

Reformed

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THE ART OF THE APOLOGY

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LET
JUSTICE &
RIGHTEOUSNESS
PREVAIL

Sermons and reflections for the pro-life Christian

*Edited by Anne Nienhuis
Foreword by André Schutten*

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Chief Concern With Conversion Therapy Law

Drawing on history and imagination, André Schutten “interviews” former Conservative Prime Minister John Diefenbaker about the Conservative Party failure to properly oppose the new legislation.

by André Schutten

On December 1st, I watched in stunned disbelief as the Conservative Party of Canada proposed, and then unanimously supported, a motion to expedite the Liberal’s Bill C-4, an act to amend the criminal code in order to ban conversion therapy. In less than 30 seconds, a bill that will profoundly impact religious communities and members of the LGBTQ community, and threatens to undermine fundamental freedoms in disturbing ways, skipped over the entire Parliamentary procedure of the House of Commons: second reading and debate, Justice committee study with experts and stakeholders, report stage, final debate and the third reading vote.

Six days later, the Senate – that supposed chamber of sober second thought – repeated the gimmick, with Conservative Senator Housakos, the acting leader of the opposition in the Senate – putting forward a motion for the unanimous consent of the Senate to pass the bill without any study or deliberation. To my knowledge, never has a piece of criminal legislation sailed through both houses of Parliament without any study whatsoever.

In reflecting on the past week, one of my thoughts is how far the leadership of this conservative party has fallen from more principled days in opposition, like those of the Right Honourable John Diefenbaker. I could only imagine him angrily chastising the party he led from December 1956 to September 1967 for what they had done (or more accurately, what they had failed to do) in the House of Commons in the late afternoon of December 1st, 2021. So, I decided to posthumously interview the Leader of Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition (1956-57, 1963-67) and former Prime Minister (1957-1963) to get his thoughts.

[Interviewer’s note: In what follows, all quotations noted with quotation marks are historically recorded statements made by Diefenbaker. Anything without quotation marks should be given the benefit of imaginative license.]

André Schutten: Mr. Diefenbaker, thank you so much for agreeing to this rather unconventional sort of interview. It’s not my regular habit to interview or consult the dead.

The Right Honourable John Diefenbaker: You ought to be careful young man. King Saul didn’t fare so well after consulting the ghost of Samuel. But I really don’t mind being disturbed this time. I was rolling in my grave anyway.

AS: I can only imagine. For the benefit of our readers, let me set the context. On Monday, Justice Minister David Lametti tabled Bill C-4 in the House of Commons. This bill proposes to criminalize a practice known as conversion therapy and expands on two previous bills from the prior Parliament (Bill C-8 and Bill C-6). Many critics of the bill, including feminist groups, doctors, religious leaders, and freedom advocates, have winsomely engaged in the debate over this issue for the past two years. The big issue with the bill is not whether to ban conversion therapy. All agree on that point. The issue turns on the definition: the definition of conversion therapy in the bill is very broad and goes well beyond capturing the coercive and tortuous practices that have been long discredited. Fix the definition, say the critics (and I am one of them), and you fix the bill.

JD: Yes, I follow. But I overheard some of the Conservative Members of Parliament saying – a pathetic excuse, honestly – that they were only returning the same bill to the place in the Parliamentary



proceedings that it was at when the election was called?

AS: It is a little unnerving that the ghost of John Diefenbaker is listening in on Conservative caucus deliberations.

JD: It would be good for them to know. Most of them would do well to consider the afterlife...

AS: Indeed. But yes, the excuse that they were just returning the bill to where it was before the election is misleading for two reasons: first, this is a new Parliament, so any government that wants to retable a bill always starts over. But more importantly, this isn't the same bill. The Liberal government fundamentally changed this bill, increasing the breadth of the ban, even banning spiritual counselling for consenting adults and banning "wait-and-see" approaches to gender dysphoria in young kids. This bill tramples freedom: freedom of expression, freedom of religion and conscience, freedom to pursue the medical or spiritual care as one sees fit.

JD: "Freedom includes the right to say what others may object to and resent... The essence of citizenship is to be tolerant of strong and provocative words." You know, probably my most oft-quoted statement (and it's a good one, if I may say so), is that, "I am a

Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind."

AS: That's a bold and visionary statement Mr. Diefenbaker. And I agree. Sadly, your party didn't uphold that pledge this week. The topic was just too sensitive for some of them. Some of them tell me they were "taking too much heat."

JD: "You can't stand up for Canada with a banana for a backbone."

AS: [chuckles]

JD: "We must vigilantly stand on guard within our own borders for human rights and fundamental freedoms which are our proud heritage.....we cannot take for granted the continuance and maintenance of those rights and freedoms."

AS: I agree. I'm not sure the Opposition members understand just what they've done. I am most concerned about the kids and other Canadians struggling with deep, existential questions about who they are, how they should live, and how to square their deep feelings and questions of identity with their spiritual commitments. This bill bans access to one set of answers. But the Conservatives also sold out on that heritage of freedom. Look, I'm a constitutional lawyer and I'm telling you, this bill tromps all over freedom of religion for pastoral counsellors, freedom of conscience for medical professionals, freedom of expression for preachers and teachers, freedom of association for communities of faith, and –

perhaps ironically – the equality rights of members of the LGBTQ+ community.

JD: The what community? I always took a stand for an end to hyphenated Canadians. Have we replaced hyphens with acronyms?

AS: Well, the LGBTQ+ community developed a little after your time, I guess. Anyway, for those who are gay or lesbian, or who are attracted to the same sex but want and choose to live according to their spiritual or religious convictions, they are prevented by the government (with the applause of the opposition) from accessing the kind of help and services that you or I would be able to access.

Bill C-4: How the Conservatives did this to Canada

by Jon Dykstra

On November 29 the Liberals introduced a bill to ban conversion therapy. Under the pretense of protecting homosexuals from getting forcibly "converted" from their same-sex attraction, what the bill actually targeted was Christian pastors and counselors and others who are willing to help those who want out of the homosexual lifestyle. As Jonathon Van Maren wrote:

"there were concerns that the deliberately broad definition proposed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberals would ban pastoral conversations between clergy and their parishioners and leave adults with unwanted same-sex attraction unable to receive the counseling they desired. In fact, in some instances parents could be prevented from opposing sex changes for their own children."

This was actually the third time the Liberals had introduced such a bill, but the previous two had been derailed by the months-long process that it takes to get a bill approved. The previous attempt, then labeled Bill C-6, was introduced on September 23, 2020, and took nine months, until June 22, 2021, to pass through the committee hearings and the three readings required in the House of Commons. It was then given to the Senate for their own three-stage assessment process, but they didn't have a chance to pass it before the Prime Minister called an election on August 15. His election call meant that Bill C-6 (along with all the other bills not yet

passed) "died on the order paper."

Bill C-4 might have had to go through this same process, and in the months and even years that it could have taken, who knows but that it could have been derailed yet once more. But on Dec. 1 Conservative Leader Erin O-Toole told the media that his party was going to accelerate the passage of the government's bill. Later that same day Conservative MP Rob Moore put forward a motion to skip all the House committees and readings, and send the bill directly and immediately to the Senate. His motion required unanimous approval to pass – if a single MP had voiced a nay, the motion wouldn't have passed. How could the Conservatives have expected to get that unanimity when there had been 63 MPs willing to vote against Bill C-6 earlier this year? Of that number 62 were their own Conservative MPs. So why would they expect to have no opposition this time around?

Their confidence might have been, in part, due to the timing of their motion. Conservative MP Garnett Genuis was the most vocal opponent of the previous Bill C-6, launching the website "Fix the Definition" to put a face to the people this bill would harm. But on December 1, Genuis was out of the country, attending a NATO conference in Latvia.

The Conservative strategy also involved pulling a fast one on their own MPs – the motion was made and passed in approximately one minute. They were able

to do it so quickly because no one actually had to vote for the motion: the Speaker of the House only asked to hear from those opposed to it. When no one spoke up, it was passed.

While many of the Conservatives were clearly in on this maneuver – as evidenced by the wild clapping immediately afterward – any MPs unaware of what Rob Moore was about to do could have blinked and they would have missed it, it was over that fast. The CPAC coverage of the vote shows that some of the Conservatives were not clapping, and remained sitting and the most downcast of them might have been Arnold Viersen. In a post to his personal Facebook page nine days later, he explained that:

"...it was a surprise that caught me and some of my colleagues off guard. I am opposed to C-4 as written and should have said no, but I did not react fast enough. I'm sorry."

His post's comments were filled with thanks for his apology. For almost two weeks it had been a mystery as to why a bill that criminalized the presentation of the Gospel would pass without any Christian MPs objecting. Now we had a partial explanation for the MPs' silence: this had been sprung on them.

Curiously, in the same post, Viersen suggested that: "Had we [the Conservatives] won the election we would not be in this situation."


Let's consider that for a moment. Wasn't it the Conservatives that just pulled this on us? We can be relieved that Garnett Genuis and Arnold Viersen have some

JD: That is ridiculous.

AS: What surprised or shocked me most was that the Opposition motion in support of the government bill was unanimous. Not one MP or Senator stood against it even though some 60 of those MPs had voted against a more mild version of the bill just six months earlier. Judging by the reaction on the floor, there were a small number of that caucus who were coerced to keep their mouth shut or lose their job, despite that same morning their leader having pledged a “free vote” on this issue. A few good men and women seem to have been threatened by their fellow Conservatives to keep quiet.

sort of explanation or apology for why they didn't stand up against this bill, but the Conservative Party overall has no such excuse. Trudeau's Liberals introduced this bill, but it was O'Toole's Conservatives who accomplished what the Liberals never did: the Conservatives got it across the finish line.

It bears repeating just how wicked this bill is. As Jojo Ruba noted, while an earlier version of the bill at least “could not prevent consenting adults from having conversations about sexuality with their clergy or their counselor, as long as the counseling was free” this latest version removed even that protection. That's what the Conservative Party has accomplished under O'Toole: they've made the compelling case that they are not the lesser of two evils.

So where are politically-minded Christians to turn? Aren't the Conservatives still our only option? They are, after all, the only major party to tolerate pro-life Christians. That's true enough, but as the passage of this law highlights, tolerating pro-life Christians is very different from siding with them. If Christians are to be involved in the Conservative Party, it cannot be to further the party's agenda. We cannot let them use us for their ends. If Christians are to continue in the Conservative Party then they have to do so with their eyes wide open, involving themselves in the party only to use it for our own, godly ends. If it becomes impossible to do that, then that should be the end of our involvement. Christians should have no loyalty to a party that has no loyalty to God, and, indeed, in this latest act, stands directly in opposition. 

JD: “One moment [Parliament] is a cathedral, at another time there is no words to describe it when it ceases, for short periods of time, to have any regard for the proprieties that constitute not only Parliament, but its tradition. I've seen it in all its greatness. I have inwardly wept over it when it is degraded.”

AS: I am inwardly weeping this week. I'm guessing a few good MPs are as well. I see this, first and foremost, as a failure of leadership. But let's talk about the role of the Opposition in Parliament some more.

JD: “The Opposition that fulfills its functions makes as important

Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole



a contribution to the preservation of the Parliamentary system as does the government of the day.”

AS: Well, what is that function then? Can you expand on that?

JD: “If Parliament is to be preserved as a living institution, His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition...”

AS: Actually, it’s Her Majesty’s Loyal Opposition now...

JD: Okay. Well, I was quoting from the speech I gave in October of 1949 to the Empire Club of Canada. And at that time the Head of State was King George VI. And so I said, “If Parliament is to be preserved as a living institution, His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition must fearlessly perform its functions. When it properly discharges them the preservation of our freedom is assured. The reading of history proves that freedom always dies when criticism ends. It upholds and maintains the rights of minorities against majorities. It must be vigilant against oppression and unjust invasions by the Cabinet of the rights of the people. ... It finds fault; it suggests amendments; it asks questions and elicits information; it arouses, educates and molds public opinion by voice and vote. It must scrutinize every action by the government and in doing so prevents the short-cuts through democratic procedure that governments like to make.”

AS: I love that line: “Freedom always dies when criticism ends”. Brilliant. And I completely agree with how you ended that: the Opposition “prevents the short-cuts through democratic procedure that governments like to make.” Well said. Sadly, the Opposition this week did the exact opposite. They gave the government a short-cut!

JD: “Parliament is a place where in full discussion freedom is preserved, where one side advances arguments and the other examines them and where decisions are arrived at after passing through the crucible of public discussion. The Opposition that discharges its responsibilities becomes the responsible outlet of intelligent criticism. Indeed, most, if not all, authorities on constitutional government agree that Britain’s freedom from civil war since the development of the party system is due in the main to the fact that the Opposition has provided an outlet and a safety-valve for opposition.”

AS: You used the phrase “intelligent criticism.” I like that. And I saw that in the last Parliament with Bill C-6 (the previous iteration of this bill). I saw 62 MPs speak winsomely, thoughtfully, carefully, on a sensitive issue, giving intelligent criticism. Parliament can criminalize tortuous, coercive conversion therapy without going too far, without violating fundamental freedoms. But then this week, due to fatigue, laziness, cowardice, I’m not sure what, but they caved.

JD: “[T]he experience of history has been that only a strong and fearless Opposition can assure preservation of our fundamental freedoms and of the rights of the individual against executive and bureaucratic invasions of those rights. Quintin Hogg, an outstanding member of the British Parliament has given the answer in these words: ‘Countries cannot be fully free until they have an organized Opposition. It is not a long step from the absence of an

organized Opposition to a complete dictatorship.”

AS: So true. So, would you say that the Opposition must oppose in each and every instance?

JD: “The Opposition cannot oppose without reason. Its alternative policies must be responsible and practicable for it has a responsibility to the King to provide the alternative government to the one in power. Without an Opposition, decision by discussion would end and be supplanted by virtual dictatorship for governments tend to prefer rule by order-in-council to Parliament and bureaucrats prefer to be uncontrolled by Parliament or the courts.”

AS: This is definitely a big issue that I’ve been tracking especially in the last two years. The executive and bureaucratic branch is almost wholly untethered by the legislative branch. We sometimes say we have “responsible government” but I feel like it’s in name only.

JD: “The responsibility of the Opposition has been greatly increased, for in the last few years the Cabinets in the various Parliaments of the British Commonwealth have recovered most of the powers lost two hundred years ago. It must not be forgotten that Parliament gave up many of its rights during the days of war and allowed fundamental freedoms to be abrogated. These rights were given up as security for victory. These freedoms must be restored and only with a strong Opposition is restoration certain.”

AS: History is repeating itself! Parliament (and the provincial legislatures) have allowed fundamental freedoms to be abrogated in many ways in the face of a pandemic, and these freedoms were given up as security for safety. But here too, the criticism from the opposition in any province or in Parliament seems only that the government has not abrogated freedoms enough.

JD: “It is human nature for governments to find the Opposition distasteful and the longer governments are in power the more they become convinced that they govern by Divine Right and that their decisions are infallible. Only a strong Opposition can prevent a Cabinet with a commanding majority from ruling without regard to the rights of minorities.”

AS: Tell me about it. We have drifted a long way in the last few decades Mr. Diefenbaker.

JD: “The absence of a strong Opposition means a one party state. A one party state means an all-powerful Cabinet. It is as true in the 20th century as it was in the 19th century when Lord Acton wrote, ‘All power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.’”

AS: Actually, he said, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

JD: Watch your sass, son.

AS: Sorry sir. Please go on.

JD: “There have been tremendous changes in government in the last fifty years but it is nonetheless true now as it was at the beginning of this century that only with an organized and effective Opposition can democracy be preserved. Canada’s freedom and destiny is in the custody of the Opposition no less than it is of the Government. Government has become so complex and

its ramifications so extensive that no matter how industrious a member of Parliament may be, it is impossible to master all the problems that come before Parliament and more so in that there are not available to the Opposition the trained civil servants who are at the disposal of the government at all times.”

AS: This is a really good point. I remember meeting once with the official opposition’s justice critic. He told me he had two policy staffers. That’s it. His counterpart on the government side has 3,000 lawyers at his disposal within the Justice Department. The justice critic was outgunned and appreciated any extra advice I could offer for that reason alone.

JD: “In my opinion the Opposition will not be able to discharge its duty unless it has available to it trained and outstanding research experts whose salaries will be paid by the state.”

AS: I guess, in the meantime, this is where groups like my employer ARPA Canada come in?

JD: Yep. That’s exactly right. The more you can help and the more your community can support you, the more impact for good you will have.

AS: Thank you. I’ll make sure our constituents hear that too. They have been incredibly supportive in the past decade, I must say.

JD: “While Parliament has its short-comings it remains the bulwark of our freedom. ... Parliament must continue to be the custodian of freedom. To that end it must constantly change its

procedure to meet the changing needs of a modern world but must be changeless in its concept and tradition. Parliament will only remain the guardian of freedom and our free institutions so long as His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition is fully responsible and effective in the discharge of its functions.”

AS: That’s a great note to end this interview on, Mr. Diefenbaker.

JD: You should really get your readers to read my whole speech on the role of the opposition. It was quite a good speech, if I do say so myself.

AS: It is an excellent speech and should be mandatory reading in every grade 10 civics class and a prerequisite for anyone to serve as a Member of Parliament. I’ll post a link to the speech Mr. Diefenbaker.

JD: Post a what?

AS: Never mind. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and your vision for the role of the opposition. And thank you for being a principled leader in your time, one to whom others who follow in your footsteps ought to aspire. May you rest in peace.

André Schutten is General Legal Counsel with the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) Canada. This article first appeared in convivium.ca, “an online space that brings together citizens of differing convictions and religious confessions to contend for the role of faith in our common life.” It is reprinted with permission.

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WHY HISTORY MATTERS

Knowing what came before shows us who we are, and who God is

by Michael Wagner

It's not surprising people aren't that interested in history. The evolutionary perspective that's dominated the West for decades now, undermines the significance of knowing our past.

How so? Well, if life started out simple and became more complex over time, then what exists now is superior to anything that came before, and what's older is outdated and inferior. *Now* is much more important than anything recorded in the history textbooks, and thus there's little reason to learn about our past.

A person's worldview affects how he or she views history. This is a point made by Stephen Mansfield in his book, *More Than Dates and Dead People: Recovering a Christian View of History*. Those with an evolutionary worldview will have little incentive to study history aside from trivial interests.

Christianity, however, views history much differently. We know God controls everything, so historical events are not random and meaningless since they all have a purpose in God's plan. As Mansfield puts it, "God has a destination for history that gives everything else in history its meaning."

YOUR HISTORY SHAPES YOU

One way in which history affects our lives involves how we see and understand ourselves. Your own family's past will influence your personal identity and if your ancestors were notorious criminals, that'll impact you differently than if they were war heroes or great philanthropists. Mansfield writes,

"...the way you see your past has a lot to do with the way you see yourself now. And the way you see yourself, good or bad, determines the way you live. This is why we say that history has the power to impact a sense of destiny. Your view of your past will shape your view of your future, and this is not only true of individuals, but even of nations – in fact, of any group of people."

Everyone's parents are part of a particular nation and culture. Thus, everyone has a specific heritage from the time of their birth. Often this heritage will contribute much to their sense of identity, and to their sense of meaning and purpose.

HISTORY SHAPES OUR TIME

Studying history also provides perspective that helps people to better understand their own era. This can be an experience similar to travelling to a different country: seeing how other people live causes us to become aware of how our own society differs from others. It makes us conscious of things we haven't thought about before, simply because they were so familiar. Learning history can provide us with a similar experience, because we see how differently people lived in the past, even within our own country.

In many respects, life is easier now than in the past. The higher standard of living today is due to the hard work of

our forebears. However, we can't truly appreciate what those people have done for us unless we actually know what they've done. The accomplishments of previous generations profoundly affect our lives today. Without victories in particular conflicts, for example, we would be living in completely different circumstances. Consider how things would be different if the Allies had lost the Second World War. As Mansfield explains:

"every generation is living in the wake of the generation that precedes it.... We all live in the world that our ancestors have left us."

RELIGIOUS HISTORY SHOWS THE WHY BEHIND WHAT HAPPENED

History shows what people have done in the past but a key question is, *why* did they do what they did?

Generally speaking, people are motivated by what they believe. Therefore, to understand history it's necessary to know what a community believed that would lead them to do what they did.

In other words, much of history is motivated by people's religion. To explain this properly, Mansfield relies on a robust definition of religion as "ultimate con-



cern.” As he explains more fully:

“A man’s ultimate concern is what dominates his thoughts and passions, what he regards with unconditional seriousness, and what he is willing to suffer or die for. This is his religion, his god, his faith – regardless of what he says he believes.”

Many think of religion in a narrower sense of believing in a particular god and attending some house of worship. They would say that they don’t have a religion and that society should be non-religious. In their view, people can practice religion as part of their private lives but should keep it out of the public sphere. However, when religion is understood as “ultimate concern,” it is clear that every society is religious because everyone has fundamental beliefs about the meaning of life that motivates their actions.

In recent decades, North American society has turned away from Christianity. But the secular or progressive ideals that have replaced Christianity are just as “religious,” even though secularism isn’t a traditional religion where people attend an assembly of co-believers to worship a particular deity. As Mansfield summarizes this point:

“When we look at the lives of people in history, we have to realize that each person’s life has been shaped in large part by faith. Whatever people believed – their ultimate concern – was their religion, even if they claimed to be completely opposed to religion.”

This point is important with regard to understanding history because, Mansfield writes:

“Faith is what powers the human side of history. Find out what people believe and you’ll know who they are.”

HISTORY SHOWS HOW GOD BLESSES COUNTRIES THAT OBEY

One notable example of the influence of religion on history is how Protestantism led to the greatest degree of individual liberty among nations. While Christianity introduced the idea of a transcendent

authority (God) above the state, the Reformation refined the concept of political liberty even further. This was particularly the case in Calvinistic countries.

In 17th century Britain, individual liberty became a key emphasis of political theory. As the British Empire expanded across the globe, these ideas were carried with emigrants who settled new lands that became the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. These countries, along with some of the Protestant nations of continental Europe, have offered their citizens the greatest degree of freedom in history.

