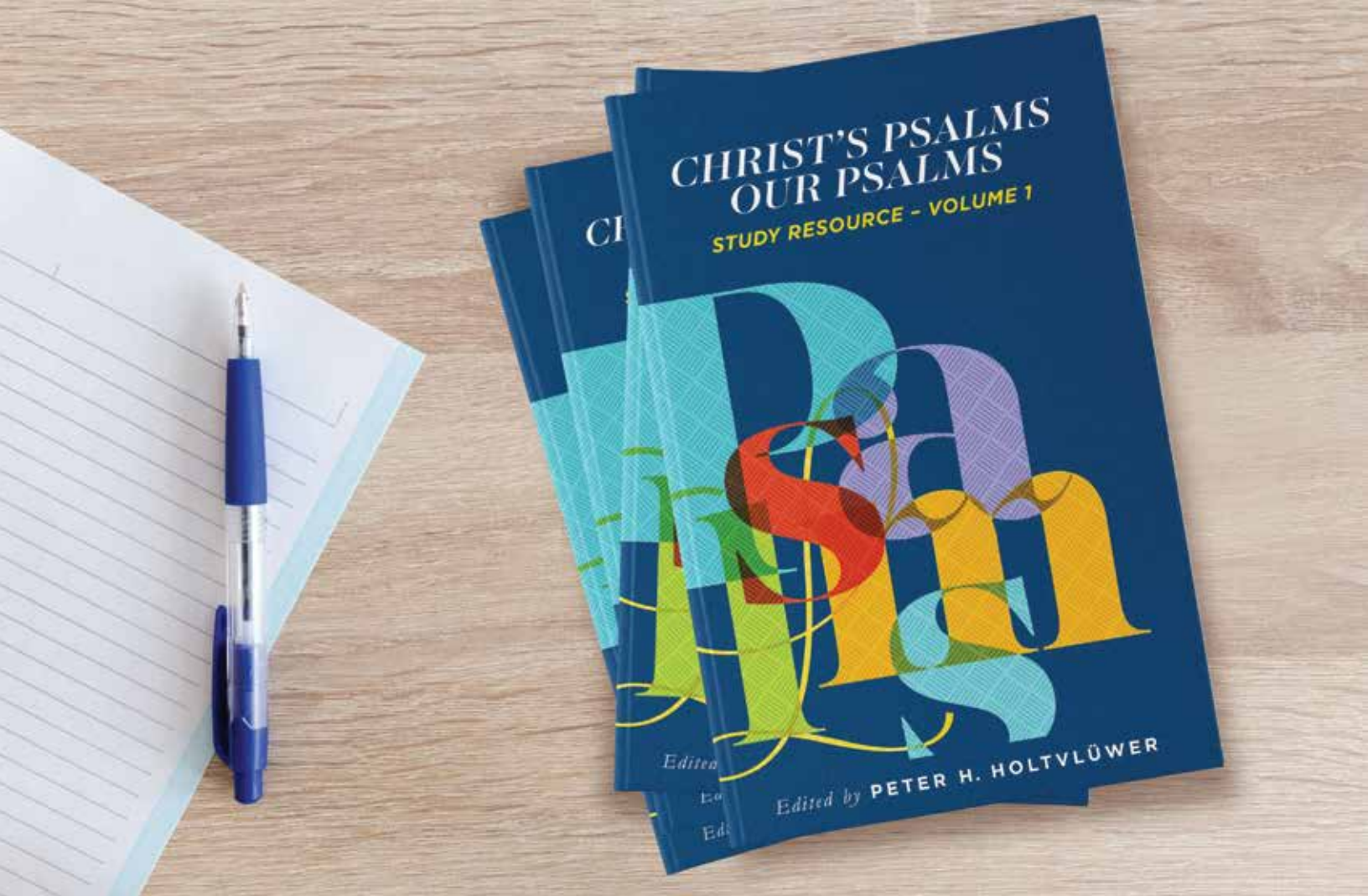


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ON PSALM 46

An excerpt from "Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Study Resource"

by Jason Van Vliet

What follows is an excerpt, on Psalm 46, from Reformed Perspective Press's new commentary "Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms - Study Resource." Written by pastors, it is meant as a resource for the everyday reader of the Psalms to better understand how they relate to Christ and to ourselves. The commentary's Christological focus sets it apart from other commentaries though, as the editor, Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer has noted the pastors take care never to "dream-up links to the Saviour but to base their conclusions on sound grammatical-historical exegesis." As you'll see, the resource also makes use of 16 different headings, to allow the busy reader to easily find the particular information they are looking for.

