



Solomon and Buddha on life and suffering

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One for the money

The Queen's image on our coins points to the constitutional bond between Christianity and Canada's national government

by Michael Wagner

If you look at the back of any Canadian coin you will see an image of Queen Elizabeth II. Someone might consider that to be a little bit strange. Canada has been an independent country for well over a century, so why does its money portray a British monarch?

Canada has indeed been independent for many years, but it's important to realize that the British monarch is also simultaneously the Canadian monarch. People generally understand the monarchy in Canada to be entirely symbolic, if not anachronistic. But there is much more than symbolism involved.

A simple analysis will reveal that the Queen is, in fact, at the center of Canada's Constitution. According to the "letter of the law," she is very powerful. Of course, in reality, she *is* more of a figurehead and does not actually exercise that power. But on paper, in the actual wording of the document, she holds a *lot* of power – she is Canada's Head of State, although her functions here are usually conducted by the Governor General, as her representative.

Under the section on Executive Power in *The Constitution Act, 1867*, the following is stated: "The Executive Government and Authority of and over Canada is hereby declared to continue and be vested in the Queen." Not only that, but: "The Commander-in-Chief of the Land and Naval Militia, and of all Naval and Military Forces, of and in Canada, is hereby declared to continue and be vested in the Queen."

This is the current authoritative Constitution of Canada. The monarch holds the power of the executive branch of the Canadian government, and he or she is also the commander-in-chief of the Canadian Armed Forces. Of course, in practice the Queen doesn't exercise these powers nowadays, but they are still firmly entrenched in the current constitution.

The Queen and Christ

From a Christian perspective this is very significant because the Queen provides a direct institutional connection between Christianity and Canada's political system. The connection becomes especially clear by examining the Coronation Service

for the installation of Elizabeth II as Queen in 1953.

Veteran BC lawyer Humphrey Waldock summarizes important aspects of that service in his 1997 book *The Blind Goddess: Law Without Christ?* and highlights the specifically Christian aspects of it.

Much of the service was conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest prelate in the Church of England. In one place the Archbishop asked Elizabeth:

Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant reformed religion established by Law? Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England and the doctrine, worship, discipline and government thereof as by Law established in England? Will you preserve under the Bishops and Clergy of England and to the Churches there committed to their charge all such rights and privileges as by Law do or shall appertain to them or any of them?

To these questions Elizabeth replied, "All this I promise to do."

Then she laid her right hand upon the Bible and swore, "The things which I have herebefore promised I will perform and keep, so help me God." Then she kissed the Bible, and signed the Oath, after which the Archbishop said, "To keep your majesty ever mindful of the Law and the Gospel of God as the rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes we present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords."

Carefully note that Canada's Head of State took an oath to maintain the Law of God to the utmost of her power. She has clearly violated this oath, as well as others, but she is still accountable to the oath. Canada's Head of State is formally bound, by her own words, to uphold God's Law.

Subsequently in the service, Matthew 22:15 was read, the Nicene Creed was recited, a hymn sung, and then Elizabeth was anointed by the Archbishop. As he anointed her Queen he stated:

As Solomon was anointed King by Zadok the Priest and

Nathan the Prophet, so be Thou anointed, blessed and consecrated Queen over the peoples whom the Lord Thy God hath given Thee to rule and govern.

Next, the Archbishop presented the Sword of State saying,

...that she may not bear this sword in vain but may use it as the minister of God for the terror and punishment of evil doers and for the protection and encouragement of those that do well.

With this sword do justice, stop the growth of iniquity, protect the Holy Church of God, help and defend widows and orphans, restore the things that are gone to decay, maintain the things that are restored, punish and reform what is amiss and confirm what is in good order. That doing these things you may be glorious in all virtue and so faithfully serve our Lord Jesus Christ in this life that you may reign forever with him in the life which is to come.

She also received other tokens of authority including the Robe Royal, the Rod of Equity and Mercy, and a ring. The Archbishop continued,

Receive the Ring of kingly dignity, and the seal of Catholic faith: and as you are this day consecrated to be our head and prince, so may you continue steadfastly as the Defender of Christ's religion.

As Waldock points out, it is clear from the Coronation Service that Canada's monarchy formally acknowledges that it receives its authority from God. The Queen, Waldock writes, "had utterly submitted her temporal jurisdiction for justice to the authority of Christ and the Church under oath."

Loyal to God

In section 128 of *The Constitution Act, 1867* it is stipulated that every Senator, every MP and every MLA must take the Oath of Allegiance which appears in the Fifth Schedule of the Act. The Oath of Allegiance entails one to swear to "be faithful and

What's Inside

Our cover article compares and contrasts the Buddha's answer to the **problem of suffering** with the Preacher's. Both agree that all is "vanity upon vanities" but after that they differ sharply.

We also have three articles on the **Culture of Death**. There is discouraging news in the areas of infanticide and euthanasia, but an encouraging report on setbacks in the field of embryonic stem cell research.

And we have a touch of humor. "**Here to help**" pokes fun at our government's understanding of tolerance — we live in a country where minority "rights" trump wrong and right.

bear true Allegiance to Her Majesty" Queen Elizabeth II.

If the Queen has sworn to uphold the Law of God, and Canada's elected officials swear allegiance to her, it would seem, then, that those officials must uphold the same Law the Queen has sworn to uphold. This is certainly the implication that Waldock draws: "No servants of the Queen have any authority or jurisdiction to substitute their ideas of morals or religion for those she has sworn to."

Many Canadians no longer support the Monarchy and see the Queen as a foreigner who is inconsequential to Canada. But Canada's Constitution says otherwise, and the Monarchy provides a vital institutional link between Christianity and Canada's government.

There are moves afoot in Britain to change the role of the monarchy, and it's likely that the explicitly Christian aspects will be lost in the future. But as things stand now, and as they have stood throughout Canada's history to this point, our Head of State is sworn to uphold the "Protestant reformed religion." Clearly, Canada's Head of State is an explicitly Christian monarch.

Take a look at the back of the coins in your pocket or purse and remember the oath made by the lady whose image you see. She may be woefully deficient in keeping her oath, but it remains an acknowledgement that she, the head of our country, is accountable to our Lord.



In This Issue

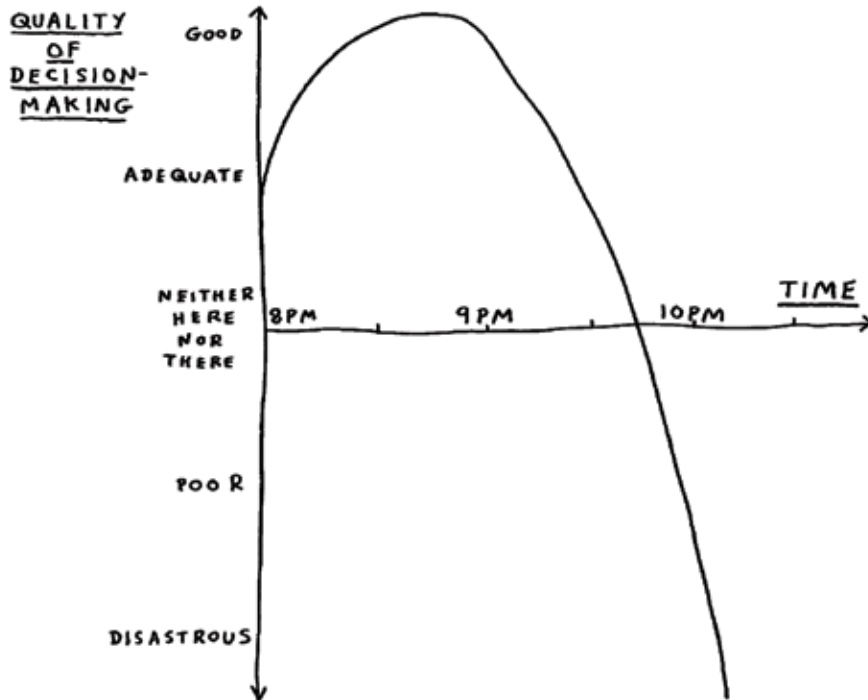
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Culture of death