Capitalism – the economic side of individual freedom – generated tremendous prosperity in these countries as well. Thus, both liberty and relatively high standards of living were the direct fruits of Protestantism.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY REFLECTS THE HEART OF A NATION

Although there is a popular slogan that “you can’t legislate morality,” the opposite is actually true: all law is the enacting of morality into legislation. Murder is illegal because it is considered to be immoral; theft is illegal because it is considered to be immoral, and so on.

Therefore, examining a community’s laws will reveal what that community values most strongly. Mansfield puts it this way:

“Laws, all laws, are statements of value, of belief, of higher principles. This is why we might define law as ‘religion codified’ or religion set into a series of statements about right and wrong.”

With this in mind, it is possible to see when a particular society’s religious beliefs are changing. Any substantial change in laws reveals a substantial change in their religion

Just such a legal and religious change was noticeable in North America during the 1960s. For example, Mansfield notes that:

“the United States Supreme Court, in the 1962 *Engel v. Vitale* case, told 39,000,000 American school children

that the twenty-two word prayer with which they started their day was a violation of the Constitution.”

This was one of the most controversial Supreme Court decisions in American history, and it indicated that the country was moving in a sharply secular direction. A few years later, the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 legalizing abortion throughout the U.S. contributed further to this change.

The 1960s were also a major period of change in Canada. In 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau legalized abortion (to a certain degree) and homosexuality at the same time. Clearly, the country was moving away from its Christian foundation.

Trudeau went even further by adding his *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to the constitution in 1982. That document would ultimately lead to the elimination of any restrictions on abortion whatsoever, as well as extend homosexual rights to the point where the federal government legalized same-sex marriage in 2005.

Again, the change in law reflected a change in religion. Canada was becoming less Christian and more secular. We can see this from the history. We can understand the present political and cultural situation of our country only by learning this history.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the evolutionary view that learning history has little value, the Christian perspective recognizes that history is the outworking of God’s plan that provides meaning to our lives. It affects how we view ourselves and our purpose in the world. Without some knowledge of history, we cannot properly understand our own society and the significance of major cultural and political events.

Given that religious beliefs are the primary motivator for people’s behavior, history provides a record of how different religions have affected the world for better or worse. What history also teaches us then, generally speaking, is that those countries most aligned with God’s Truth – Protestant Christian nations – have been the freest and most prosperous. **RP**

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

BY JON DYKSTRA

SEQUEL TO *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

Over the years radio commentator and columnist Paul Harvey (1918-2009) shared a few different versions of a curious column that, like C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters* before it, seemed to provide insight from the Enemy's side. This excerpt is from a 1996 version of his "If I were the Devil" column:

"...I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: 'Do as you please.' To the young, I would whisper that the Bible is a myth. I would convince the children that man created God instead of the other way around. I'd confide that what's bad is good and what's good is square. And the old, I would teach to pray after me, 'Our Father, which are in Washington ...'"

R.C. SPROUL ON WHY PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE TO GO

Why do we have our own costly Christian schools when a free education can be had at public schools? It's because, as Dr. Sproul explained, the public system is teaching children lies about God.

"There is no such thing as a neutral education. Every education, every curriculum, has a viewpoint. That viewpoint either considers God in it or does not. To teach children about life and the world in which they live without reference to God is to make a statement about God. It screams a statement. The message is either that there is no God or that God is irrelevant. Either way the message is the same."

But if public schools are being used to teach that God is irrelevant – if they are doing the work of the Adversary – why aren't Christians trying to defund and dismantle them? Have we stayed silent because we aren't as concerned as we should be about other people's kids? Or do we simply not know what to offer as an alternative? Sure, we have our own Christian schools but what's everyone else going to do? What if they can't afford their own private schools?

One short-term fix is homeschooling, an often inexpensive alternative readily available with loads of online help. Another fix is a voucher system where the government still hands out education dollars, but to parents instead of schools. Then parents can decide which schools they want to support. Of course, so long as the government is paying for things, it'll try to shape the curriculum. That's why the ultimate goal has to be to get government out of education entirely, returning responsibility to parents. That's no small task – it might take us generations to take back a role the government had dominated for decades. Not a small task, but as R.C. Sproul makes clear, it is a necessary one.

EVOLVING "FACTS"

When a student visited his old university during a 20-year reunion he discovered that his old Evolutionary Science professor was still working there. He decided to track down the professor, and found him in his old

classroom grading exam papers. The former student was surprised to see that the questions on the test were the exact same ones he'd answered two decades before. So he asked his professor, "With the tests always the same year to year, aren't you worried that your new students will be able to cheat off tests from your previous classes?"

The professor smiled as he answered: "The test questions might stay the same, but the answers are always changing."

A SEASONAL DAD JOKE

When a hotel sponsored a chess tournament they held it in their main lobby. That was a mistake, as it turned out the players did a lot of loud trash talking, and no one really likes "chess nuts boasting in an open foyer."

- adapted from a joke winding its way around the Internet

THE AMISH ON SMARTPHONES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In a recent column "What we can learn from the Amish" (at the TheBridgehead.ca), Jonathon Van Maren shares this anecdote:

"...an Amish historian was once giving a lecture to a room full of academics on how the Amish live. To illustrate the Amish mindset, he asked his audience how many of them felt they watched too much TV and thought their lives would be better off without it. Nearly every hand in the room went up. Having admitted this, the historian went on, how many of you will go home and get rid of your TV? And every hand in the room went down. That, the historian explained, is where the Amish differ from the rest of society: they have decided to reject those things that will interrupt or inhibit the sort of lives they wish to live, while most of us remain voluntary slaves to things we know we would be better off without.

Van Maren then applies that to our technological age, to smartphones and social media, and how often we will complain about them, but how few of us are willing to forsake them or even put any sort of limits on them. The challenge the Amish present us is to consider,

"Does this help or hinder the sort of life I *should* live? And if it does not, why am I allowing it to influence and shape my life for the worse?"

WHY EVOLUTION IS A NON-STARTER

People can make more people. Dogs and cats can make more dogs and cats. The regularity of it might be why we're

not struck by the sheer wonder of self-replication. That we're under awed is one reason too many are overly impressed with evolution, which makes the absurd claim that this self-replication arose on its own, with no intent or intelligence behind it. As an exasperated Granville Sewell notes, over at EvolutionNews.org:

"...with all our advanced technology we are still not close to designing any type of self-replicating machine. That is still pure science fiction. So how could we imagine that such a machine could have arisen by pure chance?"

SOURCE: Granville Sewell's "The First 'Simple' Self-Replicator" posted to EvolutionNews.org Sept 13, 2021

HAVE TO BE CRAZY TO HATE KIDS

Since 1965, the world's fertility rate – the number of births per woman – has dropped from an average of 5, to just 2.4. The United States and Canada come in at just 1.7, and 1.5 respectively, which is below replacement level – anything below 2 will eventually lead to a declining population, as two parents having 1.5 children, are half a child short from replacing themselves. Immigration to the West will keep us from a population drop in the short term, but so long as Canadians and Americans prioritize their careers, income, and independence over the having of children, a decline is inevitable. That is both a curse for our country, and a potential blessing for Christians, if they act *contra mundum* – against the world – and embrace children as the blessing they are. But that would necessitate a change in our own priorities. Sure, Reformed couples are having more children than their secular counterparts, but there's still room in the church parking lot for more 12-passenger vans.

"While pro-abortion liberals are pushing the abortion and contraception wagon, Christian conservatives with their large families could dominate the culture in a generation or two if they believe and act in terms of 'In God We Trust.'"
– Gary DeMar

"Those who have no love for children are swine, stocks and logs unworthy of being called men and women; for they despise the blessing of God the Creator and Author of marriage"
– Martin Luther

"When we had two kids, people began to ask 'Are you done now?' When we had three, they began to say 'You are done now. Right?' When we had four, some folks began to be rude. 'Don't you know what causes this?' When we had five, we faced the most reproach from folks. They could not wrap their minds around how we could be responsible adults when we demonstrated such an obvious lack of self-control. When we had number six, people mostly shut their mouths. When we had number seven, it was more raised eyebrows, but still silence. When we had number eight, it

has been open-mouthed astonishment, over and over. And many admiring and incredulous questions. the most common one being 'What!?! I only have two kids, and they are driving me crazy!' I have been told this so many times that I have come to the conclusion that having two kids is the hardest job in the world."

– Jamie Soles

WHY THE UNGODLY THINK THEY ARE GOOD

"When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less. A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right. This is common sense, really. You understand sleep when you are awake, not while you are sleeping. You can see mistakes in arithmetic when your mind is working properly: while you are making them you cannot see them. You can understand the nature of drunkenness when you are sober, not when you are drunk. Good people know about both bad and evil: bad people do not know about either."

– C.S. Lewis

THE CHRISTIAN ROOSTER?

You've seen them on barns, but did you know rooster weather vanes have a history on churches? The *Farmers' Almanac* says it started with a couple of popes. Gregory I (c 540-604) declared that the rooster – already an emblem for Peter who denied the Lord three times before the rooster crowed – should be the emblem for Christianity. Then, a few hundred years after, Nicholas I (c 800-867) was said to have ordered churches to display a rooster on their buildings.

One problem with this account is that the rooster is said by some to be a specifically *Protestant* symbol. For example, in 2011 a reporter for the *Star News* asked the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, NC why they had a rooster topping their steeple. Dr. Ernest T. Thompson explained that in Europe roosters had been used to distinguish Protestant churches from Catholic ones, which were topped with crosses.

"Our rooster reminds us then of our Protestant heritage. It points to the dawning of a new day, and to the joy of the resurrection. The rooster also points to Peter's threefold denial of Christ 'before the cock crows,' and so is a reminder to us not to deny our Lord."

We have here again the linkage to Peter, but the new day's herald is also being associated with the new beginning that we have in Christ's victory. So if you see a rooster on a church, that's what it *might* represent.

But if you really want to know, you best ask someone from that church.

SOURCES: Amber Kanuckel's "Why are Roosters on Weather vanes?" posted to FarmersAlmanac.com on Jan. 5, 2021; Ken Little's "What does the rooster atop the First Presbyterian Church steeple represent?" posted to myreporter.com on Jan 27, 2011;

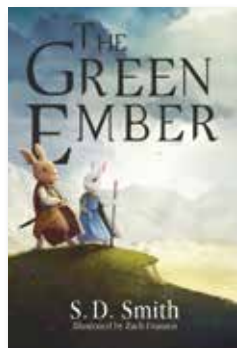
BOOKS

SPECTACULAR SWORD AND SHIELD STORIES

By Jon Dykstra

THE GREEN EMBER

BY S.D. SMITH
2015 / 365 PAGES



"Rabbits with swords" – it's an irresistible combination. This has a feudal feel, with rabbit lords and ladies, and noble rabbit knights and, of course, villainous wolves. This is children's fiction, intended for preteens and early teens, so naturally the heroes are children too. The story begins with siblings Pickett and Heather being torn from the only home they've known, pursued by wolves, and separated from their parents and baby brother. It's this last detail that might warrant some caution as to how appropriate this would be for the very young. It isn't clear if mom, dad and baby Jack are dead...but it seems like that might well be, and that could be a bit much for the very young. They escape to a community that is hidden away from the ravaging wolves, made up of exiles, rabbits that once lived in the Great Wood. Their former peaceful realm fell to the wolves after it was betrayed from within, so now these rabbits in exile look forward to a time when the Great Wood will be restored.

Though God is never mentioned, and the rabbits have no religious observance of any kind, author S.D. Smith's Christian worldview comes through implicitly. So, my overall take is two very enthusiastic thumbs up for anyone ten and up.

THE BARK OF THE BOG OWL

BY JONATHAN ROGERS
2014 / 248 PAGES



Our hero, Aidan Errolson, is a medium-sized twelve-year-old with dreams that are far bigger. However, his only excitement comes from the imagined foes he fights in defense of the flock he's been tasked to tend.

But then Aidan hears the bark of the Bog Owl, a creature that has never been seen. The Bog Owl turns out to be one of the feechiefolk, who are no less the stuff of campfire stories.. Except, this feechie boy is very real... and he wants to wrestle.

Next, Bayard the Truthspeaker makes an unannounced stop at the Errolson farm to see, so he says, the "Wilderking of Corenwald." Bayard declares that it is none other than little brother Aidan. That's quite the surprise, and quite awkward too, because Corenwald already has a king, and the Errolson family are his most loyal supporters.

If you're a bit quicker than me, this might be ringing some bells, reminding you of Samuel's visit to the house of Jesse (1 Sam. 16). I needed several more chapters, finally figuring it out when Aidan fights a giant. With a sling.

In my defense, this is only very loosely based on David – Aidan has to deal not only with a giant, but cannons too, and there's no feechie folk in the original either. That it is inspired *by*, but does not pretend to *be*, the story of David is part of what makes this so intriguing.

This whole story is so good, that I had to stop reading midway through and start again, this time with my girls, because it was simply too good not to share.

IN THE HALL OF THE DRAGON KING

BY STEPHEN LAWHEAD
1982 / 370 PAGES



Our story begins with young Quentin having a quest thrust upon him. This is not entirely unwelcome but now he has to figure out how he can see the queen. And someone needs to rescue the king. Oh, and there's a dark wizard that needs to be dealt with. Is this really a job for a former priest-to-be who doesn't know one end of a sword from the other?

Looking for help, Quentin meets a hermit who serves, not the gods, but the one God. That's an ongoing theme throughout, as author Stephen Lawhead is trying to point readers to the true God.

However, Lawhead sometimes gets it wrong. When a soldier is dying and asks how to go to heaven, the hermit tells him to just believe, but doesn't mention anything about repentance. That's a notable flaw worth bringing up with younger readers

One feature I really appreciated is that, while this is the first book of a trilogy, it is a full and complete story – this is not the sort of trilogy that is actually one story split over three books. But readers can look forward to Quentin's further adventures in *The Warlords of Nin* and *The Sword and the Flame*.

Like any great children's book, this will be a great read for adults too – I'd recommend it for 12 and up.

PARTIAL PRETERISM, ENTERTAININGLY EXPLAINED

THE LAST DISCIPLE

BY SIGMUND BROUWER AND HANK HANEGRAAFF

2004 / 428 PAGES

It's the year 65 AD, and Gallus Sergius Vitas is one of the last principled men in Rome. He's also a confidant of Emperor Nero which means his daily life is conducted on a knife's edge. Indulging the emperor's perverse demands might keep Vitas safe but would compromise the man that he is; yet to openly oppose the emperor would lead to his immediate introduction to the Coliseum's lions!

Our story begins with Vitas attempting this balancing act once again. Nero has dressed as a beast – his outfit comprised of lion and bear skins – complete with a collar and a chain held by a servant. His night's entertainment is to terrorize a group of prisoners. Enjoying their fear, the emperor quickly works himself into a killing frenzy. Vitas sees this all from the shadows and can't let it happen, knowing, though, that to openly oppose the emperor is to die. So Vitas yells at the chain-holding servant instead: "If the emperor knows you are involved in illegal torture, he will have you destroyed!" It is:

"an all-or-nothing bluff, pretending that he did not know Nero was inside the costume. Trusting that Nero would be too ashamed to admit it. Now. Or later."

Vitas' bluff works, but not just because of his daring. An earthquake sends Nero scurrying away, convinced that the shaking ground is a sign of divine judgment.

It's a great opening, highlighting the depths of the emperor's perversity, the heights of Vitas' courage, and the certain presence of God even in these pagans' lives. In less talented hands, the earthquake's unlikely timing could have come off as cheesy, since in real life God more often uses "ordinary means" (like doctors' talents or wise friends' advice) than miracles to accomplish His ends. But miracles do occur, and Brouwer makes it believable. It's a good thing too, as this is but the first miracle in a story that's all about how God used miraculous means – the prophetic words in the book of Revelation – to warn his Church to flee the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

What Brouwer and his writing partner, theologian Hank Hanegraaff, have done here is write an alternative to Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' popular *Left Behind* series. Where *Left Behind* places the beast of Revelation 13 in our near future, Brouwer and Hanegraaff place him in the first century, in the near future of those who first received John's letter. And they identify the beast as Nero and the bloody empire he led. This "partial preterist" (partial past) interpretation of Revelation holds that the book was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and the city's fall is a partial fulfillment of much of the prophecy in Revelation.

This, then, is fiction meant to teach as well and entertain,

and it does both brilliantly. Brouwer has crafted a story that takes us all around the Mediterranean, with Jews, Romans, and even troubled Christians wrestling with the question of "Who is Jesus?" There's also political plotting, assassination attempts, sieges, gladiators, and just a touch of romance.

CAUTIONS

One caution: Nero's depravity, though described with restraint, still means this is not a book for younger teens.

Readers should be aware that partial preterism is likely a minority view in Canadian Reformed churches (though I'm not sure what the majority view might be, as Revelation is only rarely discussed). Reformed notables who do hold to it include R.C. Sproul and Jay Adams.

CONCLUSION

The Last Disciple is a great book, kicking off a great series. The cast of characters is large, so if you're like me, make sure you get the whole trilogy – *The Last Disciple*, *The Last Sacrifice* and *The Last Temple* – right away, because if you wait too long between books, you may start forgetting who is who.

I'd recommend this to anyone who enjoys historical fiction – Sigmund Brouwer has got skills. And if you'd love to have partial preterism explained, well, this is the most entertaining way you could ever learn about it!





SORRY

The ART
of the
APOLOGY

by Pete Kuehni

In the middle of a leaders' coaching session, focusing on how they engaged in difficult conversations with their teams, I began to notice a theme. These leaders were frustrated with *the lack of ownership for bad attitudes on the part of some of their team members*.

I was also not "hearing" much, if any, sense of ownership regarding their own attitudes with these frustrating team members. I asked a couple of questions:

1. Have you ever delivered a "bad" attitude in response to a team members' "bad" attitude?
2. What did you do when you realized your error (assuming you did)?

Most in the group had not done anything regarding their own gap in attitude. Another question was asked: When is the last time you offered an apology to someone with whom you made a mistake? To my very great surprise *over half of the group had never apologized – EVER!!*

EVEN THE BOSS ISN'T PERFECT

This was a group of leaders with spouses, kids, involved in the community and entrusted with the leadership of people in the business they were helping to lead. How could this be? This was a group in which almost all claimed faith in Christ and yet most had never owned up to their mistakes at work, home, or in their communities.

It became clear that something was really wrong! *The lack of character in this group was troubling*. The feeling of unease became palpable as they realized the hypocrisy of what was just confessed. I felt for them. The planned agenda was dropped and I proceeded to "teach" this group the "Art of the Apology." Until they were willing to model the way and "own" an error in judgment or attitude, there was little sense in teaching anything else.

Before going further, I admit that in teaching the "Art of the Apology" it is not because I have it all figured out or find it easy to do. To be authentic and consistent has required much inner work on my part – *and this work is surely a lifelong journey!*

Our egos, left to their own devices, crave being right, being in charge, being in control. However, the way of our God & His kingdom is so very different. His way is one of letting go of those human drives and humbling oneself before Him and others. His way is one of fully embracing one's identity in Him.

When we find ourselves in Him our sense of security and significance is bolstered, our capacity to love, and not operate with fear, is strengthened. Because of Him we can own our mistakes and take the needed steps to apologize, forgive and potentially reconcile.


9 IMPORTANT WORDS

On June 15, 1985, my good friend Luch Delmonte spoke at my wedding. In his charge to me and my bride, he included 9 words. He repeated these same 9 words at the weddings of each of our 4 kids. How's that for a legacy! Here are the 9 words that can change your life should you choose to live them:

"I am sorry, I was wrong, Please forgive me!"

These 9 words have provided such a wonderful framework to help ensure relational ease at work and at home. I cannot imagine the impact on me and on others without them. Can you?

A DELIBERATE APPLICATION:

1. When is the last time you apologized for an attitude, words, and/or actions that were "offside"?
2. How did you know they were "offside"?
3. Describe what you were sensing in you and between you, God, and the other person?
4. What does your internal conversation sound like when you work at avoiding an apology?
5. What keeps you from living out Romans 12:18 – from taking responsibility in helping ensure peace between you and others?
6. If you are responsible for any part of a relational disconnect, what is your part?
7. When will you approach the person and offer the 9 words? 

This is the 7th in a series on "Leadership of People and Culture" that have been appearing on the DeliberateU.com blog, and it is reprinted here with permission. DeliberateU is a Christian business leaders mentorship group.

When is the last time you apologized for an attitude, words, and/or actions that were "offside"?



THE FATHER'S GIFT:

God's people are of inestimable value

by Chris deBoer

While all gifts are special, there are some we absolutely treasure. This greater attachment might be due to the occasion, the thoughtfulness, or the giver of the gift. I remember receiving a digital keyboard from my parents for one of my birthdays, and it wasn't a cheap little thing. I had demonstrated an affinity for playing music on the home organ or piano, and they wanted to encourage me with this special gift. I still have it and my children use it to this day.

A PRECIOUS GIFT

There is, of course, no better gift giver than our heavenly Father, and when we think about our heavenly Father's best gift, we think of Christ who was God's gift to us. There is no bigger gift!

However, in this article I want to explore another precious gift the Father has given, this one to his Son. And that gift is you!

When we consider the Father's great love for us, we need to pause a moment. Why does God love us? I am inclined to say, "because Christ died for us," but isn't that backwards? Consider John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son." God's love for us is what caused Him to send his Son.

Or consider Romans 8:5: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Because He loves us, He sent Christ to die for us. Christ's suffering, Christ's death is the ultimate expression of God's love for us. We are very precious in the sight of our Father. We are a great treasure to Him. But He will not let us remain miserable and stained by sin – He loves us too much for that! That is why He sent his Son.

When He was on earth, the Lord Jesus understood his mission and purpose.

The Father had a people whom He loved from before the foundation of the earth, but they had become wretched sinners. In order for these beloved people of the Father to be declared holy, righteous, and acceptable in his sight, the Father needed them to be washed. And this was accomplished through the blood of Christ.

FROM FATHER TO SON

But the Father gifted his treasured possession to his Son. Let's consider John 6. In this chapter Christ has fed approximately 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. It was a miracle. He then teaches those who followed Him across the sea, that He was the greater bread from heaven. Using metaphor and analogy, the people would not understand what Christ was saying when He told them that they had

Christ delights in being the gift of the Father and receiving us as gift from the Father.

to eat of his flesh, etc. Now, consider what He says in verse 37: “All that the Father gives me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.” Jesus makes it clear that He receives those whom the Father gives to Him.