If you enjoy this peek at Psalm 46, you can order the 4-volume Psalms set at Press.ReformedPerspective.ca.

1. AUTHOR & PURPOSE

Psalm 46 is one of the best-known songs written by the sons of Korah (see further information at Pss. 42/43). As strongly as any another psalm, and perhaps more so, it assures God's people that no matter what may befall us, either as a result of natural catastrophes or at the hand of human opposition, the God of Jacob will protect us and provide for us, both now and for eternity.

2. SETTING

The superscription of this psalm does not give a specific historical setting, and there is nothing in the psalm that would tie it to any particular moment in redemptive history. Instead, with its dominant theme of God's sovereignty ensuring our security, this psalm has a timeless quality to it. Since the word *alamoth* in the superscription can also mean "maiden" or "virgin," some have suggested that this psalm was originally sung by a women's choir. Others have postulated that the term indicates that the tune should be played on the higher register of a musical instrument. Truth be told, though, since *alamoth* occurs in musical contexts only here and in 1 Chronicles 15:20, it is virtually impossible to ascertain its meaning.

3. TYPE & STRUCTURE

This psalm is a hymn of praise*. In this respect, among the psalms of the sons of Korah it falls in the same category as Psalms 47, 48, 84, and 87. This song is divided into three almost equal-length stanzas:

- vv. 1–3 – God is a refuge for us during calamities in creation
- vv. 4–7 – The God of Jacob is a fortress for us during combat with foes
- vv. 8–11 – The God of Jacob is a fortress for us until the end of time

Each stanza is demarcated with the transliterated word *selah**. In addition, the second and third stanzas culminate in an identical refrain: "The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (vv. 7, 11). The third stanza is unique in that it contains a direct address from God to us whereas in the rest of the psalm we address God.

4. POETIC ELEMENTS

This psalm is filled with unforgettable poetic **imagery**. Mountains plunge into the sea. The earth itself melts. Bows break and spears shatter. The Holy Spirit saturates our minds with one vivid word picture after another. He also pulls the psalm together through various repeated verbs. The mountains are "moved" (v. 2), but Jerusalem "shall *not* be moved" (v. 5), even though the kingdoms "totter" (v. 6). In each case the same Hebrew verb is used. Similarly, just as surely as the waters "roar" (v. 3), so also the nations "rage" (v. 6). Again in the original the same word is used. Parallel lines also contribute to the tight, cohesive structure of this psalm. "The city of God" is in line with "the holy habitation of the Most High" (v. 4), and knowing that "the LORD of hosts is with us" gives all the more weight to the expression "the God of Jacob is our fortress" (vv. 7, 11).

5. PLACEMENT WITHIN THE PSALTER

In 44:4 the sons of Korah made a personal confession that we all should echo: "You are my King, O God." This acclamation of God as our royal head continues in Psalm 45. These "verses to the king" (v. 1) portray an elaborate royal wedding ceremony. Furthermore, under the LORD's blessing this royal couple will receive royal children and so begin a dynasty with many princes all over the earth (v. 16). Indeed, from nation to nation and from generation to generation, the name of

PSALM 46 (NASB)

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change
And though the mountains slip
into the heart of the sea;

³ Though its waters roar *and*
foam,
Though the mountains quake at
its swelling pride. *Selah.*

⁴ There is a river whose streams
make glad the city of God,
The holy dwelling places of the
Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of her, she
will not be moved;
God will help her when morning
dawns.

⁶ The nations made an uproar,
the kingdoms tottered;
He raised His voice, the earth
melted.

⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our
stronghold. *Selah.*

⁸ Come, behold the works of the
Lord,
Who has wrought desolations in
the earth.

⁹ He makes wars to cease to the
end of the earth;
He breaks the bow and cuts the
spear in two;

He burns the chariots with fire.

¹⁰ "Cease *striving* and know that I
am God;

I will be exalted among the
nations, I will be exalted in the
earth."

¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our
stronghold. *Selah.*

the King will be remembered.