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COMMITTEE MEETINGS

IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING



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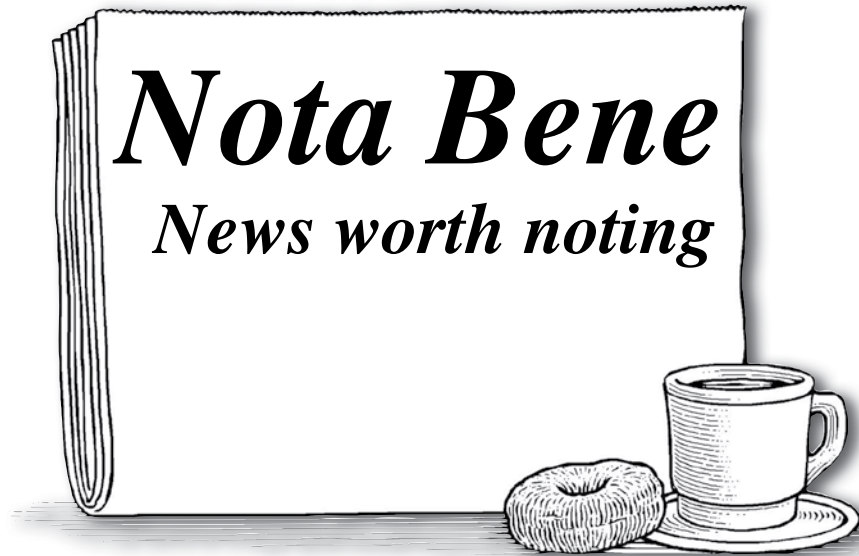
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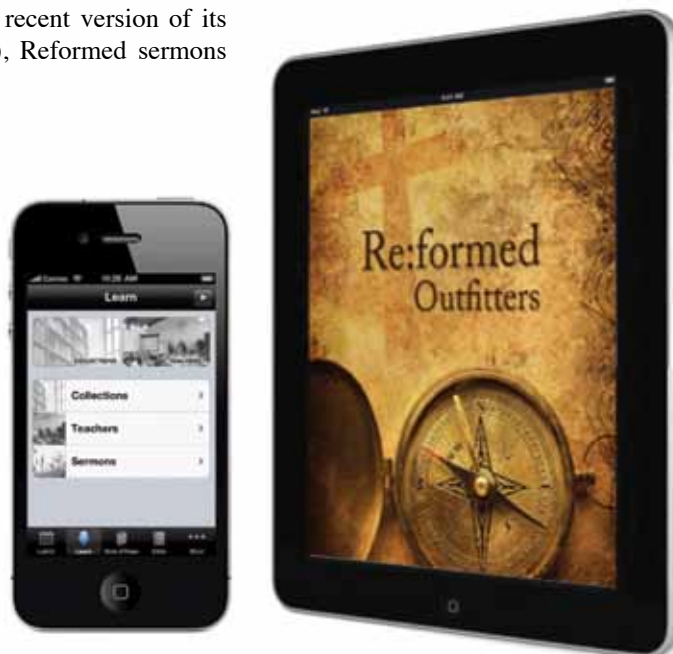
by Jon Dykstra

The Canadian Reformed Churches? There's an app for that.

Early in 2012 the Canadian Reformed Broadcasting Association through their website ReformedOutfitters.com released an app for iPads, iPhones and Android devices. The app provides users with an ESV Bible, the denomination's *Book of Praise* (which includes its confessions, as well as the most recent version of its Psalms and Hymns), Reformed sermons

and articles, and a Google Map that shows the location of every one of their congregations across North America. And while it looks like a million bucks, it can be had absolutely free.

Look for it in the iTunes App store by searching for "Reformed Outfitters," or by visiting ReformedOutfitters.com.



The Iraqi flag with "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) in Kufic script.



9 out of 10 worst persecuting countries are Islamic

by Jon Dykstra

Open Doors is a US group that reaches out to persecuted Christians around the world, and shines a light on their plight. They put out an annual persecution watch list, and this year the top of the list is headed by North Korea, where, the group's website explains, "there are reports of many Christians arrested, with at least 25 percent of Christians believed to be languishing in labor camps for their refusal to worship founder Kim Il-Sung's cult."

It may surprise some to find the recently democratized country of Iraq is #9 on the list, but sectarian violence has "caused tens of thousands of Christians to leave the country in 2011. Christians feel the government fails to protect them, with individuals being threatened, robbed, raped or kidnapped, and churches being bombed."

Aside from North Korea, the other countries in the top ten are Islamic. Though we hear again and again that Islam is a religion of peace, that is simply not borne out by its fruit (Matt. 7:20).

The complete top ten is as follows:

1. North Korea
2. Afghanistan
3. Saudi Arabia
4. Somalia
5. Iran
6. Maldives
7. Uzbekistan
8. Yemen
9. Iraq
10. Pakistan

SOURCE: www.worldwatchlist.us

Abortion and gelada monkeys

by Wes Bredenhof

One of Canada's longest running radio shows is CBC's Quirks and Quarks. Each Saturday, host Bob MacDonald features a series of clips on different news items from the world of science, medicine and technology. I've been listening to this program on and off since I was a kid. It's always interesting – and you can always count on MacDonald to bring in the “E” word: evolution. It's a subversive approach to convincing the



Canadian public of this doctrine, as if the sheer repetition of something week in and week out will make it true.

The February 25, 2012, edition of Quirks and Quarks took the evolutionary agenda one step further. One of the segments was about gelada monkeys. These baboon-like monkeys live in the highlands of Ethiopia. They live in a harem structure – with one male gelada monkey heading up a harem of many females. When a new male monkey takes over a harem, the females that are pregnant typically miscarry. If they don't, the new male leader will often kill the infants and newborns. The theory is that the females miscarry in order to “cut their losses” and start over. They typically are impregnated by the new male leader in a short period after their “spontaneous abortion.” Of course, this is regarded as an adaptive strategy, something that has evolved for the advancement of the species. Monkeys have allegedly evolved with abortion as a way to maintain and improve their kind.

The researcher, Dr. Jacinta Beehner, made it clear that that the female monkeys don't choose to miscarry. It's something that spontaneously happens. They don't deliberately cause the loss of the unborn monkey in any way. Yet, throughout the interview, MacDonald continued to speak about the female monkeys making a choice in the matter. The expression “cutting their losses” was used repeatedly by MacDonald. It was pretty hard not to read between the lines. The Quirks and Quarks website makes it even more clear. It speaks of female geladas spontaneously aborting their pregnancy, as if they have a choice. We're told, “Essentially they are ending investment in offspring in utero that have no future.” Hmmm... not too subtle. *Caveat auditor* – let the listener beware!

Dutch work toward banning burqas

by Anna Nienhuis

The Netherlands is officially one step closer to banning burqas, and other face covering clothing such as ski masks, with the Dutch cabinet agreeing on legislation in January. The legislation still needs to be passed by both houses of the Dutch Parliament, but there is strong support for the new laws among the general population.

This move is indicative of an increasing demand in the Netherlands for immigrants to adopt the Dutch culture and assimilate fully. France and Belgium have already banned burqas and other face coverings for public use.

There are certainly circumstances in which the burqa is not acceptable in our Western culture; when it is time to vote, or when someone is testifying in court, covered faces don't work. However, a ban such as the one already enacted by France and Belgium gives cause for worry as to what other religious freedoms can simply be taken away if the government heads down this path.