He says it again in verse 39: “And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” Christ understands his purpose. What He is doing on earth has everlasting consequences – even the resurrection of the dead!

Let’s also consider John 17: 1-2, the opening words of Christ’s high priestly prayer:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given Him.”

Christ has come to earth as God’s gift to his beloved, and to receive the Father’s gift of those very same people. Christ came to save, redeem, and receive specific persons: the ones whom the Father loved and gave to his Son. John 17:9-10 reads:

“I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.”

BOTH GIFT AND GIFT-RECEIVER

And finally in John 17:24:

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”

Christ delights in being the gift of the Father and receiving us as gift from the Father. All true believers need to consider the significance of this truth. The Father loves us so much that He sent his Son, to humble Himself, taking on the form of man and suffering on the cross.

And the Son does this because He loves his Father, and He loves us! He died for us, while we were still sinners, while we were still unclean and unworthy. It is only by his death that we have been made worthy, made alive to live in that loving fellowship with God! Christ is not the only gift of the Father. Yes, Christ is the greatest gift, together with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but you and I also are gifts from the Father; gifts sent from the Father to his Son. That’s how precious you are!

It is my hope that we truly understand how precious we are in the sight of our Triune God. For the Spirit loves us too, and causes us to love God rightly. In Romans 15:30 we read, “I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit...” More of the working of the Spirit could be written, but my point here has been to focus on the precious place we have in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

If we struggle with a sense of worthlessness, or a sense of insignificance, we must call to mind that in the sight of God we are precious and of inestimable value. If that weren’t the case, why would the Father have sent his Son? Indeed, our value is not rooted in who we are, but in Whose we are! That makes all the difference! I hope we can be encouraged by this great truth that the Father loved us so much that He sent his Son to suffer and die for us, and He shared his very treasured possession (you) with his Son. Let’s live a life excelling in thanksgiving!

RP



Maranatha Christian School,
Fergus, ON
is looking for

GRADE 2 TEACHER

Due to a maternity leave, we have a full-time opening at the grade 2 level. Duties commence, DV, in April of 2022. Remuneration is in line with the current LCRSS salary grid including a competitive benefits/RRSP package.

EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANT

Due to a maternity leave, we have a full-time Educational Assistant opening. Duties of this position include working with a student at the grade 7 level as well as additional duties in various classrooms in different subject areas. Duties commence, DV, in April of 2022.

If you are interested in either of the above positions or have any questions, please contact one of the persons listed below. Successful applicants will be members of the Canadian Reformed Churches or of a sister church. Applications include a résumé, philosophy of education, and statement of faith. Successful applicants will be contacted for an interview. Applications are requested as soon as possible.

Mr. Richard Hoeksema, Principal

519.843.3029 (school)
519.787.1955 (home)
principal@mcsfergus.ca

Mrs. Amy Linde, Education Committee Chair

519-993-1444
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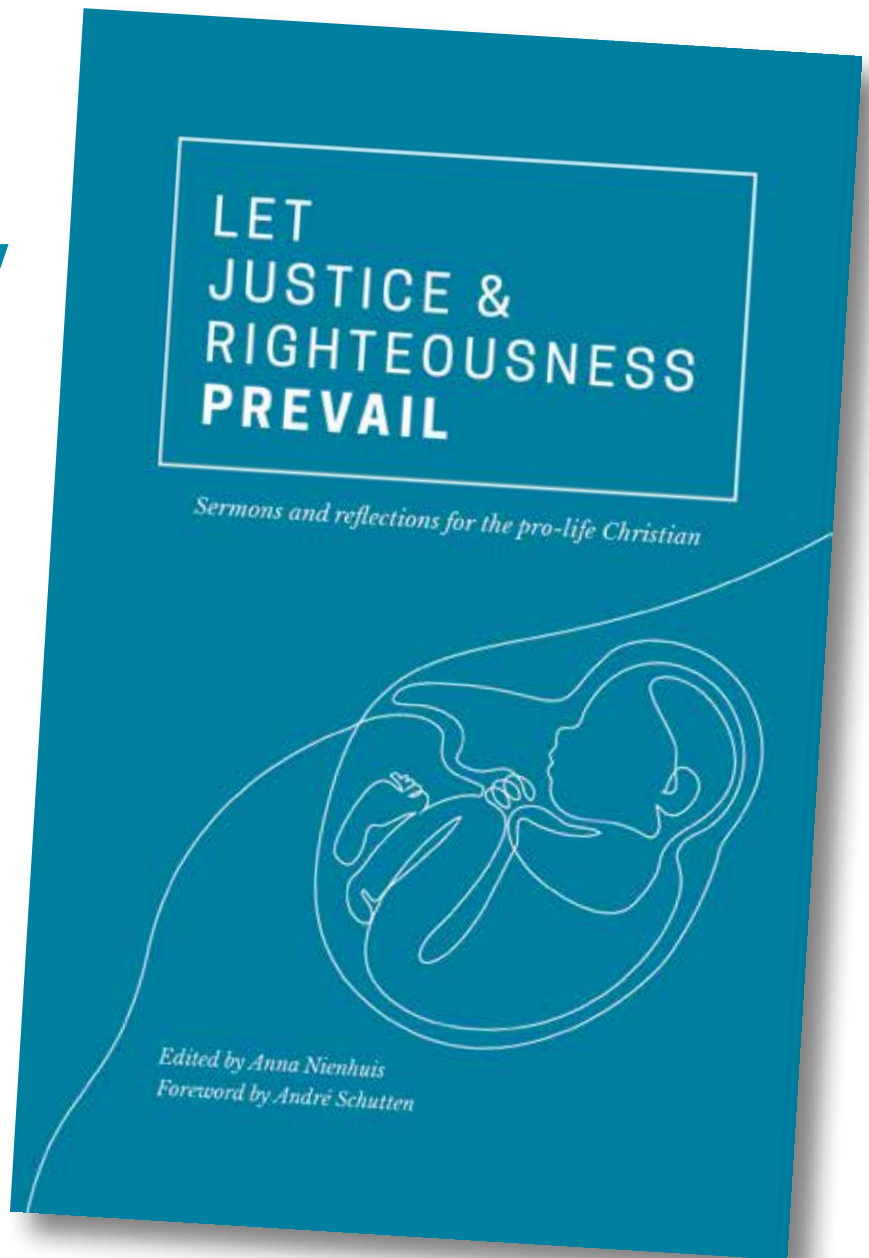
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SUFFERING, SELFISHNESS, SACRIFICE, AND THE UNBORN

— an excerpt from
*Let Justice and
Righteousness
Prevail*

This speech was delivered by Pastor Winston Bosch at a pro-life prayer service before the 2020 March for Life in Ottawa. ARPA Canada has sponsored such services for 15 years now, and built up quite the collection of great content. They've now teamed up with RP Press to publish 20 of these speeches in a book. ARPA staff have been working through "Let Justice and Righteousness Prevail: Sermons and reflections for the pro-life Christian" during their weekly devotions, and our hope is that you can be blessed by the book too. You can order your copy at Press.ReformedPerspective.ca.



As we consider the topic of abortion, my mind goes to the prayer of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:1-28. In this chapter, the Lord God asks Solomon what he would like the Lord to give him and Solomon prays this prayer:

"Give your servant an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil."

That's a beautiful prayer, and isn't that also a prayer we should pray for our own government? Our sincere prayer should be that God would give our government an

understanding mind to govern the people of this land, that the Lord would give the government discernment between good and evil, also in terms of life and death, of life and abortion.

The author of 1 Kings 3 notes this prayer of Solomon, and then goes through the legal records of his day and finds evidence of how the Lord answered Solomon's prayer. That legal courtroom transcript is found in 1 Kings 3:16-28.

Then two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. The one woman said, "Oh, my lord, this woman and I

live in the same house, and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. And we were alone. There was no one else with us in the house; only we two were in the house. And this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. And she arose at midnight and took my son from beside me, while your servant slept, and laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. When I rose in the morning to nurse my child, behold, he was dead. But when I looked at him closely in the morning, behold, he was

not the child that I had borne.” But the other woman said, “No, the living child is mine, and the dead child is yours.” The first said, “No, the dead child is yours, and the living child is mine.” Thus they spoke before the king.

Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead’; and the other says, ‘No; but your son is dead, and my son is the living one.’” And the king said, “Bring me a sword.” So a sword was brought before the king. And the king said, “Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other.” Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, “Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means put him to death.” But the other said, “He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him.” Then the king answered and said, “Give the living child to the first woman, and by no means put him to death; she is his mother.” And all Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice.

This example is undoubtedly one of many that could have been chosen, and it vividly illustrates how the Lord gave Solomon the gift of great wisdom, an understanding mind to govern, and discernment between good and evil, right and wrong.

This is a passage of Scripture that the author has recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What I’d like to do is take this story and use it as a springboard for prayer to help us pray concerning abortion in the country of Canada.

SUFFERING

The first thing that I would like to note from this story is the existence of both suffering and selfishness. The passage starts, “Then two prostitutes came.” When you hear the word “prostitute,” the first thing that should come to your mind is suffering.

Prostitution is violence against women. Prostitution is intrinsically exploitative and anti-women. Research has shown

that 90% of women involved in prostitution would like to escape it, but can’t figure out a way to do so and still survive. So, when we read “two prostitutes” we ought to think of suffering. These women suffer at the hands of men, and here they both become pregnant – and the fathers are, of course, nowhere to be seen. They’re pregnant and alone.

I think that suffering is a good place to start as we think about what to pray when we pray that abortion might end in Canada. It helps us to think of the suffering that many women undergo at the hands of men. Many women are impregnated by men who do not want to take responsibility for children. Some women are pressured into abortions, or abused or abandoned by men. There is so much suffering behind abortion. Women feel like they have no choice, no other option, like they’re being forced down a road that ends at an abortion clinic.

Once there, women are suffering at the hands of a big abortion industry that is, at its very heart, anti-women. The abortion industry tells women that being a mom is a weakness, and that killing your baby is a strength. It is an industry that profits off of suffering. Abortion doesn’t help women out of the surrounding problems of their life. Abortion doesn’t help women to leave abuse. Abortion doesn’t help women with the financial insecurity they experience, or their general feeling of being unsupported. What abortion does is get men off the hook while making women suffer the physical, the mental, the emotional scars that abortion often leaves in its wake.

As we pray, we who are pro-life must remember and pray for women that are suffering. Women that feel trapped. Women that feel like they have nowhere to go, that they’re pressured on all sides, that they’ve been abandoned by men, that can see no way forward with a baby. Women that are suffering and about to abort their baby.

SELFISHNESS

But as we read this story, we move quickly from suffering to selfishness. This selfishness is represented in the story of the second woman. She awakes

in the night and finds that she has accidentally smothered her baby. She takes the limp, dead child, sneaks into her housemate’s room, and exchanges her dead baby for the live baby.

While there is certainly sadness and suffering here, it results in a horrific sin of selfishness: a cruel act of kidnapping, a lie, the stealing of the joy of motherhood from another and giving the devastation of infant death. And then the horror of her selfishness takes on a new depth when she is confronted by the king. The selfish act that she committed against another woman now becomes a selfish murderous act committed against a baby.

You can see the scene: the soldier holds the living baby, brandishing a sword as the wise king seeks to discern between good and evil, and evil shows its face. Selfishness shows its face. And in its ugliness, it hisses from the lips of the second woman, “He shall be neither mine nor yours. Divide him! Cut him in two!”

This is where the sin of selfishness leads us, doesn’t it? It leads us also today to men and women so consumed by their own agenda, men and women so consumed by their own plans, men and women so insistent that nothing will defy their will, that nothing will stand between them and their desires, their wants, their plans, their comfort, their convenience, that they’re willing to say, “This living baby shall be neither mine nor yours. Cut him in two.” It’s a horrific and realistic picture of the selfish horror inherent in abortion. “My plans come first. My life comes first. My desires must be first. Cut him in two. Rip her apart with a vacuum suction device. Use a clamp to dismember him, cut her into pieces. Remove this child from my womb, for this baby shall be neither mine nor yours.”

We rightly shed compassionate tears and say compassionate prayers for the many women that are suffering as a result of abortion and its impacts. But we must also be willing to speak truth and to pray truth against the selfishness of men and women who leave a wake of dead babies behind them. “He shall be neither mine nor yours. Cut him in

two.”¹ Pray for the suffering, and for the selfish, that they might see a Savior and turn to Him.

SACRIFICE

This text speaks of suffering and selfishness, and we see those all around us – and inside of ourselves – in the world in which we live. But now we move from suffering and selfishness to sacrifice. We see this in verse 26:

“Then the woman whose son was alive said to the king, because her heart yearned for her son, ‘O my lord, give her the living child and by no means put him to death!’”

This prostitute whose child was alive, this woman’s heart understood that love and life are bound tightly together. This woman knew that children ought to be yearned for, and protected. This woman teaches us something about the sanctity of life and about the sacrifices to be made to keep babies alive. “Give this living child to another woman! Don’t allow this child to die.” From this prostitute, this suffering woman, we hear no selfish talk come from her mouth. There’s no reasoning that, “Well, this child can live if it suits me. The child can live, but on my conditions.” There’s none of this talk that, “The child can live if I can provide them a good

home,” or “The child can live only if I can be the mother that I want to be.”

Instead, selfishness is replaced by sacrifice. “Lord, King, give the child to another woman if it will save a life. Give my child to my lying brothel roommate. Let her adopt him, only let the child live!” *Only let the child live.* This woman is willing to sacrifice her right of motherhood, her right of parenthood, if only the child can live. This is love for life.

Pray that the Lord would teach us sacrifice, that we would want to learn from the good prostitute. There’s so much suffering in this world. There’s so much sin and selfishness in this world. But when it comes to the sanctity of life, when it comes to the life of little unborn children, it’s sacrifice that must win over sin and suffering. Is that not the Jesus way? That is the example that our Lord Jesus Christ set for us at great cost – suffering is won over and sin is beaten by sacrifice. So, as believers who treasure the sanctity of God-created life, it’s important for us to realize that when we speak about the sanctity of life, sacrifice is needed to overcome the suffering and sin that lead to abortion.

It’s easy to say that it’s the pregnant moms, the distressed dating couples, or the overwhelmed parents who don’t want another child that must sacrifice their selfish dreams in order to save a child. And that’s true, of course. But it’s also you and me, we who live in the shadow of the cross of Jesus, who must be ready to sacrifice. We must be ready to sacrifice our time, and our money, and our reputations, and our plans, and our comfort for the sake of the unborn. The sin of abortion must be met by the church’s willingness to sacrifice. The suffering and the sin of abortion must be met by the sacrifice of adoption and fostering, and homes and churches that provide safe places for pregnant women to have their children. Our cry must be, “Lord, I’m willing to take up my cross and I’m willing to open my home and I’m willing to extend my table if only you let the children live! If only the child will live.”



“Lord, King, give the child to another woman if it will save a life. Give my child to my lying brothel roommate. Let her adopt him, only let the child live!”

That is what we pray for when we pray to end abortion – that we would hear those words from our government: “By no means put the unborn to death!”

GOVERNANCE AND GOD

This gripping story in 1 Kings 3 ends beautifully with these words in verse 27: “Then the King answered and said, ‘Give the living child to the first woman and by no means put him to death. She is his mother.’” Solomon recognizes that the essence of motherhood is unselfish, sacrificial love. In awarding the baby to the woman willing to sacrifice her interest for the baby’s welfare, Solomon embraces the sanctity of life over self.

And so, we pray that we might see in our day an understanding mind and a discernment between good and evil in our government. And we can pray for the same wisdom and discernment for ourselves. We have seen that this is a prayer that the Lord delights to answer.

We pray that our government would be willing to help the suffering, but not indulge the selfish. We pray that our government would recognize the sanctity of life and not support the termination of life. We pray that they would support and encourage sacrifice, not sin.

In 1 Kings 3 we have a court record, a legal record concerning a child in danger, a child whom one woman is willing to have cut in two. The court record ends with the king’s wise ruling, “By no means put him to death!” That is what we pray for when we pray to end abortion – that we would hear those words from our government: “By no means put the unborn to death!” We pray that we might one day hear and have written before us a legal record, an official proclamation of Parliament stating, “We recognize the pre-born child as a human being and we have amended the Criminal Code to say abortion is illegal. By no means put the children to death!” That is our prayer, a prayer for God to move in a way that only He can.

Until the Lord answers our prayer as He

answered Solomon’s prayer, we continue to give our lives as living sacrifices so that, in this world of suffering and selfishness, the sanctity of life might not be ignored. Because this, brothers and sisters, is the Jesus way.

It was Jesus who, in Matthew 12, said that He was greater than Solomon. The great messianic king came to earth as an unborn child in His mother’s womb. Jesus, who came to this earth to suffer. Jesus, who loved and befriended and ate meals with and taught prostitutes as His own disciples. Jesus, who denounced selfishness with His sacrificial love on the cross. Jesus, who maintained the sanctity of life against murder and yet willingly gave Himself up to be murdered, nailed to a cross. Jesus, who rose again to sit on the throne as the greater Solomon, where He sits today, that we might all be in awe of the king, perceiving in Him the wisdom of God to do justice. Jesus, who knows the plight of every aborted child. Jesus, who will judge with justice. Jesus, who governs from heaven today with goodness and grace.

And Jesus, who one day will return to demonstrate conclusively that, through sacrifice, sin and suffering will be no more. Jesus, who one day will issue the order, “By no means put those children to death.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is our guarantee that one day all abortion will come to an end.

PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for those who are suffering and feeling trapped in difficult circumstances, especially women facing an unplanned and unwanted pregnancy
- Thank God for His example of great sacrifice, and pray for His strength to live a sacrificial life in His service
- Pray for the blessing of courage to defend and support life

- Pray that God would give you words to speak with grace and truth, that others would be called to true repentance from selfishness and so bring glory to God

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read 1 Peter 2:1-25, and consider verse 21 in this context. To what have we been called, and how does that impact how we use our voice in the public square?
2. The theme of sacrifice runs throughout scripture. Meditate on what Christ was willing to sacrifice in order to save us from our condemnation. Think of other Biblical examples where selfishness was overcome by sacrifice.
3. Consider everything we are asked to be willing to sacrifice in order to let the children live – home, time, privacy, money, reputation, comfort, etc. Which of these are you most resistant to sacrificing when you consider how you could be involved in pro-life action?
4. Many today are focused on self, and what they get out of their relationships. How has this attitude impacted us as Christians in relationships? How can you practice love that puts sacrifice before selfishness in your own life, for example as a friend, co-worker, client, sibling, parent, or spouse? RP

ENDNOTE

¹ In 1989, there was a case where this played out in our modern courts. In *Tremblay v. Daigle*, the couple had ended their brief relationship when Ms. Daigle was 18 weeks pregnant. She decided to abort the child. Tremblay, the child’s father, wanted to keep the baby and tried to prevent her from having an abortion. A court initially granted an injunction to stop the abortion, but this was overturned by a higher court in favor of Ms. Daigle, saying the court could not permit a man to veto a woman’s choice. Ms. Daigle who went ahead with the abortion, essentially saying, “This baby shall be neither mine nor yours. Cut him in two.”

WHAT IS FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE?

by Daniel Zekveld

Whether they're happening inside the Church or out in the public square, debates about how far freedom of conscience extends can be confusing. Should Christians be compelled to take a vaccine that's been tested on the fetal remains of an aborted child? Should Christian business owners have a right to refuse a service that would violate their conscience, like baking a wedding cake for a same-sex ceremony? How do Christians respond to government mandates or policies that they cannot follow in good conscience? And how do we deal with conscientious disagreement *within* the Church?

The specifics of freedom of conscience can be complex and nuanced and are often misunderstood. Abraham Kuyper called the conscience:

“the shield of the human person, the root of civil liberties, the source of a nation's happiness.”

Why is it so important? To answer that question, let's begin by looking at what the conscience is and is not.

WHAT IS “CONSCIENCE”?

Definitions of conscience vary, but they center around the idea of what someone believes to be right and wrong. The conscience is a moral compass that helps direct people's actions. In that sense, conscience is *personal and subjective* because it condemns or excuses one's own conduct, not that of another person – after all, you don't get a guilty conscience because of *someone else's* behaviour.

However, conscience is also based on an *objective and general* standard. The Bible explains that the conscience is given by God to both Christians and non-Christians and it helps people apply their knowledge of right and wrong to their behaviour, both past actions and decisions about future actions. The New Testament also speaks of the importance of having a good conscience by following its direction and doing what is right (see Rom. 2:15, 1 Tim. 1:5).

Christian political scientist David Koyzis, in his book *We Answer to Another*, tells a story about the Milgram Experiment which relates well

to conscience. The experiment was a study designed to look at how people respond to authority. The experimenter would select two participants and assign one the role of teacher, while another volunteer would be given the role of student. The person selected as the teacher was instructed to apply an electrical shock of increasing voltage to the other person – the student – who was in a different room. Now, unbeknownst to the teacher, the other person was actually an actor being paid to play the part. Although the teacher could hear the apparent pain experienced by the person in the next room, most individu-



Recognizing our Higher Authority helps Christians resist horrific authorities: in the infamous Milgram Experiment: a volunteer was instructed to apply an electrical shock of increasing (and seemingly lethal) voltage to a person in a different room. Two volunteers refused. Both were Christian.

als would continue applying electric shocks – despite increasing screams and pleas to stop – when instructed to do so by the experimenter. However, two participants were unwilling to keep going along with the instructions. Both were Christians. They followed the experiment instructor’s commands for a time but stopped sooner than most other participants, knowing that they were responsible for their actions and stating that they were answerable to a higher authority.

When asked to do something wrong, we too are responsible for our actions and answerable to a higher authority.

Ultimately, the foundation for freedom of conscience is found in the sovereignty of God. Every human being has various authorities in their lives, such as parents, employers, church leadership, or civil government. Each of these has legitimate authority over us, but that authority is also limited. The only One who is sovereign over the conscience is God, and if another authority commands us to do what we believe is sin – what we believe violates how God wants us to act – then we can appeal to freedom of conscience. The conscience is a shield that protects against the abuse of authority and points instead to the one Higher Authority.