At the same time, the **nations** will not naturally come to the point of exulting in the LORD. Quite the opposite, they will have to be brought to this point. For this reason, before the “princes of the people gather as the people of the God of Abraham,” as we hear in 47:9, the LORD must do something to subdue them in Psalm 46. Though these nations may roar against the King of kings, his people, and his city (v. 6), the God of Jacob will silence them and insist upon his divine prerogative to be exalted among the nations (v. 10). To sum up, then, the royal expectation of 45:17 becomes a wonderful reality in 47:9 but only through the mighty decree and work of the LORD in 46:10.

In addition, Psalms 46–48 form a sub-unit of psalms that focuses on Jerusalem, God’s chosen city. This focus on the city of our God is explicit in Psalms 46 and 48, and if we take into consideration the setting of Psalm 47 as connected to the return of the ark to Jerusalem, then all three psalms form a compact litany of praise from within the walls of **Zion** to the God of Zion.

The interrelated themes of Zion and kingship combine to serve as an echo of Psalm 2:6 where both are mentioned right beside each other: “As for me, I have set *my King* on *Zion*, my holy hill.” Notice how both are dear to the LORD. He calls the king “*my King*” and he identifies Zion as “*my holy hill*.” Since he holds this person and this place near to his heart, it is not at all surprising that the Holy Spirit expands on these themes in this section of the Psalter.

6. KEY WORDS

- **Refuge** (Heb. root *hsh*, v. 1); *fortress* (vv. 7, 11) – Normally speaking, a refuge (v. 1) or fortress (vv. 7, 11) is a place where people are safe from calamity and combat. Remarkably, in this psalm the refuge is not a place but a Person, namely, the God of Jacob. Finding our refuge in God is a common theme in the Psalms (e.g., 14:6; 61:3; 62:8; 73:28).
- **River** (v. 4) – In both the ancient and modern worlds people tend to build cities by rivers or other large sources of fresh water. Think of Cairo on the Nile, Babylon on the Euphrates, New York on the Hudson, and Vancouver on the Fraser. Yet the inspired irony here is that Jerusalem is not situated on the banks of a river. The Jordan River is about thirty kilometres to the east of the city walls. In the days of the sons of Korah, Jerusalem’s main source of water was the Gihon spring, yet in faith they trust that since the LORD is in their midst he himself will provide for them as abundantly as if their city sat on the banks of the mighty Nile.
- **The LORD of hosts** (vv. 7, 11) – God’s personal name is Yahweh, or I AM WHO I AM (Ex. 3:14), or the LORD, as it is often printed in our Bible translations. About 250 times in the OT and twice in this psalm God’s personal name is

combined with “hosts” to form Yahweh *Sebaoth*. A host is a big army or a large multitude of creatures. Thus, the LORD of hosts is the supreme commander of the armies of heaven (i.e., the angels) and all the nations and creatures on the earth. He also commands the heavenly hosts, which are the billions of stars in the night sky.

7. UNUSUAL WORDS OR EXPRESSIONS

- *Very present help* (v. 1) – Literally this verse speaks of help that is easily found. You don’t have to go searching high and low for God’s help. He is always right at hand, ready to help whenever and wherever his people need his assistance.
- *Heart of the sea* (v. 2) – This poetic expression describes not only the deepest part of the sea (Ezek. 27:27) but also possibly a geographical point that is far away from the shore of the sea (Ezek. 27:25). Today we might say “in the middle of the sea.”
- *Earth melts* (v. 6) – The verb used here means either “to totter” (cf. 75:4) or “to melt” (cf. Jer. 49:23). In either case the earth, which is normally so stable, now becomes utterly undone simply at the voice of God. This same God has set a day on which heaven and earth and its very elements will be dissolved by fire (2 Peter 3:10, 12).

8. MAIN MESSAGE

Summing up the message of this psalm in one sentence, we might put it this way: God is our fortress, therefore we need not **fear**. Although many psalms serve as an antidote to anxiety, this psalm does so in a particularly powerful way because each stanza provides another layer of assurance until, by God’s grace, we walk away with a calm and confident heart.