SOURCE: Mike Corder's “Dutch move step closer to banning burqa”; ajc.com, Jan. 27, 2012

Victoria's Secret model quits due to growth in her faith

by Anna Nienhuis

Victoria's Secret model Kylie Bisutti caused a minor uproar when she announced she was quitting her job as a lingerie model, saying, “I personally feel that I am not honoring God or my husband by doing it.” Bisutti won a model search contest two years ago, but says since then she has grown in her faith and now feels it is crucial to:

do everything I can to protect my marriage and be respectful to my husband. God graciously gave me this marriage and this life and my desire is to live a Godly faithful life...

The extensive media coverage her announcement received show how unexpected it is for someone in Bisutti's position to make such a decision, going against the “if you've got it, flaunt it” mentality held by much of society.

Source: Jennifer Abbey's “Victoria's Secret Model Quits to ‘reserve body for my husband’”; abcnews.go.com; Feb. 8, 2012



Jack in the Box attacks “gay marriage”

by Jon Dykstra

The US fast food chain Jack in the Box is known for their tasteless ads – they sell burgers but manage to fill their commercials with potty humor and crass double entendres. Their latest ad campaign, which started with commercials shown during the Super Bowl, was a departure for them, in that instead of mocking what is praiseworthy, it made fun of something that does deserve to be mocked.

The ad starts with a young man telling his mother that he’s going to get married. “Who’s the girl?” she asks. “It’s not a girl,” he replies, “it’s bacon.”

We then see the man, and a strip of bacon, out ring shopping and looking at flower arrangements. The commercial concludes with a church scene, as the young man marries a Jack in the Box bacon cheeseburger. The narrator tells us, “if you love bacon, make it official,” and the website for the campaign – marrybacon.com – flashes onto the screen.

It’s hard to imagine that Jack in the Box set out to make an ad attacking gay marriage. But they have, nonetheless. If marriage is simply about love, and we can redefine the word to mean whatever we want, why not let a man, enamored with the stuff, marry bacon? As a commentator at the US National Organization for Marriage noted, the commercial is all the funnier as “our country currently flirts with the notion we can make marriage ... whatever we want it to be.”

Will the Occupy movement rise again?

by Jon Dykstra

A cold winter sent the Occupy Wall Street movement packing. With warmer weather on its way, there are rumblings that it might once again “spring” to life. If so, should Christians welcome its arrival? Or should we protest these protesters?

Occupy Wall Street began in the fall of 2011 in New York when a group of several hundred took over a downtown park to use as a staging ground for protests in the city’s Wall Street financial district. They set up tents and cooking facilities and 100-200 of the protesters slept in the park each

night. Occupy Wall Street soon spawned others Occupy groups across the continent. While court orders were used to dismantle some of these tent communities, weather was what finally ended the protests – no one wanted to live in a tent through the cold of winter.

Exactly what it was that these groups were protesting was hard to determine. It seemed to differ depending on who was interviewed. They didn’t like Wall Street – that was nearly universal – but the reasons given were sometimes rightwing, and sometimes left. Some protesters were angry about the large bailouts that several Wall Street companies had received from the government. Why, they asked, should these *failing* companies get taxpayers’ hard-earned dollars? Other

protesters wanted more socialism, and objected to the wealth of the *successful* Wall Street companies.

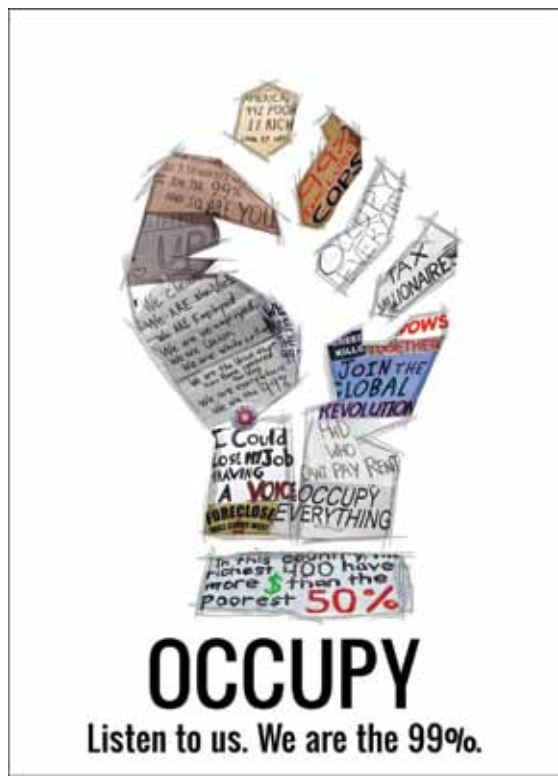
So with such starkly differing views within the same movement, what was a Christian to think?

It became easier to answer that question the longer the protests went on. Some started getting violent, and in one very large action hundreds of protesters shut down businesses in Portland and Oakland. This was very uncivil disobedience – it was rebellion against authorities appointed

by God. Then the movement started to coalesce around a single slogan: “We are the 99%.” This slogan divided the nation by income level, and the richest 1% were declared the enemy not because of anything specific they had done, but because it had been deemed that they had too much.

But by whose standards? Abraham was clearly among the top 1% of his time, and his wealth

was a blessing from God – being rich does not make you evil. In fact, God calls what the Occupiers were doing - looking at someone else’s property with envy – the sin of “covetousness,” and He condemns it (Ex. 20:17). So insofar as the slogan “We are the 99%” accurately captures its philosophy, Christians should want no part in the Occupy Wall Street movement.



The slogan, and fist, that has come to identify the Occupy movement

A game for every situation

by Harold Jansen

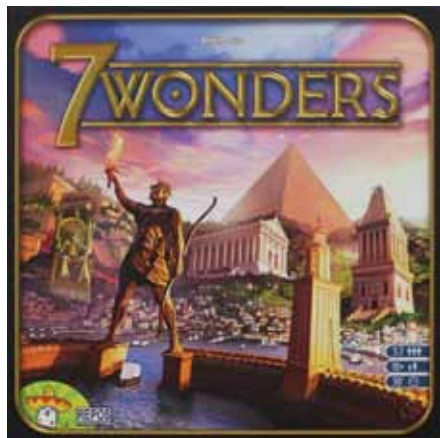
Visitors to my house are often surprised at the number of board games I own. OK, I'll be the first to admit that I probably have too many games. What's nice about a game collection, though, is having games for different situations. Besides the obvious variation in the number of players and available playing time, different groups like different types of games. I'm not going to play the same game with my kids as I will with adults. Even adults vary in how much rules complexity and strategic depth they will tolerate in their games. Here are some suggestions for some games to fill those niches in a game collection. Most of these are pretty recent releases.

7 Wonders

A quick game with strategic depth

This game hit my gaming group's table for the first time in 2011, and it was a huge hit with all of us. In this card game, each player takes on a particular civilization, with a wonder to build. The game progresses through three ages. In each age, each player has a hand of cards and in your turn you choose one card to play. You can play that card face up, playing any resource cost to bring the card into play, turn the card face down to build a stage of your wonder, or discard the card for money.

What makes the game interesting is that once you've done that, you pass your hand of cards to your neighbor, and that player chooses a card from the hand you had. This creates some difficult decisions: do I build the card I want to build or do I discard a card to prevent it from going to my neighbor? At the



end of the game, players score points for buildings they've built, how far they've progressed their wonder, the size of their military relative to your neighbors, coins they've earned and how far they have developed their science. There are multiple paths to victory, and exploring these is part of the fun of the game.