CONSCIENCE AND THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Debates around conscience are becoming increasingly relevant in our society and are most noticeable within certain vocations. Can medical professionals refuse to help a patient access abortion, assisted suicide, or sex change surgery? Can marriage officiants refuse to marry a same-sex couple? Can a photographer decline a request to take photos at a same-sex ceremony? Can a publisher decline to print pro-abortion pamphlets?

Increasingly, our society answers



Conscience protection for only some? The same culture that wants to force Christians to “bake the cake” for a same-sex celebration, wouldn’t think of forcing anyone to “design the dress” for Melina Trump. (Photo by U.S. Army Sgt. Ricky Bowden)

“no.” To allow people to conscientiously object is seen as simply discriminatory and bigoted. Our society needs to understand that a conscientious objection in these cases is not a rejection of an individual person, but a refusal to commit what the objector believes to be a sin or to participate in sinful activity.

Today it’s often Christians who are being pressured to violate their conscience. However, there are others who seek the same protections for their conscience. It’s this freedom that an atheist doctor appeals to when he determines he cannot participate in euthanasia, based on his oath to do no harm. And what of the fashion designers, back in 2016, who had principled objections to designing an inauguration dress for First Lady Melania Trump? When these designers announced they would not make the dress because they didn’t want to be associated with newly elected President Donald Trump’s administra-

tion, many celebrated their decision as taking a principled stand. Likewise, some in our society want abortion-supporting publishers to be allowed to decline print orders for pro-life material, or for a gay business owner to be allowed to refuse to rent a hall for an event that promotes biblical marriage.

Yet increasingly, the same people want to see Christians reprimanded for acting according to their beliefs.

For Christians, the answer to the questions above might be easy. But we have our own disputes about conscience within the Church as well, such as what kind of entertainment is permissible or what it looks like to honor the Sabbath Day outside of corporate worship.

WHEN CONSCIENCE PRICKS

Of note, the strongest commands of conscience are often negative, in terms of what you are not permitted to do, rather than what you may or must do. For example, if you use foul language, your conscience will likely bother you more than if you fail to correct someone else using such language. Or, if a publisher prints pro-abortion pamphlets that he objects to, his conscience will

“...we have our own disputes about conscience within the Church.”

make him feel guilty more than if he fails to promote life as he believes he ought.

When the conscience commands a person not to do something, the command is about a very specific action. Alternatively, if the command is instead to act on something good, there are often various ways of pursuing that good.

CONSCIENCE AND THE CHURCH

Because of sin, no person's conscience is perfectly aligned with what God commands in His Word. The chart below is based on one from a helpful book titled *Conscience: What It Is, How To Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ*, by Andrew Naselli and J.D. Crowley. The authors used it to explain the difference between two people's consciences, and how they compare to God's will. The

letters within the chart refer to different rules or principles of right and wrong.

Both Arnold and Zoe have added rules to their conscience that are not commanded in Scripture. For example, perhaps Arnold has a history of alcohol abuse in his family, so he adds letter 'C' which commands him not to drink alcohol to avoid temptation. Maybe letters 'D' and 'E' are Arnold's belief that he must not play cards or any games involving dice. Arnold and Zoe have also both failed to include letter 'B' in their conscience. Perhaps this is a failure to consistently honor the Sabbath Day, and their consciences no longer accuse them for it. However, Arnold and Zoe's consciences are both aligned with God's will in letters 'J' through 'M,' where they have rightly applied biblical principles and commands to their lives

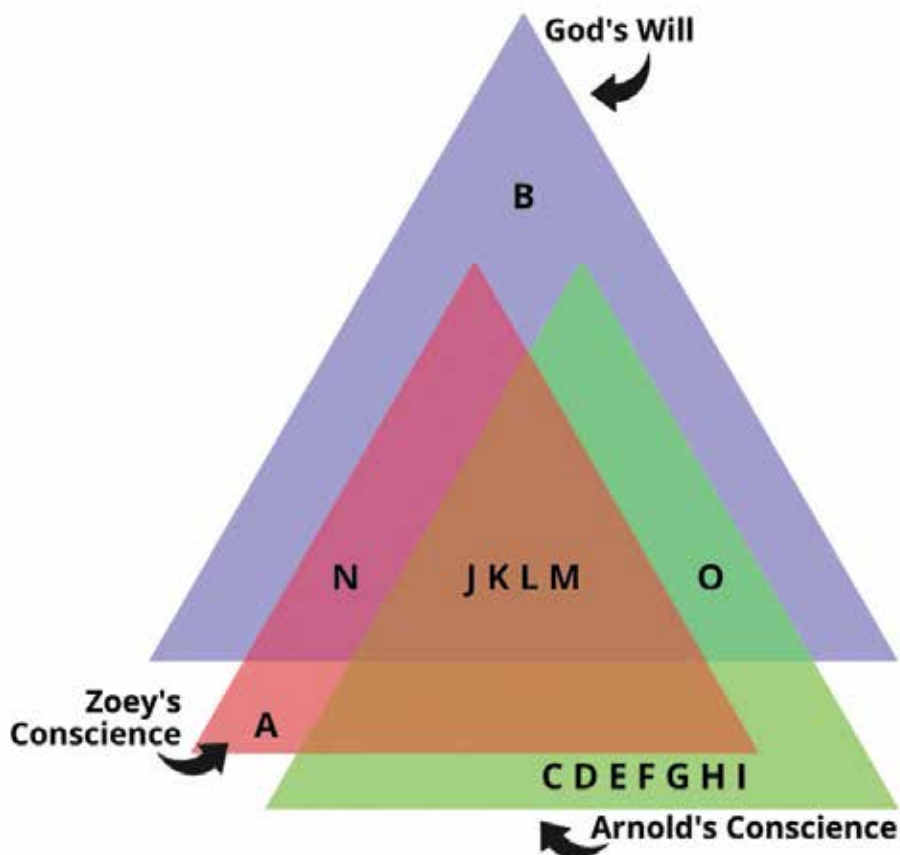
and consciences. The natural tendency is to think that if another person has more rules than us, they are legalistic. Alternatively, if they have fewer rules, they are failing to live as Christians. However, Scripture remains the standard to which we must seek to align our conscience.

The conscience can easily become oversensitive by including rules that are not matters of right and wrong. We see examples of the Pharisees in the New Testament who created additional rules for the Sabbath and wanted everyone to abide by them. We might feel unnecessarily guilty if we do not abide by similar rules on the Sabbath.

Alternatively, conscience can become desensitized. Perhaps you use or tolerate foul language that would have shocked you a decade ago, or you consume entertainment that you would have been ashamed of years earlier. Our conscience does not always accurately tell us what is sin and what is not. While it might not always make sense to follow conscience in relation to other authorities, we have a duty to obey it because we cannot commit what we believe is sin.

At the same time, we should be careful when dealing with the consciences of other people. In 1 Corinthians 8, the Apostle Paul talks about whether believers can eat meat offered to idols and refers to consideration for brothers and sisters with a weaker conscience. So, if we believe a brother or sister has a weaker conscience, we must not be a stumbling block to them and cause them to disobey their conscience. On disputable issues, we may realize that someone has a weaker conscience, and we can discuss the biblical principles that apply. Or perhaps they have a stronger conscience, and they can help us understand where our conscience is not aligned to Scripture.

Again, conscience is not meant to be some wishy-washy idea where everyone can believe what they want, like in the time of the judges of Israel, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." There are direct, objective commands and principles that can be taken



Differing convictions: Because God's law written on our hearts (Rom 2:14-15) our consciences do in important ways line up with God's Truth. Due to our sinful nature, our consciences do not do so perfectly, and thus differ from one another.

from Scripture. There are many issues which should not be disputable for Christians and are clear in the Bible.

However, there are also issues where serious Christians can come to different conclusions about what God commands. For example, what activities are not permitted on the Sabbath? Or perhaps more current, how do we navigate government restrictions and the call to honor our authorities versus our callings to obey what God demands of us? What about masking, vaccines, etc., both within the public square and the Church? Christian conscience differs on these issues, and believers can have biblical arguments for why they think God commands or prohibits different actions.

WHAT *ISN'T* CONSCIENCE?

Some of us might react to the idea that conscience is a kind of subjective belief that is not accountable to other people. We can't simply say, "well, what's right for you isn't necessarily right for me." Conscience is not merely a personal preference like your favourite food or music. It is also not license to do whatever you please and ignore other authorities. Rather, freedom of conscience refers to moral beliefs that respect a limited sphere of individual authority while still recognizing other legitimate authorities that can impose obligations on us.

As such, the conscience is not *unlimited*. Some people might abuse the ability to claim conscientious objection out of self interest or to simply justify their actions. Authorities such as the civil government, church government, employers, or parents do have power to compel or deny certain actions.

However, if the civil government (or other authorities) limits conscience, they must provide good justification for doing so and seek to accommodate conscientious objectors as much as they are able, such as through exemptions for freedom of conscience. Abraham Kuyper again shows the importance of conscience, stating that:

"Ten times better is a state in which a few eccentrics can make themselves

a laughingstock for a time by abusing freedom of conscience, than a state in which these eccentricities are prevented by violating conscience itself."

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, conscience belongs to an individual and is accountable to God. However, it should also be rooted in Biblical commands and principles. Increasingly, we encounter disagreements in the Church about various issues, while in the public square some Christians' jobs are threatened because the State fails to recognize conscience. On many matters, Christians will refuse

to do something they believe is evil even if others do not believe the action is wrong. The Church has an opportunity to continue to show our society what it means to live according to moral standards based on the will and Sovereignty of God. Wherever we find ourselves, let's seek to say, "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16).

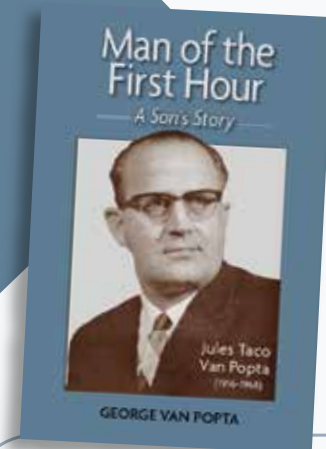
Daniel Zekveld is a policy analyst with ARPA Canada and the principal drafter of ARPA's latest policy report on "Conscience in Healthcare." You can find it ARPACanada.ca.

MAN OF THE FIRST HOUR *A Son's Story*

BY GEORGE VAN POPTA

Man of the First Hour

is a personal account of a loving son who invites the reader into the life and times of Rev. Jules Van Popta. It's a glimpse behind the scenes presented in a multidimensional narrative that touches on topics including family, church, struggles, war, and immigration. Using a combination of personal recollections and fragments of letters, documents, and articles, the author sketches an honest portrait of a "good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:21).



"The time is ripe for more histories of the Canadian Reformed churches to be written—while those who lived through the early days are still able to tell the tales. A wonderful blend of church history and family lore, *Man of the First Hour* tells the story of the first Canadian Reformed minister—his life and ministry, his character and worldview, his quirks and his legacy. Follow the journey of a Dutch village pastor whose parish became the Canadian West, the absent-minded family man whose thoughtful writings and sermons guided the immigrant churches through heady debates about union membership, integration into Canadian society, and the race to land a man on the moon."

— Jannes Smith

Professor of Old Testament, Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Order "Man of the First Hour" at
Press.ReformedPerspective.ca



CENSORSHIP ISN'T CHRISTIANS' BIGGEST SOCIAL MEDIA PROBLEM

...but we usually act like it is

by Chris Martin

Not so long ago, I was having a conversation with someone about why I write so much about Christians' concerning relationship with the social internet. This person has some insight into Christian organizations, how they are led, and why they often focus on the issues they do. He said to me, in paraphrase, "It's a lot easier to get Christians to care about and give money to combat social media censorship than it is to get them to care about how social media is forming our hearts."

I was frustrated by what this guy said, but I couldn't refute it. I've been on the radio every other week for the last seven years, most of that time to talk social media, and I've been privileged to speak to groups on these topics too. What I've found is that lots of Christians are concerned about social media *censorship*. Too few are concerned about social media *discipleship*.

This isn't surprising. We are more interested in the ways we can form the world than we are with the ways the world is forming us.

This isn't to say social media/internet censorship isn't a problem. It certainly is. But I worry that we as Christians are more interested in protecting our expression than we are our hearts.

OUTRAGE SELLS

Frankly, if I'm being 100% honest, I think a lot of Christians/Christian organizations focus on social media censorship and alleged suppression of Christian ideals because it raises more money than the alternative. But I'm more cynical than I should be, so that perspective could just be the cynicism talking. But it makes sense doesn't it? People get more fired up about the "oppression of censorship" than they do a discipleship crisis. And when people get more fired up, they're going to give more money.

Just a couple of weeks ago, the *MIT Technology Review* reported Facebook's internal data that 19 of the top 20 Christian Facebook pages are actually not run by Christians trying to encourage other Christians with gospel truths – they're troll farms run by Eastern European internet mobs that use encouraging Christian(ish) messages to manipulate and deceive Christians who don't know any better.

The Internet is making fools of us. It's leading us to hate one another more than love one another. It's warping our understandings of authority and truth and beauty and love and purpose. It's ripping churches, families, and countries apart.

In the face of all of these harsh realities, why are we so much more concerned with a platform suppressing our opinions

about social issues? Because we want the world to adhere to a standard of faith we are increasingly neglecting ourselves.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD? I AM

Christians' biggest social media problem isn't censorship – it's discipleship. But the oppositional posture afforded by the image of fighting the secular, Jesus-hating culture and their efforts to suppress the issues Christians care about most is too lucrative to ignore in an effort to address the ways our relationship with social media is warping our own hearts.

In short, "the culture" makes for a better enemy than does our own heart. "They" are out to get us by suppressing our speech, nevermind what we're doing to ourselves by scrolling Facebook for four hours a day. It's like we're hyper vigilant about the possibility of our homes being broken into as we burn them down ourselves. RP

This originally appeared in Chris Martin's "Terms of Service" newsletter and is reprinted here with permission. "Terms of Service" looks at the social internet from a Christian perspective, and you can sign up at www.termsofservice.social. "Terms of Service" the book will be published on Feb. 1, 2022, which you can pre-order at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA

7-2

PUZZLE CLUES

Find this issue's solution on page 4!

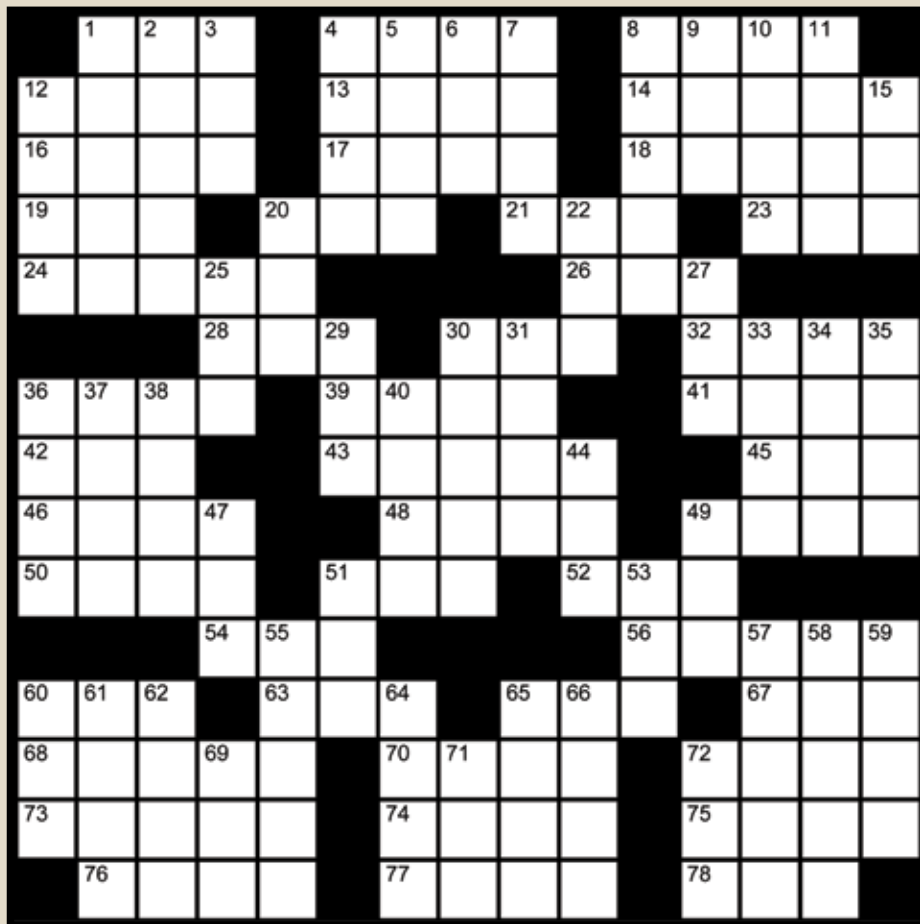
ACROSS

1. In favor of not being amateur
4. Blunder; bungle
8. Strike with open hand
12. Past participle of lie
13. What you see 29 Down do from a cut
14. Shape of many (supposed) UFOs
16. Semicircular recess at end of cathedral
17. Memorial in newspaper (short form)
18. Molecule made of three oxygen atoms
19. Prompt to enter stage, or pool stick
20. "and ____ bread with him" (Job 42)
21. "said to... ____ the people" (Ruth 4)
23. General Educational Development test
24. Japanese writing system
26. It could be lemon, could be lime.
28. High rugged mountain (esp. in Europe)
30. What Dad loosens on the pickle jar
32. Long, long time (variant form)
36. Title for Russian emperor
39. One type of car sales
41. Uncommon as a steak not well done
42. European Economic Community
43. "Lord, to whom _____ we go?" (John 6)
45. "like the sand of the ____" (Hosea 1)
46. Armies need it to fight. (short form)
48. Substance used in fertilizer
49. _ ____ is a great old-fashioned toy.
50. Capital of Ukraine
51. *Jamaica* ____: 1939 Alfred Hitchcock film
52. Reason for rally (with some Pepsi?)
54. Pointed tool to make holes in leather
56. "the _____ of the sky fell" (Revelation 6)
60. Portable folding bed
63. Abbreviation for "Lou Gehrig's disease"
65. Belonging to it
67. It's me in Paris or Montreal.
68. It finds plants sweet – but not ladybugs.
70. Short form of information
72. One way to get to the top in skiing
73. One place to keep money
74. "and the fever _____ her" (Matt. 8)
75. Plural of 15 Down
76. They all add up in math.
77. They get you in the door.
78. They have 12 mos or 52 wks (abbr.)

DOWN

1. Indonesian province, formerly Irian Jaya
2. "Christ Is _____! Alleluia!" (hymn title)
3. "Have we not all ____ Father?" (Malachi 2)
4. "they ran there on ____" (Mark 6)
5. Soft, pendulous part of 27 Down
6. Israeli submachine gun
7. Second letter of Greek alphabet
8. Chide; chastise; rebuke angrily
9. ____ Taylor: actress who played Cleopatra
10. Agape; expectant
11. Section of a window
12. "'You _____ one thing...'" (Mark 10)
15. "though... ____ like crimson" (Is. 1)
20. Suffer from being ill (at least partly ill)
22. Boy or young man
25. "the woman left her water ____" (John 4)
27. "Give _____, and hear..." (Is. 28)
29. Gross fluid in your immune response
30. "he could not _____ the facts" (Acts 21)
31. "who sing _____ songs..." (Amos 6)
33. "a scorching _____ wind" (Jonah 4)
34. Multi-layered cookie
35. Less than average tide
36. Tropical hardwood used in furniture
37. Half (of a truck?)
38. Wile E. Coyote's favorite manufacturer
40. Avoid; eschew; abjure
44. Loop around the track or the pool
47. Eggs, scientifically speaking
49. Appropriate place to rent (abbr.)

51. How you feel when you 20 Down
53. First letter and possible shape of snake
55. Paddles; enters the water
57. Fossilized tree resin
58. "'Go... to the main _____'" (Matt. 22)
59. "Dear _____," - from letter to consistory
60. Top of a baseball uniform
61. Musical work, distinguished by number
62. Drive-_____: one way to get food
64. What spiders use to make webs
65. Risky; dubious; unlikely
66. Tykes; toddlers
69. End of Communism or capitalism
71. Born as (referring to maiden name)
72. Prove me... and ____ me" (Ps. 26)



7 THINGS WE STRIVE TO BE

...and 8 that we aim for

There's lots of magazines out there, quite a few of them Christian, and a number even specifically Reformed. What sets *RP* apart can be stated other ways too, but here are 7 to start with. This is what we strive to be, in the service of our readership and our Lord.

1. CAREFUL

In an age of tweets, hot takes, and off the cuff comments, we aim to be careful, taking the time to research rather than react. Christians who read their Bible daily, and hear it preached weekly, are equipped with pretty good “sniff detectors” – saturated in the Word, we can detect when something smells fishy. But that's not enough to get at the truth; it isn't as easy as spotting the lie and then holding to the opposite. Would that we could count on liars to be that reliably wrong! No, if we want to learn the truth of a matter, then we'll have to put in the time and study to seek it out (Prov. 18:17).

This concern for the facts has killed some good stories – stories that other publications carried but we did not because, even as they were not outright fabrications, they were hyped beyond their proper proportions.

2. BOLD

We want to be bold. God has given us an audience, and to serve it well, we need to sometimes tackle tough topics. However, in the name of being careful, it can be really easy to avoid anything touchy. There is, after all, always more research that could be done. That's how being careful can become cover for cowardice. Thus a focus on boldness is a necessary counterbalance, lest we bury the “talent” God has given us (Matt. 25:14-30) – the opportunity to serve our readership on issues that matter.

3. PRO-LIFE

We recognize that the biggest political issue of our time has to be the ongoing slaughter of one fifth of all children before they even see the light of day. Our readers are like-minded, but some might also be discouraged – the fight to protect the unborn has been going on for decades now, with little progress seen on the political front (but might that be changing in

the US?). That means there's a need to encourage one another to keep speaking up, donating, demonstrating, volunteering and just generally advocating for the unborn.