The first stanza sets calamities in creation before our eyes. In fact, the sons of Korah highlight some of the most extreme events one could imagine. Throughout the course of history there have been terrible windstorms, violent earthquakes, overwhelming floods, and horrific plagues, but the terra firma remains firm. Added to that, centuries, yes, millennia have passed but Mount Baker is still Mount Baker and Mount Everest is still Mount Everest. However, what if that all changed one day? What if the earth itself gave way (v. 2a) and melted (v. 6)? What if the seemingly unmoveable mountains were picked up and tossed into the middle of the sea (v. 2b)? Or what if such a furious tsunami crashed ashore that even the solid granite mountains began to shiver and tremble (v. 3)? Obviously, these are extreme events, not unlike those things that the Lord has prophesied concerning the last days (e.g., Isa. 24:18; 2 Peter 3:10–12). Yet even if such cataclysms begin to occur, God’s people can confess, “We will not fear” (v. 2). Is this unfounded bravado? No, this is confidence that comes from acknowledging the God of all creation as “our refuge and strength” (v. 1). Even cataclysm

comes “not by chance but from his fatherly hand” (LD 10), so God’s people can find in him a refuge that is greater than the most extreme disaster.

The second stanza shifts our attention from the raging seas to the quiet waters of a river with its streams. There is a deep irony in water. When it rises and rages (v. 3a) it can cause destruction and death. Yet when it flows gently it sustains life, refreshes the parched tongue, and even gives joy to an entire city (v. 4). The city in view in this psalm, though, is not just any city; it is God’s city, his holy habitation, the city of Jerusalem. The river being described is not just any river. As explained above (see *Key Words*), Jerusalem did not have a large, natural river flowing within walking distance of its houses yet in faith the citizens of this city confess that since “God is in the midst of her” (v. 5), they will surely receive all that they need from his hand, especially the still waters that restore the soul and symbolize regeneration for the entire person (cf. Ps. 23:2–3; Titus 3:5). With this truth implanted in our hearts, God’s people do not even need to fear mighty armies or fierce nations that may march against them. The God of Jacob, the Chief Cosmic Commander, before whom no enemy can stand, only needs to speak once and the very earth itself will melt (v. 6). Since *he* is our fortress, we are assured that no sword or soldier will separate us from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:35).

The third stanza pulls together the LORD’s sovereignty over creation (“desolations on the earth,” v. 8) and all armies (v. 9). In fact, the LORD is so comprehensively sovereign that he can not only direct the outcome of a war, but he can defeat war itself so that even battles themselves become obsolete (v. 9). This last stanza also contains a dramatic pause as the LORD of hosts himself speaks. All must be silent before this almighty God. All must be silent, humble themselves, and exalt him. God’s people too must be silent and set their anxieties aside knowing that with the God of Jacob as our fortress (v. 11), we need not, and will not, fear (v. 2). Believers today have even more reason to be confidently calm since our Saviour has ascended the throne at God’s right hand, been given the name above every name, rules over all authorities, and will one day hear every tongue confess him as Lord (Phil. 2:9–11).

9. CHRIST CONNECTION

The connections between Psalm 46 and our Saviour Jesus Christ are numerous. In the first place, there is a direct line between the refrain of this psalm and one of the names of our Saviour. Both in verse 7 and 11 we are assured that “the LORD of hosts *is with us*” (emphasis added). Not only does this assurance resonate with what the LORD says elsewhere in the OT (see next section), but it also reaches forward to the name Immanuel, which the prophet Isaiah already announced concerning the son of the virgin in Isaiah 7:14 and which the angel confirmed as a name of our Saviour in Matthew 1:23. Indeed, in Christ the comfort of God’s

presence with us reaches an entirely new level. In the OT God was always present with his people, but in the NT the Son of God became flesh (John 1:14) and “took upon himself true human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary” (LD 14). In this way the Son of God was not only with us but also became one of us, “like his brothers in every respect” (Heb. 2:17) and “yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

Secondly, the sons of Korah begin by describing God as “a very present help in trouble” (v. 1). This means that God’s help is easy to find. Human beings naturally conclude that since God and we are so different, it must also be difficult to find him and speak to him. Jesus Christ taught us differently when he said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). In addition, since Christ is both God and man, we can confidently draw near to the throne of grace at any given moment and be assured that “we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). BC 26 explains in a deep and moving manner that with God’s own Son as our intercessor, divine help is always close at hand.