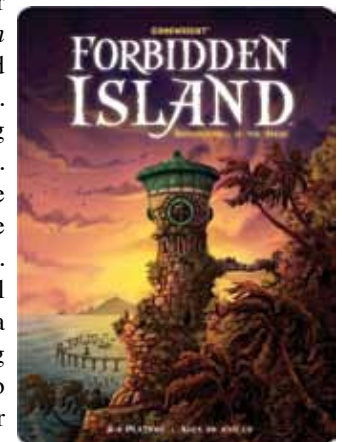
What makes *7 Wonders* so great is that it's easy to learn and quick to play. Once you've got the rules down, a game of *7 Wonders* can be completed in about a half hour, making it a great way to start or close out an evening of game playing, although you'll probably find that you want to play several games in a row. It also scales very well, accommodating anywhere from two to seven players. Because all of the action is simultaneous, adding more players doesn't add to the down time.

Forbidden Island

A game when you're in a cooperative mood

Cooperative games are a nice change of pace in that players work together instead of against each other. Matt Leacock's *Forbidden Island* takes the cooperative system he developed in *Pandemic* and distills it to its essence in a game that's simpler and faster and more suitable for playing with kids. In *Forbidden Island*, players are stranded on an island made up of tiles. Slowly, tiles get flooded, making parts of the island inaccessible. Players are racing against time to acquire four treasures before the island disappears into the sea. Each player has a particular skill that allows him or her to break a particular game rule. Succeeding at the game requires players to work together and utilize their particular skills as effectively as possible.

What's terrific about *Forbidden Island* is the wonderful sense of urgency and tension created by the game. Success and



failure are balanced on a knife's edge. In games where we've successfully escaped with the treasures, we just made it; games we lost could have been won with a different card draw. Either way, it's exhilarating and fun. The game is relatively inexpensive, accommodates up to four players and takes 30 minutes to play.

Chicken Cha Cha Cha *A game to play with the kids*

As you can probably tell, I'm a big fan of gaming with kids. But finding games to play with younger kids is difficult; those games either bore adults to tears or are too difficult for children. *Chicken Cha Cha Cha* is a game for children that hits all the right notes. It has sturdy, kid-friendly components, plays quickly, and relies on a skill that children can compete pretty equally with adults – short-term memory. Players move their chickens around the track by remembering where tiles are hidden. The more tiles you can remember correctly, the further you go. When you pass someone else's



chicken, you get to take their tail feathers. The first player who gathers all of the tail feathers wins the game. You'll be surprised at how good kids are at this game.

Telestrations *A game for a party*

Pictionary is an old stand-by among people who like party games; *Telestrations* takes this to the next level by combining it with that old classic game of Telephone. In *Telestrations*, each player gets a card with a word or phrase on it and then has to draw that word. When time is up, every player passes their picture to their neighbor. That player then looks at the pictures and writes his or her best guess as to what that picture is. Players then pass those words or phrases to their neighbors, who draw a picture based on that word or phrase.



This alteration of words and pictures happens until each player gets their original pad back. At that point, players look

The uses of board games

by Conrad van Dyk

This is a short excerpt from an article first published in the June 2010 issue, in which Conrad van Dyk made his own games recommendations, and, also highlighted some of the constructive uses of board games. The full article, "Beyond Monopoly," can be found on the front page of ReformedPerspective.ca.

Last year I came across an interesting little game called *Ten Days in Africa*. It's basically a *Racko* variant, but with a much more interesting theme. The idea is that you collect cards that represent either a country in Africa or a plane or car. Your job is to chart a 10-day journey by having the cards in a correct order. The game is not incredibly strategic, but what I found remarkable is how well it teaches geography. After playing it a few times I once more had all the countries memorized along with not a few of the capitals (it's especially fun to say "Ouagadougou"). Even my six-year old daughter quickly learned the rules

and could recite many of the countries off by heart. It strikes me that this is exactly the type of game that should be a staple in the classroom. It makes learning fun, and allows the mind to retain information at a deeper level than rote learning often does.

Aside from the educational benefits of board games (many more of which could be used in the classroom), here are some other positive aspects (this is by no means an exhaustive list):

1. Board games support social interaction

They create memories, induce laughter, and simply allow families and friends to enjoy being together. In addition, board games are great for breaking the ice with newcomers, strangers, or people of different ages. For example, I know of a minister who frequently uses board games with his pre-confession students (after the lessons, of course!) as a way to get to know them more personally.

through the pads, and everyone gets a good laugh as to how the phrase or word evolved over time through misunderstandings.

You could probably play this game with a *Pictionary* set and some paper, but *Telestrations* is fairly inexpensive, comes with neat pads and dry erase markers that make the process much easier. It's a lot of fun and leads to a lot of laughter. I do have to say that the scoring rules provided in the game don't work very well, but if you're primarily concerned with games where winning or losing is the point, this probably isn't for you. The game can handle up to eight players and, as with all party games, the more players you have, the more fun it is.

Qwirkle

A game for camping

Camping is a great time for game playing. There's no television or other distractions of modern life, so it's a good time for boardgaming. An ideal camping game shouldn't have lots of little bits or paper that can get dirty,



wet, or lost. In this way, *Qwirkle* is perfect. It comes with a whole bag of big chunky wooden tiles!

Qwirkle is an abstract game, and the wooden tiles have colored shapes on them. There are six colors and six shapes. In a turn, players can play a set of tiles all in one color, as long as all the shapes are different, or a set of tiles of one shape, as long as they're all different colors.

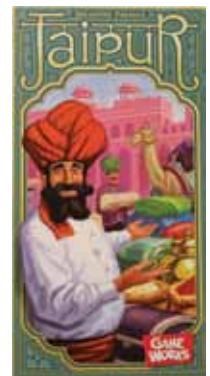
This abstract strategy game feels a lot like *Scrabble* when you play it. If you don't camp, it's still an excellent and accessible game for all ages. In 2011, *Qwirkle* won the most prestigious game award in the world, Germany's *Spiele des Jahres*.

Jaipur

A two-player game

There are lots of times when there are only two of you and you want to play a game. In my house, *Jaipur* has become the go-to game in that situation. *Jaipur* is a game of trading and collecting sets of goods represented by cards. In a turn, a player can take one card from the market, trade multiple cards for multiple cards in the market, or sell goods.

The clever thing in *Jaipur* is that the first of a type of good sold is worth the most; as the market gets saturated with a



2. Board games are cross-generational

Games make it easy to get people of different ages around the same table. This can be especially true in the teenage years, when children feel this strange need to dissociate themselves from their elders. The only people who are not allowed to play games are those past the age of 99.

3. Games help teach manners

Losing graciously is one of the hardest lessons to learn, and not only for young ones. Board games teach courtesy, patience (especially if the turns are long), cooperation, and so forth.

4. Games develop mental skills

For younger kids games are great for teaching simple addition and subtraction. In addition, they help children develop better attention spans. For adults they teach problem solving, among other things.

There have also been an increasing number of studies that suggest that as we get older it's important not only to keep our bodies fit, but also to challenge our brains. Puzzles like Sudoku are often used as examples of brain games that can help prevent Alzheimer's, but the same can be said for

anything that taxes our mental faculties.

5. Games provide a healthy outlet for competition

This is also where specialty games provide more variety than traditional North American fare. In *Monopoly*, for instance, you thrive when others land on your properties and go bankrupt (it really is a rather grim depiction of capitalism!). By contrast, specialty games frequently include catch-up mechanisms that allow players who have fallen behind in the scoring to get back into it. *Monopoly* provides only Free Parking and an occasional lucky dice roll. In addition, specialty games include an entire subgenre of games where players work together to succeed. I've mentioned *Pandemic* as an example of a cooperative game. Another in the genre is *Shadows over Camelot*, where players work together as the Knights of the Round Table. However, there is a twist: one of them may be a traitor, plotting against them...

6. Games are a relatively cheap form of entertainment

I own some games that I've played over 50 times. When you think of how much a round of golf costs, or a nice dinner, board games are really not that expensive.



particular good, its value decreases. Players can earn bonuses if they trade in larger sets of goods, but trying to build up a large set of goods in your hand might allow the other player to sell off a few goods first for higher prices. To succeed, you have to play close attention to what your opponent is doing. This one is probably the hardest to find of the games on this list; you may have to try an online game store if you want to locate a copy.