There's also a need for education. Even among Christians, there's ignorance about where our worth actually comes from. The world justifies abortion by saying the unborn can't do much – they ground worth in our abilities. The counter to that is not to point to all the unborn can already do, or soon will be able to do – that's also “able-ist.” We need to explain where our worth actually comes from, being made in the very Image of God (Gen 9:6). And there is also a need for education among Christian about the potential that some forms of birth control and fertility treatments have to cost unborn lives.

4. SIX-DAY

We hold unwaveringly to a recent 6-day creation. The opening chapters of Genesis are central to our understanding of not simply our own origins, but more importantly, who God is, and what He is saying in the rest of the Bible.

5. NOT ONE SQUARE INCH

We get to investigate God's sovereignty in every sphere of life. As Abraham Kuyper noted: “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” It's not simply Sunday's events that concern God, but how we live our lives the other six days of the week too. It is our joy to investigate and share how best to honor God in our family, career, recreation, politics, entertainment, and more. We also reject the error of those who would downplay God's sovereignty in the broader culture and the political sphere. That the world might not recognize God's reign doesn't make it any less true.

6. GRATEFUL

We want to remember how richly God has blessed us. Christians have, for the last two thousands years, been saying things are so bad the end must be nigh. And we've been wrong for just as long, and not simply about the end date, but about the state of things. Fear and outrage have made us lose sight of all that God has done – and continues to do! – to

provide for, sustain, and grow His Church. So we reject defeatism and will not lament about how much better things used to be (Eccl 7:10). As a counter to such cynicism, we endeavor to share good news, and celebrate good books (and good films too).


7. BIBLICAL

We want to ground what we say on the firm foundation of what God has said. This undergirds everything else, but can't go without saying. Whether the topic is marriage or vaccine mandates, economics or entrepreneurship, we want to turn to the Bible. It is amazing how often common sense aligns closely, but not exactly, with Scripture, making it important to find out how better to align ourselves with God's Word, and not (as the case may be) Jordan Peterson's words.



Finally, we try to be **stewardly** and *cost effective*, to get the very biggest bang for each donated dollar we've been given. If you appreciate what we do, will you consider an ongoing monthly, or one-time donation?

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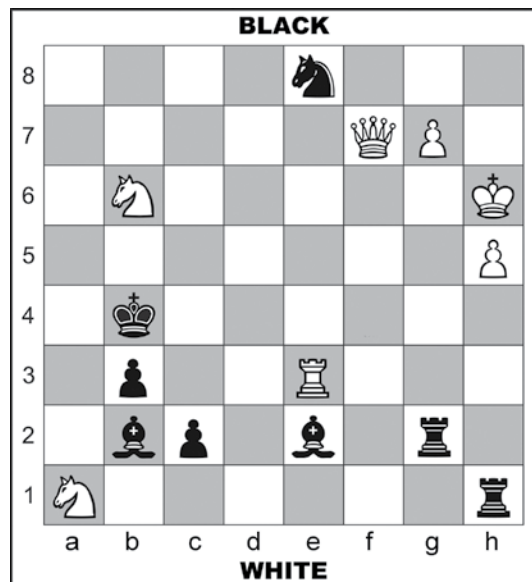
Thank you for standing with us as we together proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all spheres of life!

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ENTICING ENIGMAS & CEREBRAL CHALLENGES



Chess Puzzle #267



WHITE TO MATE IN 3
Or, If it is BLACK's Move,
BLACK TO MATE IN 3

Riddle for Punsters

#267 - "Some Sticky Situation!"

Gerry accidentally gave his wife a glue stick instead of lipstick. He feared that she would tell all her friends about his blunder but she has said nothing! Her _ _ _ s have been s _ _ _ ed ever since it happened. She looks somewhat sl _ _ _ er than before the blunder. It seems to be helping her to s _ _ _ k to her diet.

Problem to Ponder

#267 - "Number Combinations - Part 2"

As in Part 1, use, EACH ONLY ONCE, the digits 1, 3, 4 and 6. Use the operations addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, each AT MOST ONCE. However, ONE of the 4 numbers may be used as an **EXPONENT!** Again, if desired, round brackets may be used, but AT MOST ONCE. Of course, ALWAYS follow the order of algebraic operations (BEDMAS). For example, to produce the result -2, one possible answer is $4 \times 13 - 6 = 4 \times 1 - 6 = 4 - 6 = -2$ and to produce the result 999, one answer is $(6 + 4)3 - 1 = 103 - 1 = 1000 - 1 = 999$.

Find **at least one way** to produce the following results:

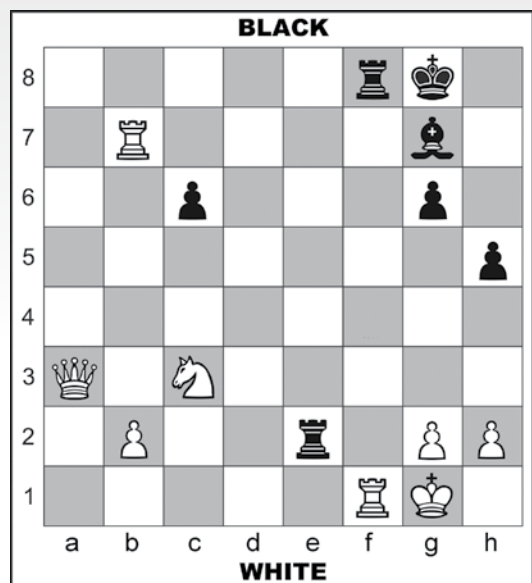
a) 8 b) 81 c) 15 d) -12 e) -11

Send Puzzles, Solutions, Ideas to

Puzzle Page, 43 Summerhill Place, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4V4 or robgleach@gmail.com

LAST MONTH'S SOLUTIONS

Solution to Chess Puzzle #266



WHITE TO MATE IN 3

Descriptive Notation

1. RxB ch KxR
[not K-R1 since QxR mate]
2. QxR ch K-R2
3. R-B7 mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Rb7xg7 + Kg8xg7
[not Kg8-h8 since Qa3xf8 ++]
2. Qa3xf8 + Kg7-h7
3. Rf1-f7 ++

BLACK TO MATE IN 2

Descriptive Notation

1. ----- B-Q5ch
2. R-B2 R-K8 mate
or
2. K-R1 RxR mate

Algebraic Notation

1. ----- Bg7-d4 +
2. Rf1-f2 Re2-e1 ++
or
2. Kg1-h1 Rf8xf1 ++

Answer to Riddle for Punsters

#266 - "The Kettle Company is in Hot Water?"

Easy Boilover was pretty **steamed** that his new kettle stopped working after only a week. It **boils** down to this: he **mist** out on a lot of hot drinks after that week, but **water** the complaint department people going to do about it? Easy is still hoping to avoid a **heated** discussion about the situation.

Answer to Problem to Ponder

#266 - "Number Combinations - Part 1"

Use, EACH ONLY ONCE, the digits 1, 3, 4 and 6. Use the operations addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, each AT MOST ONCE. If desired, round brackets may be used, but AT MOST ONCE. Of course, the order of algebraic operations (known as BEDMAS) must ALWAYS be followed. For example, to produce the result 9, two possible answers are: $4 \times 6 / 3 + 1 = 24 / 3 + 1 = 8 + 1 = 9$ OR $4 \times (6 / 3) + 1 = 4 \times 2 + 1 = 8 + 1 = 9$.

Find **at least one way** to produce the following results:

a) 41 b) 10 c) 3 d) 18 e) 17.

Keeping **BEDMAS** in mind, first do what is in **Brackets**, then do **Exponents**, then **Division or Multiplication** (whichever comes first), then **Addition or Subtraction** (whichever comes first), some of the answers possible are:

- a) $(3 + 4) \times 6 - 1 = 7 \times 6 - 1 = 42 - 1 = 41$
- b) $6 / 3 \times (4 + 1) = 2 \times 5 = 10$
- c) $6 / 4 \times (3 - 1) = 1.5 \times 2 = 3$
- d) $6 / 1 + 3 \times 4 = 6 + 12 = 18$
- e) $(6 + 1) \times 3 - 4 = 7 \times 3 - 4 = 21 - 4 = 17$

SUFFER ANNIE SPENCE

by Christine Farenhorst

The smooth money resting in John's calloused hand equaled his small plot of land; a few acres lay on a roughened palm. It had only been a barren, untidy patch at best really – just enough to keep some geese and, when times were good, a cow. It had yielded enough to keep one from starving – not enough to keep one satisfied. It had been a way of life for John's father and grandfather. And they had survived.

The land divided into strips and was owned by very poor farmers, by verge-of-poverty peasants. Inevitably, big, neighboring landowners coveted these strips – these pieces of thin but still independent existence. For a few guineas, John Spence had given up his meager plot, his paltry inheritance. Those guineas lay in his weathered palm. The money wasn't much, yet it was more than he'd ever had. But it wasn't enough to buy more land, no, not enough to buy more land.

John regretted the agreement almost as soon as he was sober. The facts, however, which had driven him to drink and to the sale of land, were still just as compelling: his wife big with another child and food scarce.

There was also another reason. A seemingly small enough reason, to be sure, but a reason that nevertheless had taken root and had given the final push to the matter. That reason was a tiny whisper of greed in John's heart of hearts. There is, the whisper said, money to be made in factories – city factories – London factories; much more money than you'll ever pull out of your half-penny patch. The drinking in the taproom had tempted him with this thought many times before. But never until now had it been so inviting and so obviously right, and never until now had he acted on it.

Now that the deed was done, the possibility of work on the bigger farms as laborer for a shilling a day also existed. But a shilling was a pittance. Kate could

work the fields too, but she'd nearly died at the last birthing. No, right or wrong, John's heart had sold itself to what he thought the city could offer. So they moved – John Spence, Kate Spence and Annie, their only surviving child, twelve this mid-summer.

And such was the weight of their poverty, that they wore all they owned.

"Just you wait, girl." John spoke as he supported his wife, as they picked a slow path over the ruts and puddles of bad roads. "London will 'ave us sittin' fine and proper. Why this babe will 'ave that silver spoon in his mouth. Just you wait, girl."

If Annie listened avidly, Kate didn't

hear a word John said. She was too weary, too heavy and she hated sleeping in the hedges.

"There's many a job to be 'ad," John went on, looking at Annie when Kate didn't respond. "I 'urd from one lad they're just cryin' for strong labor."

His spirit was hopeful and his mind entertained thoughts of fortunes. Annie believed every word he said.

"Can I git a job too, Da? Can I?" She danced in front of him, her soft, brown hair waving, minding him of a young foal.

"Well, Annie girl, I've 'urd of basket weavin' and work at mills and such. We'll see."

Annie laughed. Da and she – they'd make a home for Mum and the new babe. And they kept on walking, Kate



"The stink hit the Spences before their feet touched its intimate roads. Then they were caught up in the noise and crowds that flooded the city's muddy streets."

Spence great with child between them, paving the way to London with good intentions.

London could be smelled before it was seen. The stink hit the Spences before their feet touched its intimate roads. Then they were caught up in the noise and crowds that flooded the city's muddy streets. Aimlessly they were moved about. A motley assortment of people and things jostled them as they walked – bearded Jewish old-clothes vendors, organ grinders, cabmen's wheels, costermongers selling their wares, and flower girls bawling at the top of their lungs. Overhead smoke rose, darkly coiling from a few million chimneys, while St. Paul's Cathedral's bells bonged overhead. And not a green patch in sight, but the small patch in John's memory.

John Spence was confused. He did not know the ways of London and did not recognize its throb of misery and clamor. "We'll see if we can't find a place to sleep for the night." He stumbled, weary with the days of travel. Foul water and refuse ran past them in a gutter down the middle of the road.

"Buy! Buy!" The cry of the vendors was deafening.

Kate leaned against him helplessly. "There are no 'edges here, John. Wot will we sleep in tonight?"

"Da! Da!" Annie pulled John's hand. "There's a lad 'ere says 'is mum 'as rooms to let."

John turned to look. A boy, face streaked with dirt, grinned at him. "Foller me, sir."

They followed him. There was little choice. Mazes of alleyways coughed up houses more rough and tumble at each turn. They avoided the beggars hunched forward in doorways. They stepped past the sick lying next to the gutters. They breathed in the smell of turpentine, leaking gas, sewage and sweat. In the back of John's mind the barren strip of lost land became more fertile and the smell of growing things flooded his soul, but he could not undo time as one undoes a knot. So he walked on and his family

walked with him. And the boy walked ahead of them. Kate was slower than ever now, clinging to John for support. Clusters of tumbledown houses were built around filthy courts. The boy stopped in one of them.

"Ere's where I live. I'll call me mum." He disappeared up a flight of rickety stairs and came back a minute later with a limping, tall, fair-haired woman. Her voice was low.

"Ear you're looking fur a place to stay. I've got rooms." She took in all three of them with a curious look. "Can you pay?"

John nodded confidently and reached into his pocket. He withdrew his hand seconds later with a look of horror on his face. "Kate!! The munny... it's nowt 'ere!"

But Kate didn't hear him. She was too tired, too hungry and slowly crumpled to the ground in a heap.

Susan Jarrett was shrewd in the ways of the poor. She took the Spences in on what she termed "trust." Besides, her son was a virtuoso in pick-pocketing and the contents of John's pockets had already been counted out on her table. Had she not taken them in, the Spences would have had to huddle together for warmth under a bridge, or in a churchyard, or perhaps in a shop doorway. And with Kate so near her time, it would have been murder. Not that Susan Jarrett would have had qualms about that, but she instinctively felt there was more money to be made and she wanted her share of it.

The room Susan showed the Spences was bare, but it did provide a roof over their heads. A few flour bags furnished a scanty mattress. There was a tiny window, but no water or any other convenience. The only water tap available was a few doors down and this had to serve all of the thousand odd tenants who lived in that particular court. As for toilet facilities - fifty to sixty people shared two earth-closets.

John was quiet that next morning. Brooding in a corner of the room, his

back was hunched against the wall. More than once he had rechecked his pocket, unable to accept the fact that now his money as well as his land was gone. His usual cheer had shriveled up in this skyless place. Moodily he surveyed Kate sleeping on a flour bag and thought of the children they had lost. It wasn't likely this babe would survive either. As for the silver spoon, he grimaced bleakly to himself. All he wanted presently was shelter and food in exchange for some hard work – no more. Was that wrong? Or, and his mouth worked nervously at the thought, had he sold away their very lives? He got up suddenly and moved towards the door.

Annie eyed him questioningly from her place on the floor. "Where are you off to, Da?"

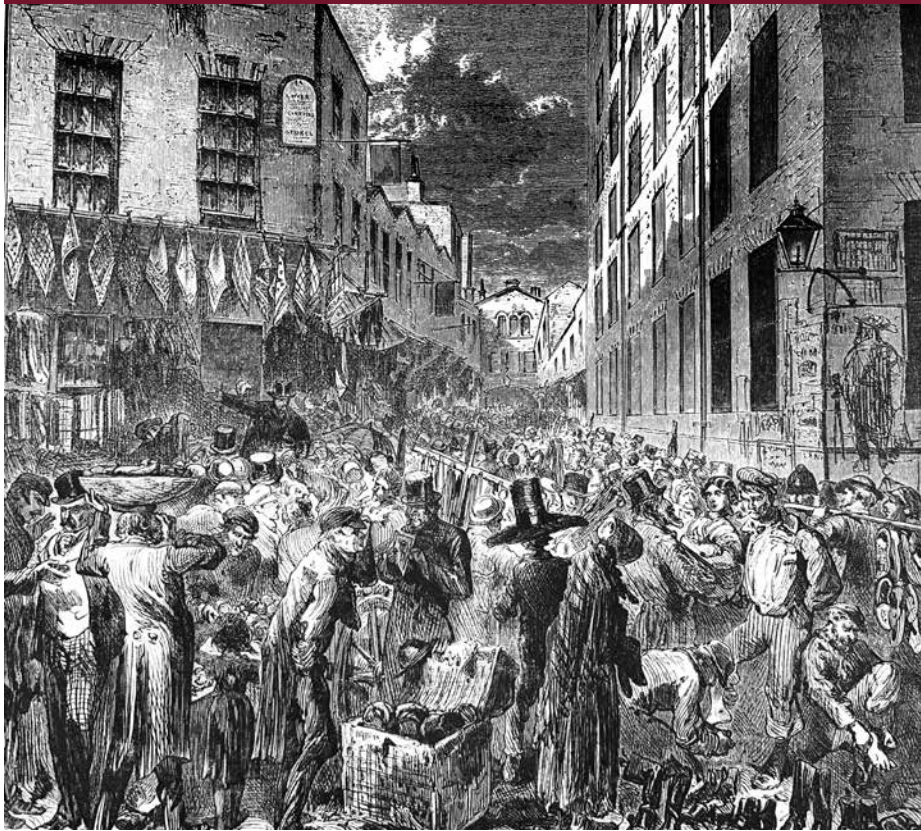
He forced a smile. "Got to git sum work to feed you and your Mum, Annie girl."

He was gone before she could ask more. Kate moaned. It would be her time soon. Annie had helped before.

John walked and walked. He kept his bearings, determined to find his way home again later. Passing along the polluted edge of the Thames, he watched "mudlarks" – boys who waded into the filthy mud at low tide searching for scraps of iron and lead to sell. If they were lucky, they'd make a few pence to take home to their families. He saw them crouch under the bridges, scraggly, skin-and-bones scarecrows. And he took note of other children sweeping the road clean for any lady or gentleman who wished to cross a begrimed spot, hoping for a charitably thrown halfpenny.

What kind of life was this? John clenched his farmer's fists, yet again cursing the day he had sold his land. But it was a helpless curse, as indeed, all human curses are helpless. Black words which do nothing to change a situation. It was always the poor against the rich and who was he? And what now? Kate hungry and cold – Annie hungry and cold – and he, who was he? The streets, full of sellers and buyers, seemed to jeer at him. And he walked all day without finding work.

"...then the evening dusk coughed up a tall, black-bearded man in a dark frock coat and wide-brimmed hat. The man was standing directly in front of the tavern that John had unconsciously been heading for."



kind and penetrating.

"You're hungry." It was said in a matter-of-fact voice even as his hand reached into a deep pocket, coming out with sixpence. "There's a place where you can buy dinner with this. I'll walk with you." And there was such persuasive authority about the man that John went with him.

They passed a number of pubs. By the light of gas jets, men's inflamed faces drifted by. Jeering and drunken women stood propped up against soot-drenched houses. The reek of gin and sweat mingled. Even in the shadow of a benefactor, John felt discouragement descend on him like a heavy, suffocating cloak. Where was he going and how would he ever manage to take care of Kate and Annie and the new baby in this place?

The man did not speak as they were walking. Yet a certain affinity was established as they trudged side by side. Every fifth shop they passed was a gin shop. Glancing in John noted the special steps most of these shops had to help even toddlers reach the counter where penny glasses of colored gin could be ordered. Small, misbegotten tykes lolled about on the floor of some of these shops – by-products of alcoholic parents who had nothing else to live for.

"Here's where you can eat."

"Thank you." John did not know what else to say.

"Are you hungry for peace of mind too, man? Are you tired of drinking and such?"

John looked at his benefactor doubtfully. Sure he was tired of drinking and wanted peace and food and work and shelter and... he could go on and on. But there was surely more to it than just saying "yes." Answering shortly, he summed up his whole life in just a few sentences. "I'm new in London. Walked in from the country yesterday. I 'ave a pregnant wife and a small dotter."

Rather hopelessly he added a last bit of information. "And all the munny I 'ad was stolen."

"What's your name?" The stranger regarded John keenly as he spoke.

"John Spence." He almost spit the words out. They sat like gall in his

There was no joy in the thought of going back to Kate and Annie – Annie with the hope shining clear out of her eyes. He had no desire to retrace his steps through the winding alleys back to the naked room.

And then the evening dusk coughed up a tall, black-bearded man in a dark frock coat and wide-brimmed hat. The man was standing directly in front of the tavern that John had unconsciously been heading for. There was no money. There was only the desire for other men's company – for those who, like himself, were also without work, without food, without money and without hope.

The bearded stranger pulled out a book and began speaking. Faces appeared at the pub's windows. "There is a heaven in East London for everyone," he cried, "for everyone who will stop and think and look to Christ as a personal Savior."

The words did not mean much to John but the deep voice did carry warmth and

conviction. From the pub's doorway a rotten egg flew through the air, almost hitting the wide-brimmed hat. The man stopped speaking and walked on. Bystanders howled with laughter. John's curiosity had now been aroused. Clapping someone on the shoulder, he asked who this man was.

"Ey, watch out! Tryin' to pick me pocket, ain't you?" Drunken, sour breath hit him, disgusted him and bitterly reminded him once more of the land he had lost.

The wide-brimmed hat was coming his way. John regarded the tall figure intently. To risk being heckled and hit with rotten eggs, the fellow must surely believe in whatever it was he had been trying to say. But then, people were always talking, always bent on persuading others of their point of view. His gaze dropped. What was this man to him, or he to the man, for that matter? Unaware of John's thoughts, however, the man stopped when he reached John, his eyes

throat. He so despised himself for what he had done.

"Well, John Spence, would you like to come to a meeting tonight that might change your life?" As he spoke, he pointed to an empty pub across the way. "I hope to see you there after you eat." Then he shook John's hand and disappeared down the road – vendors, fog and houses alike swallowing him up quickly.

The dinner was good. John wolved it down even as he guiltily thought of Kate and Annie with every bite. But he'd have to keep up his strength in case there was work to be had. He put a hunk of bread into his pocket as he washed down his last mouthful. He could see that a crowd had gathered across the road in the pub and appeared to be listening to a speaker.

John wandered over, curious to hear what was being said. Listening cost nothing and would put him under no obligation to anyone. There was no one who took special notice of him as he took his place on an empty bench near the back. The speaker's piercing voice cut through the room and a long finger pointed convincingly to the door John had just passed through.

"Look at that man going down the river." The voice had risen a decibel, ringing the length of the pub. John turned to look, as did everyone else, even though all knew there was no river.