Finally, Psalm 46 presents a striking image of the city of Jerusalem with a river flowing from it or at least near it (see *Key Words* above, as well as Ezek. 47:1–6 and Rev. 22:1–2). It goes without saying that water is essential for life. However, there is physical life, common to all, and also the new, spiritual, heavenly life, given only to God’s chosen ones (BC 35). Yet although cisterns and streams give us ordinary water that is necessary for physical life, Christ alone gives us the special, spiritual water that sustains the new life that leads to eternal life. As Jesus Christ told the woman at the well of Sychar, “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (John 4:14). And, as Christ later explains, this special “living water” refers to the Holy Spirit (John 7:38–39).

10. OLD TESTAMENT LINKS

Just as we hear in verses 7 and 11 in this psalm, so the LORD himself has repeatedly assured his people that he is with them, with his power and his grace, through good times and bad. This reassurance ought to quiet our fears. For example, when Moses felt too inadequate and too scared to confront Pharaoh, the LORD assured him: “I will be with you” (Ex. 3:12). Similarly, when Joshua faced the seemingly insurmountable task of leading God’s people over the Jordan, into the Promised Land, and onto the battlefield against fierce nations defending their home turf, the LORD also encouraged him saying, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9).

The blessing of having a river nearby is also found elsewhere in the OT. Already the garden of Eden was watered by a river that divided into four headwaters (Gen. 2:10–14). Moreover, even if the actual city of Jerusalem did not have a large river beside it, the eschatological Jerusalem, described by the prophet Ezekiel, certainly did, symbolizing the life-giving power that flows from the LORD and his temple (Ezek. 47:1, 5).

ENDORSEMENTS

"This set of volumes is a gift to teachers and students alike in Christian schools. It is a gift to teachers who teach the book of Psalms as a module in Bible classes and to those who want to explain more deeply the meaning and contents of psalms memory work to their students. It is also a gift to students who are preparing a presentation about the psalms."

- Christine Van Halen-Faber,
Principal of Covenant Canadian
Reformed Teachers College

"A wonderful (and unique) resource that will help everyday people and pastors see Christ more clearly in each of the Psalms."

-Dr. Iain Duguid,
Professor of Old Testament at
Westminster Theological Seminary

"How does one proclaim the riches of Jesus Christ from the Psalms of the Old Testament without forcing one's theology on the Holy Scriptures? Commentaries on the Psalms abound, but there are few that help the man of God to preach Christ from all the Psalms. The Study Resource fills that gap, locating the message of each psalm in the larger flow of biblical theology so that the preacher can show how it finds its fulfillment in Christ. Though not a typical verse-by-verse commentary, it contains many exegetical insights. It also offers links to the Reformed confessions and helpful suggestions for application."

- Joel R. Beeke,
President, Puritan Reformed
Theological Seminary

"Having been given a preview, I can see how this Study Resource is going to be of excellent service to Christian teachers and school leaders."

- Alwyn Terpstra,
Principal of Kelmscott John Calvin
School

11. NEW TESTAMENT LINKS

The same theme of the Lord's abiding presence returns in the NT at a most significant point in redemptive history: the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Commentators and preachers alike have paid much attention to the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19), yet comparatively less consideration has been given to the words that follow immediately thereafter: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Given the calamities and persecutions that we read about in the book of Revelation and that are occurring or will yet happen, these words of our Saviour, echoing the refrain of Psalm 46, are an immense comfort.

The river theme of the OT, including Psalm 46, finds its final and most spectacular fulfillment in the river that flows with the water of eternal life in Revelation 22, water that is "bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (v. 1).

12. CONFESSIONAL REFERENCES

BC 27 uses verse 5 ("God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved") to substantiate its conviction that the holy church of Christ "is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world." To be sure, this is an appropriate reference. A rapid glance through the pages of church history should be enough to convince any alert reader that if the God of Jacob were not the fortress of his church, she would have died and been buried in the dust long ago.

13. SCRIPTURAL THEMES

1. *Creator/Creation* – The God who created the mountains (Gen. 1:9) can also throw those very same mountains into the heart of the sea (v. 2). The God who separated the waters (Gen. 1:6) is more than able to provide a river's worth of water to a city that has only one big spring (the Gihon) as its water source (v. 4). This psalm vividly affirms the Creator's comprehensive control of his creation.
2. *God's Sovereignty* – The God of Jacob is sovereign over creation (vv. 1–3) and over the nations (vv. 4–7). Indeed, his divine rule will be acknowledged and exalted throughout the entire earth (v. 10).
3. *God's Kingdom* – Although the terms "king" and "kingdom" do not occur in this psalm, God's own decree that he will be exalted among the nations (v. 10) clearly implies his kingship.
4. *God's Covenant (of grace)* – The prominent reference to God's covenant name, Yahweh (LORD), in "Yahweh *Sebaoth*," at the end of the second and third stanzas reminds us that the doctrine of the covenant undergirds this psalm as well.