Dixit

A game when you're feeling creative

Most games are decidedly left-brain activities, relying on logic and reasoning. *Dixit* is a right brain kind of game, rewarding creativity over strategic play. The game consists of a deck of beautifully illustrated cards, with no words on them. Every player has a hand of cards.

In each turn, one player is the storyteller and chooses a card to play. That player comes up with a word, a phrase or a sentence to describe the card. The other players all choose a card from their hands that they think best exemplifies that phrase. All of the cards are then mixed, and the players who are not the storyteller vote on the one they think is the storyteller's card. What makes the game work is the scoring system. In the case that all players choose the storyteller's card or none of the players choose it, the storyteller gets no points and every other player gets two points. In all other situations, the storyteller and any player who correctly identified the storyteller's card gets three points.



Furthermore, any of the other players who attract votes get a point. This system encourages the storyteller to choose a phrase that is neither too obvious nor too obscure, a tricky balance to maintain. *Dixit* is a simple game to play, but I find it taxes my brain in a way no other game in my collection does.

Oh, and in 2010 it also won the prestigious *Spiele des Jahres* (Game of the Year).

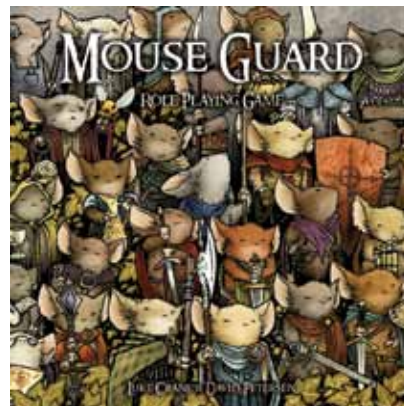
Mouse Guard Role-Playing Game

A game to indulge your inner storyteller

Role-playing games are games where players collectively tell a story. One player runs the game; the others play characters in the story. When done well, it's an incredibly fun and immersive experience. Most of these games, however, are set in fantasy settings with warriors, wizards and dragons. If the idea of role playing is appealing, but these typical games settings are not, *Mouse Guard* may be for you.

Based on David Peterson's graphic novels of the same name, players take on the role of mice dedicated to protecting

their civilization from the perils of the outside world. When you think about how small mice are, there's plenty of material for compelling adventures in seemingly mundane things. In one mission I played with my children, the mice had to save a mouse settlement from flooding after beavers built a dam near the town.



Although an excellent game to play with younger players, it also works well with adults, with plenty of opportunity for interpersonal drama and darker conflict.

All you need to play are some dice and the 320-page rulebook, which is readily available from online bookstores. Alternatively, you can opt for the beautiful boxed set, with additional missions and play aids. The game materials are well written and gorgeous, with hundreds of Peterson's illustrations. It takes a bit of reading to get a handle on the rules, but it is a more streamlined and easy-to-grasp system than most role-playing games. The book provides lots of guidance in how to structure and run missions, and rewards good role playing, not clever dice play.

Ascending Empires

A game when you want to get physical

In many ways, *Ascending Empires* is a pretty classic space empire game. Players start with one planet and expand to nearby planets, colonizing them, mining resources and establishing science stations. Planets come in different colors, and in order to advance in technology, it's necessary to establish a presence on several different color planets. This inevitably leads to conflict with other players and space battles.

Here's what's different about *Ascending Empires*: in order to move the wooden disks representing your ships around, you have to flick them with your finger. This leads to a lot of laughter and fun as carefully planned flights go astray. The game manages to strike a near perfect balance between physical dexterity and

strategy. Flicking your ships across the board is a blast, but clever strategic play is ultimately going to decide who wins, much to the relief of those of us who are not particularly coordinated. This is another one that may not be easy to find; online game stores are probably your best bet.



The basics of Reformed evangelism

Present the gospel, and demand a decision

by Clarence Bouwman

We've heard it all before – or so I thought. The recent Theological Conference hosted by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary turned out to be an eye-opener for me, particularly its treatment of evangelism. I thought I'd share with you the central points of the opening (and keynote) address.

The speaker was Rev. Henk Drost, minister of the Word of God in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, currently serving as missionary in the Ukraine. His first address to the Conference (he delivered two) was entitled *Spreading the Seed of the Word: Reformed Foundations for Evangelism*. From the get-go, it was abundantly obvious that this brother had thought the issues through, and done so with a very open Bible.

Sow

His principle thrust: you sow the seed; you do not cause growth.

It was good to hear, simply because we commonly think that we fail to pass on the gospel if we don't get the results we desire, and that in turn gets us discouraged and prompts us to give up. That's not Scriptural thinking, we were told, because it's God who causes the growth, not we. Once we've sown the seed we need to let go, need to give it over. That's to say: being reformed (with respect to our neighbors and contacts) means that we spend time in prayer. Rev. Drost challenged us to consider how we follow up on those conversations we've had with people around us; do we keep "knocking on their door" or do we multiply prayer for them? He was insistent: it is the latter we need to do.

Response

It gave food for thought. Did I hear him

aright? Doesn't this let us off the hook – for it's easier to talk to God about the neighbor than to talk to the neighbor about God, isn't it?

God speaks (through people) to the unbeliever. Since God Almighty speaks, the hearer is under obligation to respond. The temptation (we were reminded) is to play the hearer off against God with the argument that people are dead in sin and so can't respond. When we stress human deadness (and hence inability to respond), we end up thinking that they need to hear the Word again and again – until the Lord awakens them to new life.

Scriptures, however, speak differently. God created people to be responsible, and so the church has rightly formulated the obligation of the (unbelieving) hearer like this:

The kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent (Lord's Day 31.84).

Those who pass on the good news of Jesus Christ to their neighbors must then, sooner or later, insist that the neighbor (though surely dead in sin) was created to respond to God, and so may not remain neutral to God's call to repentance; he must embrace it in faith. If he fails to do that, he in effect has decided to discard the good news as rubbish. As to the actual moment when you

press on your hearer the need to make a decision will depend on circumstances, including frequency of conversation, depth of discussion, gift of understanding, etc. When the person concerned effectively decides to reject the gospel, you do well to recognize that there are others who need the gospel....

Confessions?

According to Rev. Drost, the trend in Europe is to separate reformed teaching from reformed evangelizing (I might add: the same is surely true in North America). The thought is that those who don't know the gospel need baby food, and the Reformed confessions are seen to be too complicated for that level. As a result, European evangelism has increasingly become characterized by un-Biblical thinking – and that, in turn, undermines what outreach work was actually intended to accomplish. Rev. Drost was insistent: you must work with the Reformed confessions, simply because they catch correctly the sound doctrine God has revealed.

That's not to say, he continued, that one needs to throw all the deep things of the confessions at the hearer in the first meeting. On the contrary, you first relate



the basics, and as understanding grows you dig deeper into the rich truths of Scripture.

But relating the basics is not the same as keeping it simple. It is not so, according to Rev. Drost, that we need to bring the gospel down to Johnny's level, as if his understanding it will prompt him to embrace it. On the contrary, it's exactly when folk understand the gospel (Christ actually died to reconcile vile sinners to holy God) that some will reject it! Don't, we were told, keep the gospel so simple that it's not offensive. Speak the truth, and speak it plainly. Then leave the work of regeneration and faith to the Holy Spirit (see Canons of Dort, III/IV,11). This is "sowing the seed."

Reformed?

What identifies evangelism as Reformed (as opposed to, say, Pentecostal)? Rev. Drost pointed to four "identity markers for Reformed evangelism" (as he called them): Word, grace, choice and body.