"Look at him going down in a boat with the falls just beyond. Now he's got out into the rapids... now the rapids have got a hold of the boat... he is going, going..." The voice rose again. "He's gone over – and he never had a chance."

There was a dramatic pause before the finish.

"That is the way people are damned. They go on; they are caught by the rapids of time; they don't think; they neglect God; and they are damned. Oh, you who are the Lord's, seek Him while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near."

Through the maze of alleyways John found his way home late that night. The different twists and turns all looked and smelled alike in their filth and squalor. As he finally trudged up the stairs, he was met by Susan Jarrett. "Your wife 'ad 'er little 'un."

Pushing past her, John ran the length of the miserable corridor. The smell of birth met him. Kate lay on a filthy sack in the corner and by her sat Annie, on the floor, holding a small bundle wrapped in a coarse cloth.

Annie did not look up as her father came in. It was only when he touched her shoulder that she moved her head. Then it was woodenly. And her voice cracked when she whisper-said, "Mum's dead and

so's the babe, Da."

Then John cried. It was a bitter, raw cry – a loud, wailing cry – and it brought the other tenants to his door. But they could not help. Every room in the court housed a poor family, and they were all dirty and hungry. Brief in their sentiments, they were briefer in their stay. The only one that remained behind in the end was Susan Jarrett. She wanted to know if the rent was going to be long in coming.

Tonelessly John replied, "I'm off fur some work tomorrow."

"Your dotter'll 'ave to stay 'ere." There was finality in her tone.

"It's all right, Da." Annie's voice was soft. She stroked his arm. "It's all right."

He looked at the small bundle she was



"Mrs. Darcy, who wore a brown ulster and had a lace shawl draped over her hair, smiled again. Annie thawed under these smiles."

still clasping and at the inert form of Kate on the sack. There was no world anymore. Or was there? Annie's soft, brown hair hung about her oval face. Incredibly she smiled at him. Flooding over him suddenly was the memory of the man who had given him sixpence and who had spoken kindly.

The tiny window glimmered faint light that next morning. Annie woke up with a strange sensation within her deepest self. It was not hunger. She knew hunger – it could gnaw in her stomach and hurt. No, this was different. This was grief and this pulled at her heart, weeping and tearing at her soul. It was agony - agony that could not be abated or turned into gladness. Annie swallowed thickly and peered through the thin darkness for Da's form. But there was no one in the room with her. Da had told her last night that he would be up and away early trying to find work. "Rest easy tomorrow, girl," he had said, "I'll be back. Don't you fret! I'll be back."

Someone had taken Mum's body and the babe's too, tiny though it was. And Susan had taken away the sacks, hardened with Mum's blood, Mum's life. And now there was nothing. Annie sat up. She was cold. Da had given her a hunk of bread last night and she fingered it absently.

It was like that for the next three days. Annie stayed in the room by herself. She walked about a bit, filtering sunlight between her fingers when sunlight hit the tiny window. And she cried often, sleeping between tears, weary with an immense burden of grief. She ate the scraps of food that her father brought her from his haunts around the city. He was not much for talk in the evening. Annie tried to read his face as he sat dejectedly against the wall. Sometimes she would rub his arm, as a kitten might rub up against a leg, she was that starved for affection. Then John would start, looking at Annie with a mixture of guilt and love.

"Never mind, Da," she would whisper, "we'll manage. I'll take care of you."

There was a pain in John when she

mouthed this and he ran his rough right hand through her fine, brown hair and pulled her close with his left. She snuggled by him, feeling somewhat comforted, yet also aware that she was being a comfort herself.

It was on the morning of the fourth day that Susan came into the room unexpectedly. Annie's heart thudded. Susan had not bothered overly much with them. But they were in her debt; they owed her the rent. Susan spoke from the doorway: "There's a lady downstairs says she might 'ave a job for the likes of you. Wants to 'ave a look-see at you and a small chat."

"A job?" From her spot on the floor Annie looked up at Susan dumbfounded.

"Right. A job I said. Now get up then and come down with me."

"What sort of job?" Annie shook the ragged garment that had once been her mother's dress and then wiped her fingers on the edge of her skirt as she stood up. Susan didn't answer but motioned for her to come, turning back into the bleak corridor. Although apprehensive about offending, Annie repeated her question as they walked down the stairs. "What sort of job?"

"'elpin' with 'ousework. Easy work, that. And you get plenty to eat."

Annie hadn't been eating much and her small stomach revolted when she walked into the cramped, one-room living quarters where Susan managed with her three children. A smell of fried onions and fish hung about nauseating her whole being. There was a woman in the room, a handsome woman in a rather coarse sort of way. Looking steadily at Annie, she suddenly smiled.

"My name is Mrs. Darcy."

Swallowing down the bile that had risen to her throat upon entering the room, Annie smiled back. She had to force the smile. She missed Mum and hadn't talked to anyone for days.

"I hear you've just come in from the country?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Darcy, who wore a brown ulster and had a lace shawl draped over her

hair, smiled again. Annie thawed under these smiles. With but little prodding Annie told both Mrs. Darcy and Susan her life's story, which took only as long as it takes a dog to wag its tail before it gets a bone.

"I need a girl to help with some light work around my house, Annie," Mrs. Darcy said when the girl had finished, "Do you think you'd care to have the job?" Seeing Annie's hesitation, she added, "Of course, you'd be earning a wage. Fair's fair, right? How does four shillings a week sound?"

Still Annie wavered. "Me Da," she began.

"Listen," Susan said from where she stood in the doorway, "wouldn't it be fine to surprise your poor Da? Suppose Mrs. Darcy comes for you tomorrow mornin'. I'll make sure it's fine with your Da when 'e comes 'ome tomorrow night. See, 'e might not want you to work, girl, 'im being such a good Da and all, but I know you want to 'elp 'im out."

Annie took a deep breath. "Can I see 'im Sundays?"

Her voice was soft. The two women glanced at each other. "Sure, and I'm sure you could. Why don't you 'ave all your belongin's packed together in a bundle and be ready for Mrs. Darcy in the mornin'."

"I 'ave no belongin's except this." Annie indicated her threadbare, thin frock.

"Well then," and Mrs. Darcy responded as if it were a normal thing, "we'll just have to see about getting you something better."

Annie moved towards the door, ready to go back to her room, but Susan stopped her. "Why not go out and sit on the steps for a bit. You've been in such a long time and you're such a good girl, Annie. I'm sure your Da, 'e wouldn't mind."

The sunshine was pleasant. Annie squinted in the bright warmth of the day. Wouldn't Da be surprised and right pleased to hear that she had a job. And new clothes! Although maybe the woman would only get her an apron. But even that would be pleasant. Wouldn't Mum have been proud to see her in something decent! She fingered her worn skirt

absently. Perhaps today Da would come home and tell her that he had a job too. That would be even better. With deep intuition she knew that Da needed to have a job more than she did. He needed it to keep his self-respect. The sun shone warmly and at this precise moment she was sure that things would end well. She surveyed her surroundings, soaking up the rays. Ah, but things were dirty here in the city. The gutter carried slop and there was a small nipper crawling in it. They had been poor as long as she could remember, but Mum had always made sure that she was clean and Mum had never let her muck about in the dirt like that.

"Ello."

Annie startled. There was another girl at the bottom of the steps quietly eyeing her. "Ello," she offered back with a timid smile.

"Your new 'ere then? My name's Eliza. What's your name?"

"Annie."

"Wot your doin', Annie, sittin' 'ere in daylight. Got no work then?"

"I'm startin' work tomorrow." There was so much pride in Annie's rejoinder that the other girl laughed.

"That so? I work in a factory. That is, I did work in a factory. It shut down. Wouldn't mind so much but the munny see, we need the munny."

Annie nodded. She understood that. Eliza continued. "We used to live down south of 'ere. It was in a coal-minin' town. Mum took us, Tansy, Maude and me, down into the pit early in the mornin'. Carried baskets on our shoulders. When we got way down the men would fill our baskets with coal, big 'eavy pieces they was, and we'd go up agin. Dark it was in them pits." Eliza shivered involuntarily.

Annie did too and asked, "Ow did you see in them dark pits?"

"Oh, me Mum, she'd 'ave a candle between 'er teeth. We'd foller 'er. At the top we'd empty the coal and then go down fur another load. We weren't allowed to rest ever." She emphasized the last word and spit on the ground after she said it as a gesture of contempt.

Annie took a hunk of bread out of her

pocket. Da had given it to her the night before. "Want to 'ave sum?"

Eliza's troubled look disappeared. She grinned broadly. "Sure."

Da was quiet again that night. Annie was sorely tempted to tell him about her job but remembered what Susan had said and did not. She did kiss his stubbly cheek telling him things would be better, no matter what. She told him too that she'd been allowed to sit on the steps and that she'd made a friend. She could see Da begin to relax a bit and thought of how happy he would be when she gave him her first wages.

"I've been goin' to sum meetin's." Not looking at Annie at all, John spoke softly, almost to himself.

"What meetin's Da?" Annie was interested. Her father rarely informed her as to how he spent his days.

"Well," John shifted his position against the thin, cardboard wall, coughing and thinking simultaneously. He wasn't too sure about his subject matter. "Well, meetin's where they tell you about Jesus and 'ow to live."

"You mean your goin' to a church, Da?" Annie was awed. Back home church had only been for the rich – only for those who had proper clothes to wear. Mum had told her a bit about how God wanted people to live. She understood that God wanted you to do things that were right – things like not stealing, not cheating and not using bad language. Her father's voice stopped her train of thought.

"No, Annie. No." Shaking his head, not at all familiar with the vernacular on which he was about to embark, John continued hesitantly. "Not likely the church back 'ome would allow sum of the men I've seen in these meetin's to come. The people that go are poor, Annie. Just like us."

"Where's these meetin's, Da?"

"Well, I've been to three and they've all been in a hall." He grinned a bit as he spoke and went on. "They call it a hall, but it's really a pub."

"A pub?" Annie was incredulous. "Why, Da? That's not a real church."

"Annie," John Spence turned his head to face his daughter directly, "many's the time I thought God cared nowt fur me. I didn't blame 'Im. I didn't care fur 'Im either. I cared fur drink. But I did work 'ard on the land." He stared down at his hands and went on. "But I just warn't important. I 'ad no munny. Anyway, munny don't count, Annie."

He stopped, not certain of the point he wanted to make. Annie's eyes were glued to his face. Speaking haltingly, he ended the discourse. "Anyone can talk to God, Annie, anytime and anywhere. That's prayer, Annie. God wants us to talk to 'Im. 'E loves to 'ear us speak to 'Im and 'e always wants to 'elp us fur 'e loves us. And you can't 'elp prayin' if 'e loves you."

Looking at his daughter rather helplessly, John Spence wanted to say more, wanted to impart the change he felt had come over his heart. It was a long speech he had made, and he wasn't at all sure he had told Annie these things properly – things that were becoming more and more important to him every passing day. But he comforted himself with the thought that he would tell her more as time went on, and that he would soon be able to take her to the meetings.

"Aren't you lookin' fur work no more Da?" Annie's voice was perplexed. She had not understood what he had just said.

"Annie, at the meetin' I met this man. 'Is name is Will Marley. 'E's thinkin' that a gardener, 'andyman of sorts, is needed at this place 'e knows. 'E'll tell me tomorrow."

He smiled at her and Annie was sorely tempted to tell him that she had a job too. But the thought of the surprise come Sunday, when she would lay her wages in Da's hands, was even more tempting.

"I'm so glad, Da," she whispered, "I knew you would get a job."

"I got summat fur you, Annie." John pulled out a small book. "I got this from Will. I was shamed to tell 'im I couldn't read. But you kin read – leastways a little bit."

Annie took the book and looked at it curiously. Turning the pages she saw verses and songs. "Why, Da, this 'ere's a songbook. Do you sing songs at the pub?"

"Lots of singin' there, Annie. I'm goin' to take you soon – as soon as the job's settled and we've paid Susan."

Susan came to the room to fetch her down the next morning. Mrs. Darcy, imposing in the severe, brown ulster and lace shawl, was waiting like a sentinel at the bottom of the stairs. She smiled at Annie again. It was rather a stiff smile but it still made Annie think of her Mum. Leaving Da behind wihtout a word was hard. But Susan had assured her again on the landing that it was for the best. "I'll tell 'im - don't you make a fuss now! I'll tell 'im about what's 'appened, and 'e'll thank 'is good fortune fur your common sense."

"Ready, Annie?" The brown ulster moved towards the door. Annie moved too, a little uncertainly. Outside, on the feeble flight of the entry stairs, she breathed in the morning air.

Eliza was sitting at the bottom of the steps. Mrs. Darcy avoided touching her by holding her skirts to the side as she passed, walking quickly ahead. "Ello, Annie. You're off then?"

"Yes."

Annie was stiff in her nervousness.

"Your off with the likes of 'er?" Eliza pointed a thumb at Mrs. Darcy who was already about twenty feet down the alley.

"Yes," Annie whispered, "she's goin' to buy me sum new clothes." Almost running to catch up with her fairy godmother, she threw one more sentence over her shoulder, "Ope I see you agin, Eliza."

But Eliza began running too and tugged at Annie's ragged skirt. "Annie!"

Annie turned. Eliza's face was contorted – funny-like. It almost seemed as if she were going to cry. "Don't go Annie."

Annie smiled. "It's nowt to bother yourself about, Eliza. I'm comin' back to see Da on Sunday and I'll see you too."

Annie didn't turn again. She visited heaven that morning. Mrs. Darcy took her to a dress shop where a lady outfitted her from head to foot: a reddish frock, a cape and a hat. The only thing that puzzled her was the fact that these did not appear to be working clothes. When

she asked Mrs. Darcy about this, she did not receive a clear answer. "Mr. Darcy, he's what you might call a little fastidious. He likes to see girls neat and trim."

Annie didn't know what fastidious was, but on the whole she gloried in the feel of the new material on her body. Wouldn't Mum have been proud. And that almost brought the tears.

It was early afternoon when Mrs. Darcy hailed a cabby and holding on to Annie's hand, stepped up into the carriage. Annie felt quite the lady in the four-wheeler. She'd ridden in a neighbor's cart before, and that on bumpy country lanes. The sky had been the canopy and the trees and the grass had waved. And Mum and Da had laughed. There were those tears again. She felt the new frock's warmth and fingered the material for comfort.

"Where are we 'eadin' now, Mrs. Darcy?"

Mrs. Darcy hadn't said much all morning. Annie had caught blue eyes staring at herself several times with a most peculiar expression. It frightened her. She had expected to be in a kitchen by this time, perhaps scrubbing pans or dusting shelves or sweeping some steps. "Mrs. Darcy, please, where are we 'eadin' fur now?"

Mrs. Darcy's eyes slowly focused on the girl. "To another lady, Annie – a friend of mine. She's a doctor of sorts. She's going to give you an examination."

The word examination scared Annie terribly. She shifted away into the cabby's corner unconsciously eyeing the door. Mrs. Darcy went on.

"You see, when you work for people that, well, that are a little more well-to-do, you have to be healthy. So she'll check you over. Make sure that you're not sick."

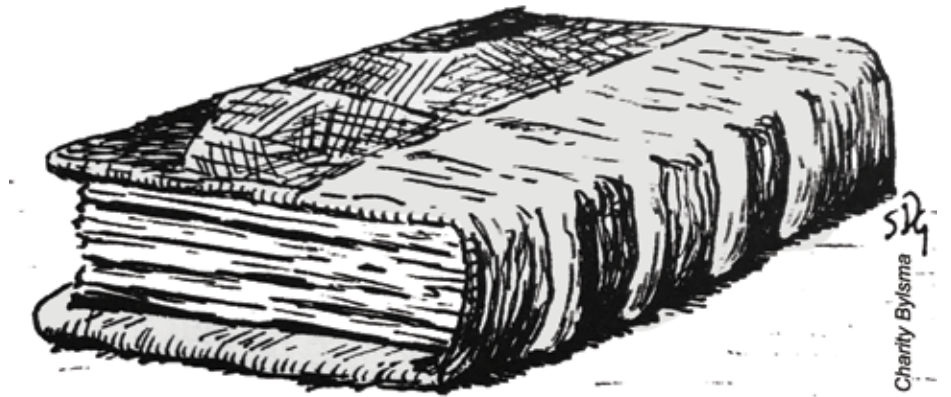
She paused and her voice rose a little as she continued. "So, you're to do what she tells you. Do you understand, Annie?"

Annie nodded. She was confused and not at all happy anymore.

"Number 36 Millwood." The driver opened the cab door and they alighted. Annie felt her hand being taken again, firmly, and the hint of unease which had overtaken her in the cabby turned her stomach sour.

"Is this where your friend lives, Mrs. Darcy?"

"Yes, Annie. And please remember what I told you. Do everything she tells you."



"I got summat fur you, Annie." John pulled out a small book. "I got this from Will. I was shamed to tell 'im I couldn't read. But you kin read – leastways a little bit."

It was dark and dank in the room. Heavy drapes hung on the windows. In spite of her new clothes, Annie shivered.

"Annie, this is Mrs. Broughton, the lady who will examine you."

Annie regarded a heavy woman whose wheezing breath came quickly. She had no smile, but only pointed to a screened-off partition in the far corner of the room. Annie rigidly moved towards it feeling awkward. There was a bed behind the partition.

The examination lasted less than five minutes. As Annie re-arranged her clothes, she did not hear Mrs. Broughton's low aside to Mrs. Darcy.

"You got your money's worth. She's a virgin." In a louder voice the woman carried on, "That'll be twenty shillings, if you please."

Mrs. Darcy paid. Annie would not look at Mrs. Broughton as she unsteadily made her way towards the door. In the hall she somberly stated: "Your friend is a dirty, fat woman and I wouldn't 'ave come if I 'ad known what she was goin' to do. I don't think my Da would like it either."

Mrs. Darcy took her hand. "Now, Annie – an examination is never pleasant. But it's over now and we'll go for another ride in a cab. You like that, don't you?"

Annie didn't answer. And the new frock began to feel hot and heavy.

Outside she shakily took in great gulps of air. The cabby was still there, waiting. In the shadows of the bushes by the side of the road, Annie thought she saw the form of a girl. It very much minded her of Eliza. She peered and would have walked that way, but Mrs. Darcy's hand imprisoned her own, pulling her strongly towards the cabby. "Come on, Annie. Don't dawdle!"

The cabby drove briskly through the warmth of the summer afternoon. Loud cries of vendors selling their wares stridently grated past them. Annie could see calico blinds on the windows of the many tenements they passed. Some windowsills held penny flower bunches in cracked vases. These were all homes and belonged to different families that had Mums and other children.

"Ave we long to go?"

Mrs. Darcy turned her shawl-wrapped face towards Annie. "We're almost there, Annie."

There was something in her eyes which made Annie refrain from asking any more questions.

There was a garden. Annie could see it straightway when the cabby stopped, and in spite of the high walls which surrounded the house, and in spite of her growing discomfort, this garden made her glad. She had been born and bred outside the city and the sight of green was like an old friend waiting.

But the dwelling itself was foreboding and scowlingly large in dimension. Indeed, it seemed quite too large for just two people like Mrs. Darcy and her husband to occupy by themselves. The cab-driver opened the carriage door and, after stepping down, Mrs. Darcy paid the man.

"Do you live 'ere alone?"

Annie's timid inquiry brought a strange smile to Mrs. Darcy's face. She did not answer Annie's question, but took her by the hand again, through the gate, up a stone walk to a big front door. There was no one behind the door. Somehow, taking into account the size of the immense house confronting her, Annie had expected several people behind the door – people like butlers, maids and housekeepers. But there was no one. Immediately behind the door was a steep, thin stairway. And the whole area smelled faintly of gas mixed with something sweet, minding her of dying flowers.

Mrs. Darcy pushed Annie towards the stairs. "Up you go, Annie. I'll show you to your room."

"You mean I'm to 'ave a room?" The child was overcome with amazement. Where she came from entire families lived in rooms, not single Annie Spences.

Behind her Mrs. Darcy grinned. She slapped Annie's small behind playfully. "Yes, you get your very own room."

The stairs led to a long, narrow

hallway with many doors. The hallway was not empty. Several girls, all in silk dresses, stared at Annie. Some eyed her with curiosity, some with apathy and some with pity. Annie felt uncomfortable. Did they all work here? She suddenly wanted to leave and abruptly turned, only to find Mrs. Darcy right behind her – Mrs. Darcy, suddenly a wall, like the wall around the garden.

"I'll show you your room, Annie." It was not an invitation but a command.

She walked on even as one of the girls giggled. Then several laughed out loud. One bowed to another, saying in a falsetto voice, "Your room, your majesty – your very own room."

Determined, Annie turned around once more encountering the cold eyes of Mrs. Darcy. She swallowed audibly before speaking. "Mrs. Darcy, you can 'ave your clothes back. No disrespect intended but I'd rather talk to Da furst."

But even as her mind formulated the words and her mouth said them she knew inside herself with a deep, desperate fear, that there was no going back – perhaps not ever. There was no response. There was only a firm push towards the first door in the hallway on the right.

The room behind the hallway door held a bed, a dresser and a chair. Staining that bed was a red, silk dress. Mrs. Darcy closed the door behind them and moved towards the bed. Taking off her gloves slowly, she sat down heavily on its edge. The dress lay next to her.

"I want you to listen to me very carefully, Annie Spence."

Annie stood with her back against the wall and saw that Mrs. Darcy's penetrating eyes had turned an icy-blue. They were totally devoid of the smile which had initially won Annie's confidence the day before.

"You're a big girl now and you can't go back to your Da. I want you to put on this pretty, red dress and in a little while I'll bring you up a bite to eat. This evening a gentleman friend will come up to visit you."

A horrible realization came over Annie. She was only twelve, but through the years she had seen her mother bear

child after child.

"I want nowt to do with no gentleman," she whispered hoarsely.

Mrs. Darcy just regarded her. Annie's hands nervously twisted together and she footslogged over to the chair. The dress appeared as repulsive to her as Mrs. Darcy. Her thin hands unclasped and clutched the arm of the wooden chair. And a great anger overcame her: anger at the lies she had been told, anger at her own foolishness for believing them, and anger at Mrs. Darcy for telling them. Before she knew it, she had lifted the chair above her head and had heaved it with all her might at the woman sitting on the bed.