5. *God's Grace* – He who is our “very present help in trouble” (v. 1) is certainly a kind and gracious God.
6. *God's Church* – The city of God (v. 4), otherwise known as Zion or Jerusalem, is not only a location on a map but a dwelling place for God's people. In this way, the city of God in the OT symbolizes the church of God in the NT.
7. *Antithesis* – Though the nations may rage against God and his holy city, the LORD of hosts will protect his people as their refuge, fortress, and ever-present help (vv. 5–7).
8. *Man's Depravity* – Nothing noteworthy.
9. *Justification* – Nothing noteworthy.
10. *Sanctification* – Nothing noteworthy.
11. *Mission/Outreach* – Nothing noteworthy.
12. *Other* – Nothing noteworthy.

14. APPLICATION

1. For the Christian

We tend to focus on our personal crises, whether that be a sudden financial upheaval, an unexpected medical concern, or a severe tragedy within our family. The mountain of the crisis looms large and at times feels overwhelming. Psalm 46 teaches us to step back and see things from another perspective. Without undermining the difficulty of anyone's struggles, isn't the cataclysm described in verses 2–3 more extreme? And since the LORD of hosts can help and hold his people through a meltdown of the earth itself, surely he is also able to help each of us through our individual crises.

2. For the congregation


The world, with all of its secular and sinful passion, always seems to be stronger than the church. Numerically, the world looks bigger than the church. Financially, the world has more resources than the church. Visually, the world, with the glamour of Hollywood and the appeal of so-called freedom, appears more attractive. How can the church survive the flood of ungodliness that threatens to drown it (Rev. 12:15)? Psalm 46 provides an unforgettable answer. There is one who is always and infinitely more powerful than the world, and he is the Creator of, and Commander over, the entire world, including its population. Since he is our fortress, the church, even in its most vulnerable moment, is more than adequately protected.

15. OCCASIONS FOR USE

The comforting truths of Psalm 46 resonated with Martin Luther so deeply that he composed a famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” on the basis of it. In an era

where disease was rampant and heretics were banned or burned, Luther found solace in this psalm, turning it into a hymn that is still sung around the world today. It is noteworthy that Luther, just as we did above, found this psalm to be utterly and thoroughly Christ-centred. Therefore, what may lie in the shadows in Psalm 46 is brought right out into the open in Luther's hymn. Lord *Sebaoth* (or: Lord *Sabaoth*) is Christ Jesus and the foes are not an army of Syrians but rather Satan and his malicious horde.

16. QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. In John 4:7–15 Jesus spoke to the woman at the well of Sychar about “living water.” What exactly is living water and how does Christ give it also to us?
2. Twice in the psalm we hear the assurance that “the LORD of hosts is with us” (vv. 7, 11). Which name of our Saviour captures this same truth?
3. In this psalm the sons of Korah call our God “a very present help in trouble” (v. 1). Yet sometimes God's people are in trouble and they call out to God for help, but he does not seem to hear their voices. How do we understand and deal with this?
4. Is anxiety sin? Even if you are not a worrywart by nature it's hard to live in this broken world and avoid all anxiety. Yet the question remains: is worry a transgression of God's command? In this regard contemplate verse 2 of this psalm and connect it to Christ's teaching in Matthew 6:25–34.
5. Spend some time unpacking the **imagery** of the joy-giving river in verse 4. In what different ways does this water give gladness to God's people? What different kinds of blessings are associated with water in Scripture? Isaiah 12:3 and Titus 3:5 are good places to start, but what others can you think of?
6. In verse 6 the Holy Spirit speaks of the earth melting and he uses similar language in 2 Peter 3:10–13. Compare various translations of these passages and then discuss whether this eschatological melting is literal or figurative. At the end of time, will the elements of this present creation be melted down in the smelter of God's refining fires and be recast into a new heaven and earth, or does Scripture mean something different? 