Word

Evangelism theorists today stress the need to get to know your hearers. Though it's certainly important to know the context of those to whom you speak, it's far more important (Rev. Drost stressed) that we know the Word of God well. To help any sinner in this postmodern world, we need not just reach the hearer, but need to reach him with the truth. Unless he hears the truth, he will not be convicted by the truth. The Holy Spirit, after all, uses the Word to work faith.

This central importance of the Word is the core aspect of Reformed evangelism. It is through knowing the Scriptures well that we are able to distinguish between what is Biblical teaching and practice on the one hand, and what is tradition on the other. We cannot insist on tradition; we must insist on what is Biblical.

Grace

Too often we experience that people get excited about the gospel – only to see them soon fall away. To prevent that tragic development, we need (we were told) to highlight from the start the need for grace, i.e., the reality of sin and misery, and how

the blood of Jesus Christ alone delivers us from the righteous judgment of God. The good news of justification of sinners lies at the heart of Reformed evangelism.

To illustrate how important the point is, Rev. Drost reminded us how so much evangelism today is done from the perspective that "God loves you." But, said Rev. Drost, if I were an unbeliever in love with my sins, I'd say, "Thanks for that wonderful news; now leave me alone – for all is obviously well...!"

Biblically faithful outreach work takes sin and one's fallen nature seriously. Every sinner is guilty before God, and therefore heading to judgment. Rev. Drost was insistent: do not tell sinners that God loves them, for it's just not true! Most people don't know that their central problem is their sinfulness, and that God is the righteous Judge! So, confront them with the reality of their sinfulness and the reality of God's judgment (and do it, of course, with love). Once you have done that, you are in a position to show them the solution, i.e., God in mercy has given His Son to pay for sin.

If you do not confront people with their sin, they will not see the need to repent – and any perceived repentance will be superficial. Hence Drost's plea: dare to speak of people's identity as sinners and their need for a Savior from the righteous judgment of God.

Choice

The message of the Bible is strange to those around us. That the eternal Son of God died on the cross 2000 years ago outside Jerusalem to reconcile sinners to God is bizarre and foolish to the modern hearer. That being so, it is not fair to expect people to make a life-changing decision after they've heard scarcely 15 minutes of gospel preaching. One needs to keep on instructing the hearer in the revelation of Scripture. That instruction includes an appeal to the heart to make a conscious decision. After all, God is not mocked.

The more the hearer learns, the greater his responsibility becomes. As instructor, you come to the point (see above) where you put more pressure on the hearer to give a response to God. If that person refuses to respond positively, cease evangelizing that person – for time has value, and there are

others who need to hear the Word.

Body


In Scripture, a positive response to Christ is at the same time a response to His body, the church. The church, though, is frowned upon today. Is it actually important to call a new believer to the body of Christ? Isn't joining the local church with its geographical boundaries an outdated concept?

The Bible makes no distinction between joining Christ and joining His body. Jesus spoke of taking up His yoke and learning from Him – and that happens through the teaching given in the local church (see Art 28 Belgic Confession). It is in church that the new Christian finds rest for his soul. To do evangelism without directing the person to the church is Biblically incorrect; the new convert desperately needs the fellowship of the church.

This means in turn that the church needs to be prepared to receive those in whom the Holy Spirit works faith. The church needs to exhibit love, devotion and nurture for these newcomers. This is what happened in the Pentecost church of Acts 2, and it needs to continue to happen in every church that calls itself by the name of the Lord. In fact, if one dares to pray that God almighty work repentance and faith in the neighbor, one needs to accompany that prayer with establishing mechanisms to receive those whom God (through our conversations) is pleased to bring to faith. After all, one counts on God answering prayer....

In sum

We retain some mixed feelings about evangelism, particularly on the how of it. And yes, we get discouraged because we don't see much fruit – and so the temptation arises to quit speaking the gospel or to water down what we say. This lecture provided a necessary corrective to that temptation. Evangelism is nothing more (or less) than sowing. And once you've sown the seed you – prayerfully – let go.

Rev. Bouwman is a minister in the Smithville Canadian Reformed Church. If you want to hear the Henk Drost lecture, it is available online at CanadianReformedSeminary.ca/general/2012_conference.html 

Trapped in Dukkha

Solomon and Buddha address the problem of life and suffering

by Jonathan Chase

When the man who would one day come to be known as Buddha spoke of *dukkha* (an ancient word that means both *life* and *suffering* at the same time), he described it as a “wheel of friction” that went on and on in a painful cycle of birth and rebirth, which was going nowhere and was never satisfied. His objective was to achieve *nirvana* – to stop the cycle, to blow out like a candle (*nirvana* literally means “blowing out”), to never again be reborn. This was the way, he taught, to leave behind the suffering, disappointment and dying that characterizes human existence.

Buddha on suffering

Thus the first of four Noble Truths of Buddha’s *dharma* (“the teaching”, “the way it is”) is that life is characterized by an endless cycle of suffering.

When the Buddha left his father’s palace in India during the 6th Century BC, or roughly during the time of the prophet Daniel, he set out to see the world, and was shocked to see so much suffering, a thing he had been shielded from since childhood. He then set his mind on discovering the answer to this troubling reality, and he stumbled upon it after 49 days of meditating under a tree in Bodhgaya, North India. His answers (Noble Truths 2 through 4) were as follows

- Suffering has an origin
- Therefore, it can be eliminated
- And the path to eliminating it ultimately involves awakening to the

reality that self is an illusion.

Following Buddha’s reasoning requires a bit of an intuitive leap, but it’s helpful to realize how deeply appealing this idea is, that all suffering is the result of attachment to a delusion. Like a crabby old man who spends his existence desperately saving up a hoard of wealth that he never enjoys, we too enslave ourselves to our attachments and never stop to ask why. It’s always that job, that boyfriend, that social status, which will ultimately make us happy; and like the Rolling Stones, we “can’t get no satisfaction.”

According to Buddha, this is because everything is transient, and the self that each of us serves is part of something bigger. So, if we detach ourselves from possession (including possession of our body and ego) and meditate on true reality, we will eventually realize that we are all One, like a thousand Aspen trees that are really just one tree connected together by the roots under the surface. Ultimately, taught the Buddha, even this One doesn’t exist, since it too is in a temporary state of being; ultimate reality, then, is emptiness, and to know this is bliss, because emptiness cannot experience discontentment.

Ironically, though, for many Western Buddhists *dukkha* is not a problem but an opportunity. Entirely missing Buddha’s point, their hope is that in the next life (the next turn of the “wheel of friction”) they’ll get that job, that boyfriend, that social status they are after, and then they’ll be happy.

Solomon on vapor

Christianity suffers from a similar problem, a similar wrestling with the cycle of life and suffering. The Preacher cries out in Ecclesiastes 1:2-7:

Vapor of vapors, says the Preacher.

Vapor of vapors! All is vapor.

*What advantage does man
gain by all the toil*

At which he toils under the sun?

A generation goes,

and a generation comes,

But the earth remains forever.

*The sun rises, and the sun goes down,
And hastens to the place where it rises.*

The wind blows to the south

And goes around to the north;

*Around and around goes the wind,
And on its circuits the wind returns.*

All streams run into the sea,

But the sea is not full;

*To the place where the streams flow,
There they flow again.*

Typically, Christians interpret this passage by saying, “Yes, such is the futility of life without God.” But let’s be clear, the preacher isn’t referring to life without God here; he speaks of life among God’s own people, and he calls it a “chasing after the wind.” And so it is; we grasp at the wind, and enjoy it for but a moment before it is gone. We build, and in 50 years what we have built is gone, broken down by the elements or torn down to make room for something else, which in turn soon

passes away. The world in which we live is vapor; we are vapor. “As for the days of our life,” Moses teaches us in Psalm 90, “they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years; yet their pride is but labor and sorrow, for soon it is gone and we fly away.”