But Mrs. Darcy ducked and came at her, pulling a white kerchief from her pocket as she did so. Managing to grab Annie's arm and snatching her close, she pushed the kerchief against Annie's face. There was a sickly-sweet odor. It nauseated the girl. Slowly losing

consciousness, she was oblivious to the fact that Mrs. Darcy summoned another girl from the hall into the room. She was also entirely unaware that between the two of them they undressed her, slipping her childish, inert body into the red dress.

"She might be a touch one," Mrs. Darcy declared thoughtfully, "Maybe I can frighten her with... well, I'll see... a little hunger and loneliness won't hurt. We'll give it some time.

John came home fairly early that evening, his step more buoyant than it had been for the last few days. Will had said after the meeting today that he could bring his Annie over tonight and that the job was sure.

"Ere, man," he'd said, "ere's summunny to get that Jarrett woman off your back."

When John had stared at him in a somewhat bewildered way, he had added, "A room cums with the job, John. Yourself and your Annie can share it – and I'm certain the Morrrows will 'ave sum work about the 'ouse fur Annie too."

The meetings were becoming less and less foreign to John. Tonight he had watched a newly-converted man roll a beer barrel from his house and tip its contents down the gutter. He'd also seen others, risking ridicule, confess their sins up at the front, kneeling down at what was called the "Penitent form."

Perhaps all these things wouldn't have made such an impression on him but that Will Marley had been such a friend. Every day asking him how was he doing and how was Annie? Every day sharing his bread, and what he had wasn't much. Every day promising to look out for work. Will was a chairmender. He rolled his barrow through the streets of

LISTEN! SIX MEN YOU SHOULD KNOW

BY CHRISTINE FARENHORST

161 PAGES / 2021

The six men we get introduced to here are given 25-30 pages each which is enough space to get a very good feel for them. It's also short enough that it avoids completely the indulgence evident in many a bigger biography of telling us what the subject ate for lunch on the third Tuesday of October, one hundreds years ago. The half dozen that author Christine Farenhorst introduces us to are:

- Martin Luther King Jr.
- Albert Schweitzer
- Rembrandt Dutch
- Samuel Morse
- Sigmund Freud
- Norman Rockwell

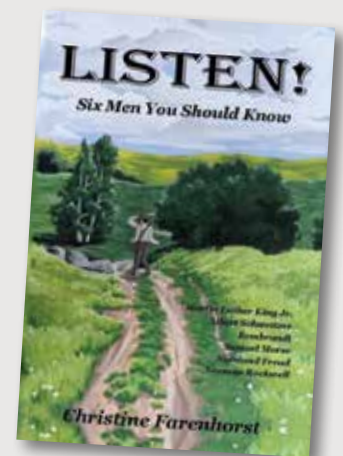
I enjoyed the eclectic nature of the selections – these six holding little in common outside their fame and influence, but all worth knowing better. I was more curious about some of them than others, particularly the very first, the American icon, Martin Luther King Jr. But after learning a little about his thoughts, and the political and cultural battles of his time, I skipped ahead to the profile of Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud who spent most of this life in Europe, and died when King was just 10. I'd read biographies on both men previously,

but Christine's solidly biblical perspective brought new light to both subjects.

For the four others, I knew little more than their names – or their artwork, in the cases of Norman Rockwell and Rembrandt – and I enjoyed this opportunity to delve into their backgrounds, their age, and place. I enjoyed learning about Samuel Morse in particular, as he is the only one of these six who was clearly a Christian. Christine shows that some of the others, like Freud, clearly were not, while Rembrandt, had, at best, an odd relationship with his Maker.

Overall, this is a very quick enjoyable read – I think I finished it in a day. It was sad reading about many of these men's outright rejection of God, so I might recommend reading the profiles out of order so that you can conclude with Samuel Morse, and end on a happy note! Children who enjoy history, and reading, would likely enjoy this as young as 12. The short, 30-page profiles, would also make this a great title for adults who want to know their history, but are put off by the tomes that some historians publish.

– Jon Dykstra



London crying “chairs to mend – chairs to mend.”

He'd given John a detailed account of how he'd been a chimney sweep as a lad of six. “Me Da, ‘e died of the cholera when I was a tad. Mum needed the munny. The advertisement asked for small boys to fit narrow flues. I was small all right. Only got one meal a day. ‘Ad to start work at four every mornin’. The master sweep would put a calico mask over me face and a scraper in me ‘ands. Then ‘ed push me up the chimney where I’d ‘ave to loosen soot fur ‘im. If I fell, and I did that, the sweep would put me ‘ands in a salt solution to ‘eal and ‘arden them. Oh, John, the sting of it! I can still feel it. Then I began to drink. Me poor Mum saw little of the munny I earned. Then I quit the sweepin’ and started snatchin’ dogs from people, wealthy people mind you, and sellin’ them. Then I saw a man ‘ang outside Warwick gaol. And it came to me that that man could be me. Then I ‘eard this fellow, Elijah Cadman, speak. ‘E used to be a fighter – a regular boxer like – and ‘e spoke about ‘eaven and ‘ell as if they were over in the next alley. Anyway, I got the call. God moved me, you might say, and I got into a straight business, chair mendin’, and ‘ere I am.”

John didn't quite understand the rationale behind all of Will's story. But he did understand that Will was helping him, was feeding him, and would put Annie and himself up for the night.

He'd reached Susan Jarrett's place. It would be the last time that he'd run up these rotten stairs.

“Annie's Da?” A small voice called to him from below. There was a girl with red hair and she looked to be about Annie's age. It came to him that Annie had spoken of a friend last night. Maybe this was the girl. He smiled.

“You know me Annie?”

“Well, she's not ‘ere any more. She was taken away.” The girl's voice was breathless, shaking a bit in the telling.

John walked down the stairs again, towards her. “Wot's your name, child?”

“Eliza.” She faced him candidly, blinking at the fierceness of his rising voice but not backing away from it.

“Wot do you mean, Eliza, by wot you just said?”

“I mean that Annie, your girl, she's gone. Left fur a job. She told me yesterday that she ‘ad a job. So I came out this mornin’ to say goodbye and she left with this woman and, and...” Eliza stopped, swallowed and then haltingly continued. “The woman, the woman – well, she was bad.”

“Bad?” John's knuckles showed white as he gripped the edge of the splintered railing, leaning closer towards the girl.

“She was no good. I know when someone's no good. She ‘ad this walk. I tried to tell Annie, but this woman told ‘er to come.”

“Why would Annie leave without tellin’ me? She always tells me wot she's about. Wait ‘ere, Eliza.” John turned and ran up the steps to the Jarretts' room.

Susan met him in the hall. “Ome are you, John?”

“Susan, where's Annie?”

“Annie? Why, in your room, I suppose.”

“Ave you looked?”

She stared him straight in the eye, lifting her eyebrows in a perplexed way, and John was puzzled. Was Annie there after all and was the girl outside leading him on? He ran past Susan up the steps, three at a time, to the second floor. The wood creaked and moaned under his weight. The flimsy door opened and stayed where he flung it against the wall. There was not even a hint of Annie in the room. There was only the bareness of the place. The cracks in the wall – the small, dingy window – the lingering odor of death – but no Annie. He turned and walked back, walked slowly this time, thinking. Susan was still in the hall.

“Did you find Annie then?”

“No.” His answer was short and terse.

“Where do you suppose the girl would go?” Susan's voice was sympathetic and once more he wondered. She had, after all, let them stay here and they owed her.

“Eliza says a woman came and took ‘er away today.”

“A woman?”

“Yes.”

“Didn't see no woman come ‘ere. But I told Annie she could sit on the steps. Maybe sum woman come by. I wouldn't rightly know.”

John changed the subject. “Got your rent, Susan, and maybe sum besides.”

Her eyes never left his face. “That so, John. Well, I reckon it's about time.” Her expression didn't change, but her heart thought of the two pounds Mrs. Darcy had given her and how it was hidden away in the torn part of the chair in her room. John counted out the money into her palm and walked away.

“If you ‘ear,” he said and she nodded again smiling all the while, but condemning him for a fool in her heart.

Eliza was still standing where John had left her. He sat down on the bottom step, his eyes on her face. In a cracked voice he mumbled, “She's gone. You spoke true.”

“I know.” Eliza's tone was soft and she stood by him quietly.

“I got me a job today. A decent job and I took the pledge too. I'm not goin' to drink any more.”

The girl sat down next to him. “Annie's da,” she divulged slowly, “I know wherabouts she is.”

Incredulously he lifted his head and turned to face her. “You know where me Annie is?”

She nodded and continued, “I follered ‘er and that lady today. She got sum new clothes and then I ‘ad to run quite ‘ard to foller because they took a cabby, but I know the street and the ‘ouse they stopped at. And then they got back in the cabby again and I follered again to another ‘ouse. It's a big place she's at.”

John gaped at her. “Will you take me there, Eliza?”

“Can't now, Annie's Da. Me Mum's always in a dreadful ‘uff if I ain't ‘ome in time at night. But tomorrow I'll take you.”

“Thank you, Eliza.” There was a faint glimmer of hope in his eyes. “First think in the mornin’?”

“I'll be ‘ere, waitin’ fur you, Annie's Da.”

There was not a shadow of a doubt in John's mind as he walked out of the alley, that he could trust Eliza. There was

that about her, just as there was not that about Susan Jarrett. He'd go to Will's place now. There'd be a corner for him there. He knew there would be.

Annie woke uneasily in the bed. The ceiling overhead leered at her. Pink it was, and the plaster was peeling dreadfully. Her head was sore and her mouth felt dry. She ran her tongue over her lips.

"Awake then, are you?" Mrs. Darcy's voice brought it all back to Annie. She raised her head painfully, suddenly aware that she was wearing the scarlet dress. It was unpleasant to her touch and she shrank from herself. Mrs. Darcy stood up.

"I hope that you've calmed down a bit, Annie. I stayed with you just to make sure you're all right."

Annie studied her distrustfully.

"I want nowt to do with you. I want to go to me Da."

"Your Da's a poor man, Annie. He's

She threw herself onto the bed and wept and wept. And no one came to comfort her.

not got enough to feed you properly. Besides, he won't want you back once you're spent time here."

"Me Da always wants me." Annie's voice rose in defense.

"Do you know where you are, Annie?"

"I'm, I'm...." She stopped, confused.

"You're in a brothel, Annie, in a house of ill repute, a house where bad girls stay. Do you understand, Annie? Once you've stayed here, everyone will think that you're bad. No one will want you anymore."

"Me Da will, 'e"

"Your Da thinks you're lost and after a few days he won't bother looking any more. He'll think you've drowned in the Thames or some other river. He'll give up looking for you, Annie. Do you understand?"



"A bird sang faintly outside. Annie got up, stretched her arms and legs and plodded over to the window."

cally, her voice dropping another decibel, "no one will hear you and no one will care!"

Annie listened in horror. Clenching her thin fists, she buried her face in the bedspread.

"I see that you're thinking things over." Mrs. Darcy's voice was smooth as the silk on Annie's dress and twice as repulsive. "I'll be back in the morning and we'll talk some more."

As soon as the door clicked into its lock behind Mrs. Darcy, Annie was off the bed. She padded over to the window and peered down into the dusky garden. How glad she had been to see it initially. It so made her think of the country. She pulled at the latch to open the window but it stayed fast. She turned, surveying the room, her very own room, and grimaced. Bending low she peeked under the bed. There was nothing there, barring the dust. The clothes that Mrs. Darcy had bought for her that morning were gone. The chair held nothing. She stepped towards it and the silken dress rustled as she went. But then her right foot struck something. It was the

songbook Da had given her, lying by the chair on the floor. It must have fallen out of her pocket as they undressed her. She picked the little volume up, cradling it in her hands. Da had carried it and it was like touching him for a moment.

Weakly Annie walked over to the chair and sat down, all the while clutching the small tome. Da had really wanted her to have it. He had changed since they'd come to London. It wasn't just the grief he felt over Mum. No, he was changed in a different way. And somehow, it had to do with this book. She caressed it with her hand, feeling its cover, feeling Da's rough hand holding her own. Then she opened it. There was something written on the flyleaf. She spelled out the words slowly: *I call on you, O God, for You will answer me.*

What strange words! What exactly had it been that Da had said to her about these meetings anyway? There had been something about talking to God. But what was she sitting here for, thinking about these things, when she should be figuring out how to get away. It was dark already. Would Da be home now and coming into their room? And what would he think with her gone? Susan Jarrett would tell him that she had a job – or would she tell him something else? That part was muddled in her mind. Da would likely miss her and come searching for her. Wouldn't he?

Annie got up and walked back to the window again. Her hands explored the latch carefully. She pulled and poked. Her nails scraped around the edges to possibly loosen things a bit. But nothing moved – nothing gave way. There was not even a hint of a creak to suggest that perhaps in time the window might open. She turned and went over to the door. Gingerly her hands touched the handle. It came down a little, but then stopped. The lock was secure. She bent to peer through the keyhole, but there was only darkness. Then hopelessness gripped Annie so that her whole being became ill with fear. She threw herself onto the bed and wept and wept. And no one came to comfort her.

Annie finally fell asleep. It had been a long day and she was exhausted. But her sleep was fitful and she continually

whimpered in her dreams. She saw Da walking away from her, his form exuding disappointment. She saw Mum, tired and heavy, walking the road to London. Mum wouldn't raise her eyes to Annie's face, wouldn't give her even a bit of a smile. She felt the weight of the dead infant in her arms again and then Susan Jarrett shoved her about with a broom, shouting all the while, "You're a wicked girl – a most wicked girl."

It was almost dawn when Annie opened her eyes. She turned her head slowly, fearing to see Mrs. Darcy back on the chair guarding her. But there was no one. Her hands felt cold and cramped and, looking down at them, she discovered that she was still clasping the songbook. She had done so all night.

"Anyone can talk to God, anytime and anywhere. That's prayer, Annie. God wants us to talk to 'Im. 'E loves to 'ear us speak to 'Im and 'e always wants to 'elp us, for 'e loves us. And you can't 'elp prayin' if 'e loves you." It was as if her Da was in the room with her. The words resounded in her mind. And a great desire was born in her to speak with Da's God.

"Wot will I say, Da?" she whispered, "Wot will I say? Can I say wotever I've a mind to say. Can I ask 'Im anything?"

Sitting up in the bed, she shivered and turned her head towards the closed window. Then, swinging her feet over the edge, she cautiously began to speak. "Ello, God. Me name's Annie Spence. I'm locked up in this room and this is a bad place to be in."

She stopped and sobbed. Saying the way things were sounded harsh and she was afraid of this morning. Then she stopped crying and went on.

"Me Da, 'e told me this was prayin' - leastways I think that's wot 'e meant. So if I'm not doin' it right, I'm sorry. I'm so scared, God, of Mrs. Darcy and I shouldn't 'ave gone with 'er without tellin' Da. Maybe I'll never see 'im again."

She stopped to blow her nose into the bed covering. "I don't know wot to do, God. And I don't know 'ow to end talkin' to You neither. Maybe I can talk to You

agin sometime."

A bird sang faintly outside. Annie got up, stretched her arms and legs and plodded over to the window. She put her hand up to the pane, hoping to maybe catch a glimpse of feathers. Lightly her left hand rested on the pane as she peered, and noiselessly the window slid open towards the outside. The small book felt warm and alive in her right hand. The bird sang again – louder this time. Annie smiled. "I love You, God. Can You 'elp me jump down too, please?"

The distance down below to the garden was frightening. Annie swallowed audibly, her eyes widening at the drop. It was high – a good twenty feet at least. She turned and brought the chair over to the window. Climbing onto it, she was able to scoot onto the sill, advancing her feet precariously over the outside edge. There were voices in the hall. Annie shut her eyes and felt herself drop. Then everything went black.

"Annie! Annie! Wake up. Annie, please, we ain't got much time."

Annie moaned. Her eyes opened halfway. A face swam into focus – a friend's face. She knew who it was but could not think of the name.

"Annie! It's me, Eliza." The voice carried great urgency.

"Eliza?" The name crept around in Annie's mind. She didn't understand what had just happened.

"That was some jump, Annie. I shut my eyes when I saw wot you 'ad in mind to do. But it's time to get up now. We've got to get goin'. Your Da's so worried."

Annie mind cleared a bit. "Da? Is me Da 'ere?"

"Your Da's comin' fur you this mornin', but not if you don't get up." Exasperated Eliza pulled at Annie's arms. "Ere, I'll 'elp you."

Annie half-sat up, still unsure of what to do. Eliza supported her under her armpits when she tried to stand. "Me leg! I've 'urt me leg, Eliza!" Annie almost sat down again.

"If you don't walk soon, sore leg and all, they'll nab you and put you back in,

Annie. Please try to walk! 'Ere, put your arm about my neck then."

Annie did, but she almost gagged when she took the first few steps. "Eliza, 'ave we got far to go?"

"Soon's we're out of sight of the 'ouse, Annie, we'll find a place to rest. But we got to move quickly, see, or they'll be after us."

They moved through the garden – Annie hobbling and leaning heavily on Eliza. The gate was open and the street lay before them. Early vendors trudged about. A flower girl, bare, dirty feet showing under an equally dirty, tattered skirt was setting up a stall. A few women, clad only in soiled petticoats, were on their way to factories. Pitiless morning light showed their faces dull and devoid of emotion. They simply walked. The hot-baked-potato man was doling out breakfast to a group of sweeps.

"Ey there!" one of them called out as Eliza and Annie passed, 'Aint you out a bit early fur business!" They all guffawed and Eliza's arm about Annie tightened protectively.

"Eliza, your a good friend. And I only just met you yesterday. I'm so glad you 'elped me."

Eliza shrugged.

"I 'ad nothin' better to do anyway."

"Wot did me Da think, Eliza, when 'e found out I warn't 'ome?"

"'E went in and talked to Susan and she told 'im that she didn't know where you were. That you were sittin' on the porch and most likely wandered off."

"But she told me she'd tell Da I was workin'." Annie stopped walking. Indignation blazed out of her eyes. "She told me..."

Her voice trailed off. Eliza prodded her with her shoulder to keep on walking.

"She got paid, Annie. This woman you went with..."

"You mean Mrs. Darcy?"

"Whatever 'er name was. She pays people. She pays nursemaids, charwomen and others like Susan Jarrett, to tell 'er about lost, young girls that might be good prospects for 'er 'ouse like. Me sister, she was spoken to by this lady dressed up as a nun. Real sweet-faced lady she was. But she warn't no nun. And she doped

up Maude, that's me sister, and when she come to there was this man in a room with 'er..."

Annie gasped. "Wot 'appened, Eliza?"

"You don't know our Maude, Annie. She made like she was crazy. Foamed at the mouth. Tore at 'er 'air. The man thought she'd escaped from an asylum and 'e left. They let 'er go after that."

Annie sighed. "I threw a chair at Mrs. Darcy, but it didn't 'elp much. Can we sit a minnut, Eliza?" Annie's leg throbbed more at every step. Eliza anxiously looked over her shoulder.

"I suppose we'd 'ave known by now, 'ad they come after you. Sit then, but only fur a minnut or so."

Gratefully Annie sank down at the side of the road. The red dress was ripped and soiled. She felt unclean in it. "Me clothes are gone, Eliza."

"Not to be 'elped."

"Ow did you know where I was?"

"I follered you yesterday. You sure traveled! I was about wore out with follerin'. I told your Da I'd take 'im over as soon as it was light, but I couldn't sleep last night, worryin' they might take you somewheres else. So I spent part of the night in the bushes in the garden. Lucky I woke to see you swingin' your legs over the edge of the winder. Lucky too, you didn't break your neck."

Annie squeezed Eliza's hand and got back up.

It took them two hours to reach Eliza's place. Annie's wrenched ankle was swollen out of proportion by this time and Eliza was half carrying her. It was the same alley that Susan Jarrett lived in. The room Eliza shared with her family wasn't much better than the one Annie had shared with her Da. There were two straw mattresses in a corner on the floor and the small wooden table held a cup with a small bunch of mignonette. The greenish-white flowers welcomed Annie as she gratefully sank onto the straw.

"I'll go and look for your Da now, Annie. Why don't you sleep a bit?"

Annie didn't even hear the admonition. She was already asleep, sore leg

stretched out in front of her.

John Spence was sitting on the bottom steps of Susan Jarrett's stairs, head leaning heavily on his hands. He did not hear Eliza coming and startled to hear the sound of her voice.

"Annie's Da!"

He jumped to his feet directly. "I'm ready to go when you are, Eliza."

"No need, Annie's Da. She's at my place, sleepin'."

John stomach lurched. "She's all right then? Me Annie, she's all right?"

"Well, she's 'urt 'er foot a mite. But fur the rest I think she'll do fine."

"Where do you live, Eliza?"

Eliza glanced up at the stairs. In the morning dawn, she thought she detected a shadow figure on the landing. Motioning John to follow her, she told him all that had happened in the small hours of the day, but only after they had put some space between themselves and Susan Jarrett's house.

Annie was sleeping soundly. The red, besmirched dress covered her childish form poorly. John knelt down on the floor and touched her arm. She opened her eyes slowly and made as if she were about to cry. "Da! Oh, Da! I've lost the book!"

He gently stroked her hair. "Wot book, Annie?"

"The one you gave me, Da. I lost it when I jumped and now it's gone."

"Never mind, Annie! Never mind!" John had never been one for hugging. He'd never been able to say much about love. But now words tumbled from his mouth as if they had always been there. And maybe they had. "Annie, girl, when I come 'ome and you were gone I cried... and I prayed..."

Annie touched his hands. "I know, Da. I know. I understand wot you meant about prayer, Da." Her eyes were shining, full of understanding. "'E opened the winder fur me, Da. And now we can begin agin."

RP



IN PRAISE OF BLUNT

by Ichabod Spencer

Christians want to present the gospel in a nice polite manner. But in a world that is increasingly treating Christian truth as inherently offensive, we're facing a reality in which we can be perceived as polite, or we can clearly speak God's Truth. In Ichabod Spencer's *A Pastor's Sketches*, the author shows there are real benefits to be had in clarity. The excerpt below begins with Rev. Spencer (1798-1854) at a revival meeting where people have come specifically to seek God.