Dr. Jason Van Vliet is Principal and Professor of Dogmatics at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario. You can order “Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Study Resource” at Press.ReformedPerspective.ca.

MOVIES

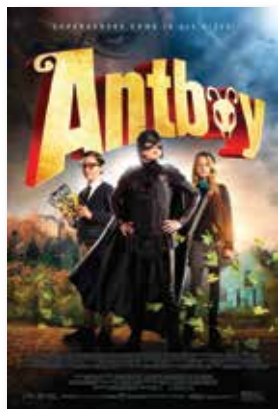
FOR THE KIDLETS

By Jon Dykstra

ANTBOY

FAMILY

2013 / 77 MINUTES **RATING: 7/10**



Pelle is a 12-year-old boy who goes entirely unnoticed at his school...except when he ruins a couple of bullies' fun with a well-thrown apple. Then he has to dash away, into the yard of old Mrs. Gæmelkrå. Why are the bullies too scared to follow?

It turns out some mysterious stuff has been going on at the Gæmelkrå house involving insect experimentation. When one of those experiments – a tiny Hercules ant – bites Pelle he takes a Peter Parker-like turn and gains the proportionate strength of an ant. Thus Antboy is born!

What follows is a quirky movie about a quiet boy who sees his superpowers as a chance to be popular but realizes that friendship is quite a different and better thing.

One notable caution concerns a brief instance of potty humor: Pelle discovers that, like the ant, he can now secrete acid. There is no immodesty but we do see a stream of acidic pee, which does a number on a urinal. He later uses this "power" to break a lock.

Antboy is Danish, but has decent English dubbing. It owns its cheesiness and while not a spectacular example of the superhero genre, is silly fun for families that can deal with the peril and tension. Overall I would recommend it for 10, or maybe even 12 and up. Watch it for free at DoveChannel.com.

CURIOUS GEORGE 3: BACK TO THE JUNGLE

ANIMATED / FAMILY

81 MINUTES / 2015 **RATING: 7/10**



The unflappable man in the yellow hat has finally gotten tired of the trouble George keeps getting himself in. He wants everyone's favorite monkey to learn a new word: "caution."

But when an opportunity comes up for George to head up into space on a rescue mission, caution goes out the window. Off he goes up, up, up into space, and then, when the space capsule has an equipment malfunction, down, down, down he falls, crash landing in the jungles of Africa. While the man in the yellow hat thinks "jungles are no place for a monkey," George has a great time meeting all sorts of animals and making friends of them all.

One caution involves a brief nod to evolution, with a line-up made up of modern man on one side, a monkey-like creature on the other, and a few cavemen in-between. A more notable caution concerns the man in the yellow hat taking on the role of the "dumb dad." I brought this one to my kids' attention, because this is a mild example of something they'll see in other films too.

This is quite a good film, but not a great one, striking me as being more like an extended episode of the TV series than a feature film. But if your family loves George then they are sure to love this too. It's a rollicking, silly, goofy adventure – very much the typical Curious George fare.

THE DEFENSE OF NEW HAVEN

CHILDREN'S

2016 / 82 MINUTES **RATING: 7/10**



This is a wonderfully bizarre adventure: a steampunk Christian allegoric comedy adventure, with every character played by a child actor, *even though the characters are adults*. Our hero, Alec, is a one-armed man who gets recruited by a fully-bearded six-year-old to carry a secret message to the city's miniature-steamboat-driving defensive forces so that they'll be able to stop gasmask-wearing raiders.

This is both cheesy and fantastic. The kids deliver their lines like you'd expect children to do, and you either have to be okay with that or you won't enjoy a moment of it. But for its preschool target audience, this won't be a hindrance. That audience will be entranced by the set: the city of New Haven is proportioned perfectly for its pint-sized inhabitants, complete with narrow cobblestone streets, treacherous back alleys, medieval-style buildings, and canals for the miniature steamboats. It is amazing!

The only caution would be that this isn't a movie for older kids, or at least the sort that roll their eyes. If an older brother or sister can enjoy things vicariously, then they'll find it a treat to watch their little siblings hoot and holler all the way through this one. And that'll be the fun for mom and dad too.

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SPACE BUDDIES

CHILDREN'S

2009 / 84 MINUTES **RATING: 7/10**



In this adventure five talking puppies end up stowed away on an incredibly advanced spaceship – so sophisticated even a dog could fly it – but which is short on fuel. To get back home they have to refuel at a Russian space station where they befriend a Russian dog, Sputnik, and have to contend with a crazy cosmonaut.