Like everyone around us, we so often pursue that job, that boyfriend, that social status, believing that *then* we will be happy. And when we get there, we discover that actually it’s something else we have been seeking, and so we begin the pursuit over again. The midlife crisis comes upon us, we search for that sense of fulfillment in the dream we never pursued, or we look for something more lasting, our life’s legacy.

Evading the issue, we tell our kids, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might (Ecclesiastes 9:10)”, but we try hard not to think about the second half of the verse, “for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.” All is chasing after the wind. While we know better than to believe in reincarnation (“it is appointed once for a man to die, and then comes judgment” - Hebrews 9:27) our lives are still characterized by the friction and frustration of *dukkha*.

Insight

Buddha understood something about this life that is so essential for a Christian to grasp and take to heart. Indeed, five hundred years before the Buddha looked upon the oppressive existence of human life and decided the best solution was to find a way out of it, the Preacher wrestled with the same assessment in Eccl. 4:

Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold, I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of the oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is

done under the sun. I have seen that every labor and every skill is rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vapor and striving after wind.

For the Buddhist, this is both the problem and the solution. Life is all suffering, men are all rivalry, and our only hope is to withdraw from this world, and, for all intents and purposes, to cease to exist; or better yet, to never have existed. The Preacher stood on the same philosophical ground, he looked down the path the Buddha would one day take, and he understood its appeal.

But he came to a different conclusion: “Consider the work of God, for who is able to straighten what He has bent?” (Eccl. 7:13). Our forefather Adam desired

to find wisdom in himself – to be god in God’s place. As a result, God has *bent* this creation, so redesigned it that every attempt by men to find happiness in it or in themselves will lead to frustration and failure, *so that we will be directed back to our Creator*.

So the Preacher warns us:

Remember Him before the silver cord is removed and the golden bowl is crushed, and the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. “Vapor of vapors,” says the preacher, “all is vapor!” (Ecclesiastes 12:6-8).



“God has *bent* this creation, so redesigned it that every attempt by men to find happiness in it or in themselves will lead to frustration”

Christian Hedonism

This underlies his repeated exhortation throughout the book to enjoy the life of vapor that we have. What Solomon calls us to is, as John Piper famously calls it, Christian Hedonism: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

When we live in the fear of God, we acknowledge that our lives are in His hands. Satisfaction comes only from Him, and this knowledge allows us to “eat our bread with happiness and drink our wine with a cheerful heart” (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

We don’t expect satisfaction from this life, we know that it is but vapor, and so we look to our Creator for satisfaction. When God’s nearness is our highest joy, then the bread and wine and every other good thing that was tasteless without Him becomes rich and delightful; and though the suffering that otherwise would dominate our lives still remains, it only brings us closer to our Creator, so that our trust in Him grows deeper. Reflecting on the vapor and brokenness of this short life gives us a heart of wisdom, so we know to

spend this existence seeking the favor of our Creator.

That in mind, we pick up again with Moses in Psalm 90:

So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom. Do return, O LORD; how long? Have pity on your servants! *Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love*, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days...Let the favor of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands!

How does the Christian live in a world that is vapor? Not by denying the transience of life, but by bearing it in mind all of our days! Only by considering how transient we are can we grasp the depth of joy that is found in the love and nearness of the infinite, permanent Creator God! His favor is the deepest, most satisfying, most fulfilling pursuit we can ever have!

Conclusion

Have you as Christian taken to heart

the reality that this life doesn’t satisfy the deep longings of the human heart? Or are you still afflicted what the Buddha called “ignorant craving” and what the Preacher called “striving after wind”? The solution isn’t to stop craving; it is to look to the right source. As David put it in Psalm 37:4, “Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” Does your life, your goals and plans, reflect this reality? Is your chief end to glorify God and enjoy him forever? Do you cry out with Augustine, “LORD, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you”?

Today, there are more than half a billion people who have chosen the Buddhist path to “freedom.” If our lives manifest what we confess to be true – that Christ paid the price for sin so that creation could be made new – and if we delight ourselves in the LORD, knowing that He will give us the desire of our heart, then our lives cannot help but be a testimony to these millions who know no other freedom than escape. Then they will know the truth, and the truth will set them free.



More than 500 million are trapped in the Buddhist path to “freedom.”

Here to help

Our government has our best interests in mind

by Joe Campbell

Conversing earnestly, they must not have noticed that I was close enough to overhear them.

"It's discouraging," she said, "how badly legislators and judges treat us Christians."

"On the contrary," he said, "it's encouraging how earnestly they seek to help us."

"You can't be serious," she said. "No sooner had the legislators hatched the Charter of Rights and Freedoms than the judges used it to strike down The Lord's Day Act."

"They just wanted to get our attention," he said.

"By declaring that freedom of religion means freedom *from* religion?"

"By starting a process that will make us equal to other identifiable groups."

"I thought we were already equal," she said.

"Equality means different things to different people."

"Once they secularized Sunday, they went on to rule against religious exercises and recital of the Lord's Prayer in public schools."

"They were just being consistent."

"Their consistency emboldened secular activists to banish Christian practices, symbols and utterances from the public square lest they give offense. Why, we've reached the point where we feel guilty if we wish someone a Merry Christmas."

"That's a good sign."

"Is it a good sign that, contrary to two thousand years of Christian moral teaching, legislators liberalized abortion and legalized contraception and sodomy?"

"I mean our feeling guilty is a good

sign," he said. "It shows that the process is working."

"When the legislators shredded Christian sexual morality, the judges must have felt like second-class wreckers. So they struck down what little protection remained for the unborn. Then, they joined the lawmakers in denigrating Christian marriage by reducing it, civilly, to the level of common-law unions and same-sex liaisons. Oh, yes, and while they were at it they liberalized possession of child pornography and legalized group sex."

"Again, they were just being consistent."

"Is it consistent when human rights

commissions pressure Christians to violate their consciences?"

"How?"

"If they're healthcare workers, by participating in abortions. If they're marriage commissioners, by presiding over same-sex nuptials. If they're business operators, by providing goods and services for immoral activities."

"They can always resign their posts or shut down their businesses."

"At what cost?"

"You still don't get it," he said.

"What's to get, other than that a once Christian nation has chopped off its religious and moral roots?"



“What’s to get,” he said, “is that we Christians don’t qualify as a favored or protected group. We’re not discriminated against as feminists say women are, marginalized as ethnic leaders say visible minorities are, deprived as native organizations say aboriginals are, oppressed as gay rights activists say homosexuals are, demeaned and profiled as Islamists say Muslims are—”

“If we didn’t qualify before,” she interrupted, “we qualify now, thanks to the legislators and judges.”

“To be favored or protected,” he said, “an identifiable group has to be disadvantaged historically.”

“But we Christians have been persecuted since the Church began in the Roman Empire.”

“You can’t expect legislators and judges to know that,” he said. “They’re parliamentarians and jurists. They’re not historians.”

“We’re persecuted today in the Middle East, India, China—”

“They’re not geographers, either.”

“When legislators make laws we don’t like, we can at least vote the sitting scoundrels out and put new ones in. When judges do it, we can’t change them or their laws. Don’t legislators and judges realize this is undemocratic?”

“Why would they? They’re politicians and political appointees. They’re not political scientists.”

“But the majority is supposed to rule, and we’re more than seventy per cent of the Canadian population.”

“They’re also not statisticians.”

“If they insist on labeling people,” she said, “they should start with themselves. Nowadays, any public person who doesn’t understand history, geography, political science, or statistics is disadvantaged.”

“That’s why they qualify for affirmative action,” he replied.

“Affirmative action for legislators and judges?”

“Why else would we give them outlandish salaries, benefits and perks?”

“I think I’m getting it now,” she said. “If legislators and judges rule against us long enough, we’ll have documentary proof of being historically disadvantaged, too. Then we’ll qualify for preferential treatment like they do.”