It was on one of those evenings, when about seventy persons were present, and I was passing rapidly from one to another, that I came to an individual who had never been there before. Said I: "What is the state of your feelings on the subject of your salvation?"

"I feel," said he, "that I have a very wicked heart."

"It is a great deal more wicked than you think it," said I;

and immediately left him, and addressed myself to the next person.

THE ARROW DRIVEN DEEPER

I thought no more of it till a few days afterwards, when he came to me with a new song in his mouth. He had found peace with God, as he thought, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Said he: "I want to tell you how much good you did me. When I told you that I had a very wicked heart, and you answered that it was a great deal more wicked than I thought,

"I cannot conceive how you know what to say to each one, where there are so many."

and then said nothing more to me, I thought it a most cruel thing. I expected something different. I thought you would say more, and my soul was wonderfully cast down. I did not believe you. I was angry at your treatment. I thought you did not care whether I was ever saved or not; and I did not believe you knew anything about my feelings. But the words rung in my ears, 'A great deal more wicked than you think.' I could not get rid of them. They were in my mind the last thing when I went to sleep, and the first when I woke. And then I would be vexed at you for not saying something else. But that was the thing which drove me to Christ. I now know it was just what I needed. I thought, when I went to that meeting, my convictions were very deep. But I have found out they were very slight. You hit my case exactly. If you had talked to me, my burden would have been diminished. But you fastened one idea on my mind. You drove the arrow deeper, when I expected you to do just the contrary; and I could find no relief till I gave up all into the hands of Christ. I know you read my heart exactly."

After some few minutes' conversation with him, he said to me, "I want to ask you a question. I have been thinking of it a great deal, and I cannot conceive how you know what to say to each one, where there are so many. We have been talking about it some of us, and we cannot understand how it is that you can know our thoughts and feelings, when nobody has told you. How can you know what to say to one after another, when there are so many, and some of them you have never seen before, and they say so little to you?"

CONSPIRE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

"I have only one rule on that subject," said I. "I aim to conspire with the Holy Spirit. If I perceive any one truth has impressed the mind, I aim to make its impression deeper; because the Holy Spirit has already made that impression, and I would not diminish it by leading the mind off to something else. If I perceive any error in the individual's mind, I aim to remove it; for I know that the error is of sin, and not of the Holy Spirit."

"But," said he, "our impressions are so different."

"No matter. They are of the Holy Spirit if truth has made them; and he can choose the kind of truth which is appropriate to any sinner, better than I can. I just aim to conspire with the Holy Spirit."


Said he, "I am confident if you had said much to me, or anything, to turn my mind away from that one thing, it would have done me hurt. You have no idea how much you increased my trouble that night. I somehow wanted you to lighten my burden, – you made it heavier. Then I was soon led to see that none but God could help me. I had partly begun to think my heart was improving. I found out the contrary, and turned to God in despair. He gave me peace, through Jesus Christ."

RP

QUESTIONS

1. Pastor Spencer's approach is truthful, but might it be said to lack grace? Did he have to deliver it so bluntly? And why didn't he stick around to talk some more? Can we say his is a good approach simply because the man repented? Or might God have used Pastor Spencer despite his bluntness, and not because of it?
2. How does Pastor Spencer's bluntness measure up against the prophets declarations in the Bible? More blunt or less?
3. Was Jesus ever blunt? He is said to be full of grace and truth (John 1:14) so how should that impact our understanding of what it means to be gracious? What does it look like to be both gracious and truthful?
4. Do today's churches often acts graciously, but at the expense of stating God's Truth clearly? Or is it the other way around? Which danger is the Church most in danger of: being too blunt to the point of being graceless, or being too nice to the point of obscuring the truth?
5. What are you in most danger of?

"A Pastor's Sketches" contains an account of Rev. Spencer's numerous home visits, and his other evangelism forays. Originally published in 1850, this unique book is available at www.solid-ground-books.com.



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FILMS

FOR CHILDREN AND KIDS AT HEART

By Jon Dykstra

ODD SQUAD: THE MOVIE

CHILDREN'S / FAMILY

65 MINUTES / 2016

RATING: 7/10



Odd Squad is an organization founded to correct the "strange, the weird, and most especially the odd" wherever they might occur around the world. The organization itself is odd in that it is run entirely by children. While there's an educational vibe, with basic math and logic used to solve most problems, this is all about the fun, and not just for the kids. In a nod to James Bond, there are agents, cartoonish villains, gadgets galore, the science types who invent them, and a leader known only by her letter, "Miss O." But, thankfully, there isn't any of Bond's violence and sex.

A new rival adult-based agency, the Weird Team, is also dealing with all things weird and odd, and fixing things so quickly that Odd Squad doesn't have any cases to solve. So the film begins with Odd Squad disbanding. How's that for an unexpected twist!

The only cautions would concern, not this film, but the TV show that spawned it. In the episodes we've watched so far (20 out of more than 100) one dealt with 13 being bad luck, and in another there was mention made about "millions of years" which presumes the evolutionary time scale. But that's it.

The film is goofy and creative, and while the target audience is in the 6-10 age range, it'll be a great one for a family movie night.

PAW PATROL: THE MOVIE

ANIMATED / CHILDREN

2021 / 86 MIN

RATING: 8/10



The PAW Patrol is made up of talking puppies, each with their own expertise, teaming up whenever there's an emergency. Our daughters were sure to like it, but would it be good enough to keep the parents awake? It turned out, yes, thanks to lots of action throughout, and even some political intrigue. A new cat-loving, dog-hating politician had just won the mayor's race... but only because the other contestant had to drop out. I don't know if the writers were trying to mock big government but they did a good job, as everything the arrogant mayor touches goes comically amuck. A major subplot involves top dog, Chase, struggling with a crisis of confidence – that's the story's drama. Comic relief comes from all directions.

One caution would concern a "wedgie drone" that leaves the mayor pantsless, though wearing long boxers. It's 15 seconds of silliness that's not a big deal, but also would have been better skipped.

Overall, though, I was pleasantly surprised by just how much good old-fashioned fun this film was from beginning to end. I'd recommend this for the 8-11 crowd – it is a children's film – but mom, dad, and the older kids will get a kick out of the little ones' giggles and gasps.

THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

ANIMATED

1970 / 89 MINUTES

RATING: 7/10



Things begin in "live-action" with Milo, a boy bored by everything, returning home from school to discover a mysterious package in his bedroom. It's a talking tollbooth that invites him on an adventure if he has the gumption to go. The moment he drives through the tollbooth, the whole film switches over into animation, taking him to a weird and wacky world that couldn't be depicted any other way.

This is a morality tale, but of a secular sentiment. The bored boy is going to learn that all those things he's being taught in school – addition and spelling, subtraction and writing – are far more interesting than he's ever realized. He'll make this discovery by visiting the kingdom of Digitopolis, where *numbers* rank at the top, and the kingdom of Dictionopolis where *words* are said to be supreme. But this is a topsy-turvy world, where a watchdog actually has a watch inside him, and a spelling bee, is a bee that can spell!

One caution would concern demons, which might be scary for young children, but are personifications of temptations (like in *Pilgrim's Progress*) that are trying to ensnare and delay Milo.

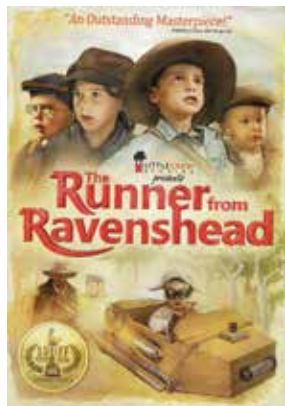
Tollbooth is unlike any other film you've ever seen, which will be off-putting for many, but for the adventurous viewer, this could be worth a try.

THE RUNNER FROM RAVENSHEAD

CHILDREN'S FILM

81 MINUTES / 2010

RATING: 7/10



Both the charm and the kitsch of this film come from the producers' decision to fill all the roles with children. They aren't playing children, mind you. Nope, these pipsqueaks are playing full-size adventurers and the result is both bizarre and delightful!

We jump right into the action with our hero Henry taking on a whole tribe of savages. He engineers a one-man rescue of a tot tied to a pole but, just as he's about to give the savages another licking, we discover it's all Henry's day-dream. In real life Henry is no adventurer; he's just a janitor hoping to be a hero one day.

This is actually a Christian allegory but if kids don't figure that out, it doesn't matter. It is also just a chase film, complete with derring-do, explosions, hijinks, and fight scenes. And all of it done on a pint-sized scale.

I had low expectations; I mean, with an all-kid cast, how could I not? But the cute factor is enormous, and enough to keep parents smiling throughout. For its pre-school and elementary-aged target audience, to see kids their age fighting bad guys, doing stunts, and escaping on a zip-line in a rocket-powered crate is going to be fantastic fun. Watch it for free at ReformedPerspective.ca.

CURIOUS GEORGE

ANIMATED / CHILDREN'S

86 MIN / 2006

RATING: 8/10

George is a monkey whose curiosity always gets the best of him. And in this, the first film and lead-in for the (fantastic!) TV series of the same name, that curiosity gets him his first meeting with the Man in the Yellow Hat, and then gets him transported from the jungle right across the ocean to the United States. And that's only the start of the adventure!

While many a children's animated film has humor that only an older audience will understand, there is no deeper level in this one. But mom and dad can appreciate the beauty. I first watched this with 5 other adults, and we all enjoyed it in large part because of the bright gorgeous visuals.

In the TV show, we're told repeatedly that "George is a monkey and he can do things that you can't." George can swing in trees and climb buildings, which we can't, and he can also get into certain sorts of trouble and not actually be naughty, which we can't do. For example, in one scene George paints the walls of an apartment with a jungle scene. He didn't have permission. But as a monkey, he didn't know he needed it, so it isn't nearly the bad thing it would be if a person had done it. Parents can make the point the film misses: don't imitate monkeys, even cute ones.

Another caution: the Man in the Yellow Hat briefly talks a little evolution in his role as museum guide. More notable: our "hero" agrees to go along with a lie that'll trick the public into believing a 2-inch statue is actually 40 feet tall. Parents will need to hit the pause button to explain that the hero is failing the test here...and so much so that the *villain* of the film is the one protesting that lying is wrong!

I'll add one more caution even though it isn't directly related to the film. If this gets your kids interested in Curious George books, parents should know the original stories, by H.A. Rey, often portray George as not simply curious but flat out disobedient. That changes the nature of his hijinks from being simply a misunderstanding, to being rebellion. There are newer books based on the TV show that are good, but the originals have this nastier version of George that isn't nearly as fun.

While there are some cautions to consider, this is, overall, a gorgeous, gentle, sweet film that children will want to watch multiple times. Teens? Maybe not. But mom and dad won't mind coming along for the ride, if only to appreciate the visual feast.



ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

A FREE DOCUMENTARY ABOUT END TIMES

2020 / 112 MINUTES

RATING: 8/10

Reviewed by Jon Dykstra

On Earth as it is in Heaven is a great introduction to Postmillennialism, a particular view about how God will bring about the end of the world. In talking about “Postmil,” the documentary also compares and contrasts it with other popular “eschatological” or “end times” views, including *Amillennialism* and *Premillennialism*. There are big differences between these three, but they all get their names from the *Millennium*, a thousand-year period mentioned repeatedly in Revelation 20, starting with the chapter’s opening verses:

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.”

In brief what the three camps believe is:

Premillennialists: Christ will return before (or “pre”) this thousand-year period. There are two main divisions in this group, between *Historic premillennialists* (which would include John Piper) and *Dispensationalists* which include Tim LaHaye, author of the *Left Behind* series.

Postmillennialists:

Christ will return *after* the Millennium (which may or may not be literally 1,000 years), when the whole world has been Christianized.

Amillennialists: Also believe Christ will return after the Millennium, but believe it is symbolic period (the “a” in Amillennial means “not”) so it isn’t a specifically one thousand-year period. It is understood to be happening right now, with Satan bound after Christ’s resurrection, and it will end with Christ’s return. That doesn’t contrast all that much with the Postmil position, so maybe the biggest difference is that the Amil typically see a future for the Church that involves persecution rather than a gradual global Christianization.

Premillennialism is the most popular, though not in our Reformed circles which is split between the other two with the larger group being the Amils.

Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that the largest group of Christians don’t hold to *any* end times view, most of us skipping over the Book of Revelation altogether. That’s what makes this documentary essential viewing. God has a lot to say about his plans for this Earth and how He will bring about His triumphant return, so even if some confusion exists, we should be eager to listen.

On Earth as it is in Heaven has at least three major themes.



1. IT'S A HISTORIC UNDERSTANDING

In making the historic argument *for* Postmil, the documentary spends most of its *against* time addressing Dispensationalism, a subset of Premillennialism.

In one clip from Larry King’s CNN show, we see Dispensationalist Tim LaHaye argue that his view is the *literal* view. Young earth creationists also describe themselves as holding to a literal view of the Bible, so does that mean they should all be Dispensationalists too?

Well, what LaHaye means by literal isn’t what we creationists mean by literal. Kenneth Gentry explains that reading the Bible literally means reading each of the Bible’s 66 books as the genre they are – it would be a mistake to read poetry, parables, allegory, hyperbole, and more, all in a literalistic fashion. Yes, we should treat the opening chapters of Genesis as literal history, but when Wisdom is referred to as a woman in Proverbs 8, we understand there is no such literal woman – she is a symbol. One problem with Dispensationalism is that it frequently treats what is meant to be symbolic as being literal.

Another problem is that while there is a historic type of Premillennialism, the more popular Dispensationalism has a very recent origin, going back just a couple hundred years. In contrast, we’re told of Postmil’s historic roots, and

how a form of it was popular among the Puritans. Other notable Reformed theologians like Jonathan Edwards, and more recently, James White, were also postmillennial.

2. IT'S AN OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

The film delves into a *lot* of texts, including the one its title comes from in the Lord's Prayer. Matt. 6:10 reads:

Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On Earth as it is in Heaven.

One way to summarize the film is as an exploration of how this petition is to be understood. Jesus instructed us to pray this, but why then are we often pessimistic about God's kingdom, and His will, being accomplished here on Earth? Yes, we know His kingdom will reign *eventually* – at Christ's final coming Heaven and Earth will both follow God's will perfectly. But is that all that this petition is about? Or is it a request that we're making to God about now too, and the future, and at Christ's return?

To put it another way, do we believe we are living in a *post-Christian* age or a *pre-Christian* age? Most believers seem to think things are getting worse and worse. However, as texts are explored, the film provides a biblical basis for an optimistic understanding of how God's Gospel will triumph here on Earth. Rather than living among the last vestiges of a formerly Christian culture, God's good news will be preached and will spread, disciples will be made, and the world will turn to God in repentance.

3. IT'S GOD AS KING, NOT THE CHURCH

On Earth also offers an important clarification about the Postmil expectations for this coming Kingdom of God. The particular sort of Postmillennialism being discussed here believes it is *not* going to be the Church ruling the State. It will instead be the Church teaching and discipling Christians, and those Christians then seeking to serve God and obey His will in every aspect of their lives... including the civic realm.

...pessimism can take us to a shameful "peace in our time" approach that hands off our battles to our children.

So after a country turns to God they would forbid abortion because God says "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). But this wouldn't be the Church ruling the State, but rather God's rule over the State finally being recognized.

CAUTION

While the film tries to be fair, it is making a case for one particular view. So if this is your first exposure to end-times discussions, you should note the advice Prov. 18:17 presents, and seek out further information.

One great resource, as mentioned in the film, is Steve Gregg's *Revelation: Four Views, A Parallel Commentary*, in which commentary for four different end-times views are listed for each verse of Revelation. Another helpful introductory book is Darrell L. Bock's *Three Views of the Millennium and Beyond*, where he's enlisted defenders of Pre, Post, and Amillennialism to debate and discuss their differing views.

If you'd prefer audio/video to a book, then you'll like "An Evening of Eschatology" that John Piper hosted about a decade back, which can be easily found on YouTube. His two-hour round-table talk featured three different end-times views: Jim Hamilton for Historic Premillennialism (the view that Piper also shares), Sam Storms for Amillennialism, and Douglas Wilson for Postmillennialism.

CONCLUSION

Will you be convinced? Well, in my own case this is the start of an exploration and not the end, so I certainly appreciate the many texts cited. This is a documentary to watch with your Bible in hand, and your remote's pause button at the ready.

My own interest in eschatology is related to the fruit I've seen that follows the different views. As the film shows, the pessimistic Dispensational view lends itself to only short-term thinking. If the world could end at any moment, then why

spend time building Christian institutions and infrastructure for the future? Or as was said, who polishes the brass on a sinking ship? I remember a story about a Bible college president explaining why they had built their campus with wood, rather than stone – they didn't want to give the pagans stone buildings. His presumption was that his institution would eventually be lost to the world.

The Amil view most prevalent in my own Reformed churches is generally pessimistic but hasn't abandoned Kingdom-building projects. That might be most evident in the Christian schools we've built everywhere we have a congregation. They might not be stone, but there's a lot of sturdy cinder block being used! However, if we think the world is going to get worse, then why are we "polishing the brass"? Maybe the answer is our assurance of Christ's ultimate victory. It might also be in keeping with a thought, attributed to Martin Luther (probably incorrectly), that if the Lord was returning tomorrow, it would still be worth planting an apple tree today because it could still be done to God's glory.

If we're keeping God's glory first in our minds then there is a sense in which our end-time views don't matter nearly as much. Whether pessimistic Amil or optimistic Postmil, if either are focused on glorifying God they may well engage with culture, build businesses, and start up schools in ways that are nearly indistinguishable from each other.

And yet, the fruit of Postmil's optimistic outlook can be seen in the lives of a David Livingstone, who explored Africa with the thought of preparing the way for the missionaries that would follow him years later. His work was for a future he expected to happen – God's Word spread and gratefully received throughout Africa – but which he knew he wouldn't live to see. His goal was to be a small part of a long-term strategy for successful

Kingdom building.


Where our end-time views might also be relevant is in our weakness. Humanly speaking, if a fight comes to us, and we're convinced we're bound to lose, doesn't it make sense to delay the fight for as long as we can, so as to put off defeat for as long as possible? That's where pessimism can take us, to a shameful "peace in our time" approach that hands off our battles to our children. That's the temptation we'll need to watch out for any time gov-

ernment or other cultural forces come after our churches, our schools, or our families. Instead of defeatism, we'll need to fix our eyes on God and realize that we can glorify Him by fighting for what is right, whether we win or lose.

Of course, the Postmil believer has his own sinful tendency to watch out for. Believing that Christians can actually win some or most of these battles, he might be liable to start *unnecessary* fights.

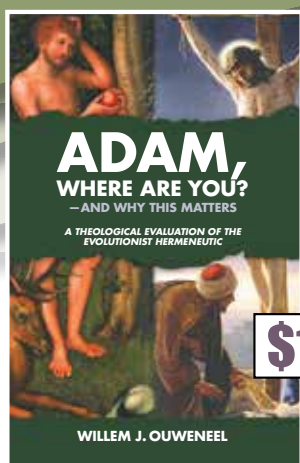
The most important point then is to

never lose sight of God's glory: that is the reason we were created, and it is our privilege to proclaim His Gospel. Whatever we think of the end times, all Christians should be ultimately optimistic, knowing that Christ has already paid for our sins, already conquered death, and presently sits triumphant at the right hand of God the Father.

Watch *On Earth as it is in Heaven* for free at ReformedPerspective.ca. 

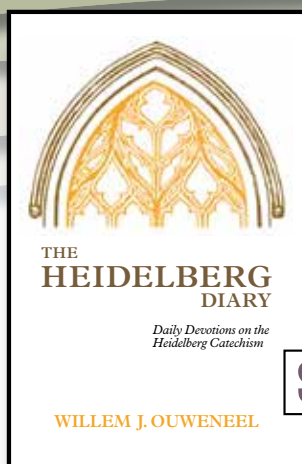
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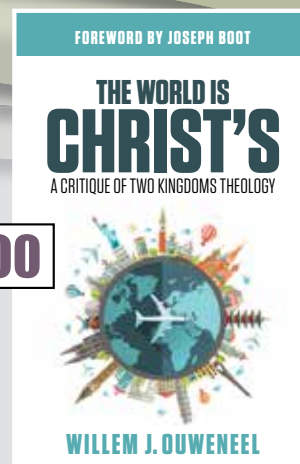
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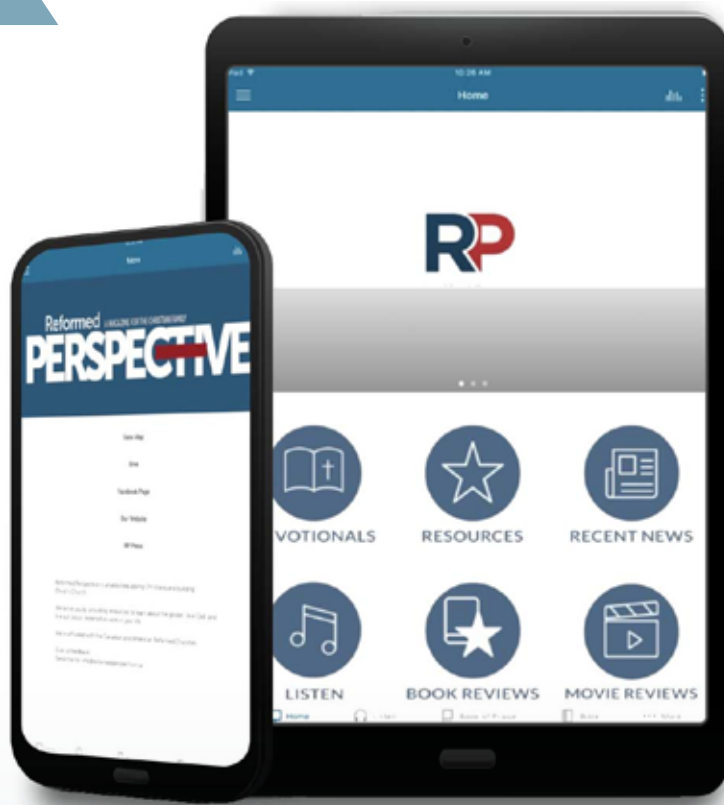
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