If you read any other reviews you'll find the critics groaning at the pups' stock personalities: the only girl, Rosebud, likes pink, Budderball never stops eating, Mudbud always gets dirty, B-dawg is a rapper, and Buddha is a peacenik. But the critics aren't six-years-old. Sure these are cardboard cutouts, but that simplicity makes them easy to tell apart, and easy to understand for the preschool-aged target audience.

The only concern would be a handful of dog fart jokes. Sigh.

This is not a film mom and dad are going to love but they likely won't mind it either. And if you have kids aged 5-8 who find most movies frightening, what might make this a treat is that it has *some* tension – there is a bad guy – but it isn't *too* scary. And then five cute puppy stars only add to the fun!



THE SECRET WORLD OF ARRIETTY

ANIMATED / FAMILY

2012 / 94 MINUTES

RATING: 8/10

This is a Japanese animated adaptation of the much loved English book series, *The Borrowers*. Arrietty is one of the Borrowers – the tiny people, just inches high, who live in our houses, in between the walls, under the floorboards, and in the ceilings. Now that she's 14, she's old enough to accompany her father on his "borrowing" expeditions.

It's vital that these little people are never discovered, so even as they are creative sorts, turning leaves into umbrellas, sewing needles into swords, and clothespins into hairclips, they can't make their own goods. To create factories or farms would risk being discovered by the big people, the "beans." That possibility so scares the Borrowers that if a human ever sees them, then they will leave that house, never to return.

But on Arrietty's first expedition, to get a single sugar cube, a young boy in the house discovers her. Shawn is a nice boy, newly arrived to the house because he is sick and needs care that his parents can't seem to provide. While he would never hurt Arrietty, or share the secret of her existence with others, the same isn't true of the housekeeper when she also discovers the tiny people, and hires an exterminator to help track them down.

CAUTION

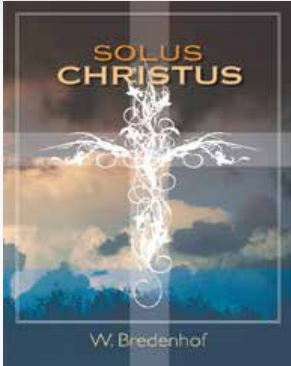
The only caution relates to the "borrowing" that goes on. What do we call it when someone borrows without asking, and with no intention of ever giving it back? *Stealing*. But in defense of these fictional thieves, they can't ask for permission because then they will be discovered, and they can't make these goods on their own for the same reason. Also, what they take is so negligible as to never be noticed. Still, this "borrowing" is a point parents should raise. In the *Curious George* TV shows it's noted that George is a monkey so he sometimes does things that we shouldn't. That seems a good warning about the Borrowers too.

CONCLUSION

While *The Secret World of Arrietty* was originally done in Japanese, Disney was so entranced by the film they took charge of the English release and did a wonderful job with the dubbing. It is a gorgeous film that many a parent will absolutely love too, especially if they read the *Borrowers* books in their childhood.

And the slower pacing is perfect for any children who find other films too frantic or scary. Yes, there are some tense moments, but there is a lot of beauty and calm in-between as we explore the world as it looks through a set of tiny eyes.

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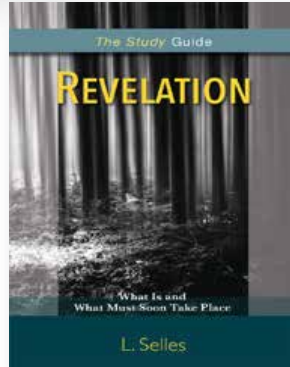


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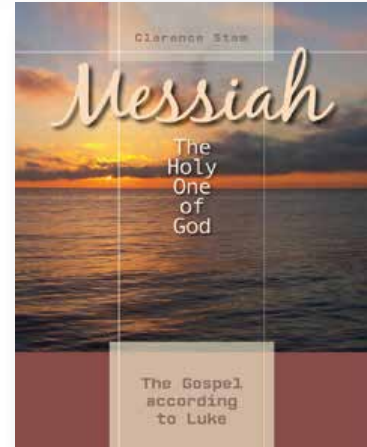
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