“Except that legislators and judges are in the minority. Apart from women, all favored and protected groups are minorities.”

“So what they have to do is rule against us until we’re reduced to a minority, and then it will be Utopia? I can hardly wait.”

“I told you they earnestly seek to help us,” he said. “Once we’re certified as an historically disadvantaged minority, we’ll join the winners’ circle. We’ll be right up there with aboriginals, feminists, homosexuals, polygamists, pedophiles...”

“Polygamists and pedophiles?”

“Yeah, they’re historically disadvantaged minorities, too. It’s just that the legislators and judges haven’t noticed them yet.”



Graphic Design

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Laura's Dream Mary's Accomplishment

by Christine Farenhorst

On September 20, 1995, a baby girl was born on a boat in the port of Whangarei, New Zealand. Her parents, Dick Dekker, a Dutchman, and Babs Müller, a German, were on a seven-year trip. It gifted the newborn child, Laura Dekker, with citizenship in three countries: the Netherlands, Germany and New Zealand. Laura spent the first four years of her life at sea. Growing up she became accustomed to and loved certain sounds, smells and sights: the sound of the lapping of the waves against the boat, the smell of the water constantly surrounding her, the feel of the wind in her small face, and the setting of the sun on the vast horizon.

In 2002, when Laura was but six years old, her Mom and Dad divorced. Her father retained custody of the little girl and raised her. The year her parents divorced, she was given her own sailboat, a boat named *Optimist*, perhaps because of the dire misery of the occasion. When she was ten, she received another boat, a Hurley 700. She named it *Guppy* and sailed it during her summer holidays. Laura was all of eleven years old when she sailed, on her own, from Holland to Lowestoff, England. The local authorities apprehended her and requested that Dick, her father, come and accompany her back home.

Around the world!

In August of 2008 when Laura was still twelve, she announced that she wanted

to prepare for a two-year solo sailing voyage around the globe. The public announcement made big headlines in the Dutch national newspaper *Het Algemeen Dagblad*. Her father, the newspaper reported, was supportive of the girl's bold decision, and a description of a 38-foot ketch (also named *Guppy* like her previous boat) was included. It seemed to be a boat well equipped for long-distance sailing and solo navigation. Laura's dream and elaborate plan was that she would set a world record for being the youngest person ever to sail alone around the globe.

Local Dutch authorities, however, objected to Laura Dekker's aspirations, and the Dutch Child Welfare Office became involved. A family court judgment was obtained which placed Laura into shared parental custody with the Council for Child Care – a Council which would not allow her to sail solo around the world at her tender age. This shared custody

battle, and battle it was, lasted until the summer of 2010. International media attention resulted. It was questioned whether a government had the right to intervene when minors engage in risky behavior, if and when such behavior is permitted by a parent. Dutch inland shipping regulations do not allow a person younger than sixteen years of age to sail a boat longer than seven meters.

On December 18, 2009, when Laura was 14, she was reported missing. She had run away. A farewell letter was left for her father. Her boat, however, was still in port. She was discovered on St. Martin in the Dutch Antilles, and two days later, under the escort of a policeman, was flown back to Amsterdam.

A court ruling later that same December overruled objections about Laura being allowed to sail solo around the world. As well, in July of 2010, the Dutch court, giving a mandate that Laura fulfill a list of



Laura's route around the world

Six Lines FREE

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conditions, released her from supervision and granted Dick Dekker full custody of his daughter once more.

Mother, Babs Müller, who had acquired a new partner, was initially opposed to her daughter's venture. When she was accused by Laura of ruining the girl's life and was threatened, if she continued to oppose, that her daughter never wanted to see her mother again, she commented:

It breaks my heart to think that because of this I could lose contact with my daughter. I have never before made such a difficult decision. But I must accept the consequences. I would rather have a live daughter who I will never see again than a dead daughter.

Later she changed her mind and supported the solo sailing, saying:

Laura can sail like the devil. That's not the problem. The difficulties lie in the problems a thirteen-year-old girl can encounter in the harbors of Third World countries and of the psychological pressure of being alone for such a long period on the ocean. She is not yet an adult.

And, in an open letter to a newspaper, Babs added:

I know she can do it. She's a strong girl who does not give up easily. Of course, no mother on earth likes it if her daughter goes to sea alone. I will have sleepless nights from the worry, but this is about Laura and how I can help her.

The conditions the court had given Laura included keeping up with schoolwork via the Internet, and completing classes in first-aid and survival. All these conditions were met, and in February of 2010, she and her father acquired a new boat. It was French, a two-masted ketch, which was again christened *Guppy*.

More than a year

Laura Dekker sailed from Den Osse, Holland, on August 4, 2010, and headed

for Portugal. This segment did not constitute part of the circumnavigation as Dick Dekker accompanied her, coaching her as well as testing the new boat with her. They arrived in Portugal on the 15th of August. She sailed out of a Portuguese port, with others on board, to Gibraltar because, according to Portuguese law, she was too young to be formally qualified to captain her ship. But she departed from Gibraltar on the 21st of August, 2010, on her own. More than a year later, on December 20, 2011, she reached the longitude of her unofficial starting point in the Netherlands. She had crossed all longitudes in the course of her circumnavigation, but faced another 4800 nautical miles for her official completion. Laura Dekker arrived in Simpson Bay on Sint Maarten a month later, on January 21, 2012, after a non-stop journey of some 5,600 nautical miles from Cape Town. Thus Laura Dekker completed her dream of being the youngest person to fully circumnavigate the world.

A shorter journey

Now on to Mary's accomplishment. Mary Jones was born on December 16, 1784, some two hundred plus years before Laura Dekker. She also completed a journey – a journey on foot – and a first of sorts.

Mary's parents, Jacob and Mary Jones, were poor but devout folk. Her father was a weaver and barely made ends meet in Llanfihangel y Pennant, Merionethshire, Wales. Mary learned how to work hard when she was still a very young girl. She helped her mother prepare meals, worked the family garden, and cared for siblings.

Poor as they were, Mary was sent to one of Thomas Charles' schools and learned how to read. Thomas Charles (1755-1814) was a Welsh Nonconformist Clergyman who was in the habit of gathering poor children into his house for instruction in reading and Christian principles. During his lifetime, he trained many teachers, and he formed many such schools in Wales, whose expenses were met by collections made in the Calvinistic Methodist Societies. As the funds increased, so did the schools. In 1794, when Mary was ten,

there were twenty such schools.

Mary heard the Word of God read to her, and she loved it. She embraced the truth of Scriptures in her small mind, and she announced when she was ten years old that she would have a Bible of her own.

“But you’ve no money,” her parents said, “and you can read the Bible if you walk to our neighbor’s house.”

“But that is two miles away,” the child answered, “and how shall I do that each day the rest of my life. And how can I read to you?”

So she set her mind on this thing – to own a Bible. And she laid out a course for herself. And she kept to the particular course she had set for herself and never wavered from it. It consisted of running errands for neighbors, selling extra eggs, and working at whatever her hand could find to earn an extra penny.

For six years Mary Jones worked. For six years she saved every penny she could find. And when she was sixteen years old, she had finally saved enough for a Bible.

“And now I will walk to Bala, to the house of Charles Thomas, he who began the schools,” she said to her parents.

And her parents let her go, even though they were worried that walking so far, for it was twenty-five miles, would be difficult and hard on their daughter, as well as on the only pair of shoes that she owned. So for most of the journey, to save her shoes, Mary walked barefoot. At Bala, she knocked on the door of a preacher, a Dafydd Edwards, and he graciously permitted her to stay overnight when he heard what her errand was.

The next morning, Dafydd Edwards accompanied her to the house of Charles Thomas. But imagine how great her disappointment was when Mary found out that Charles Thomas had no Bible in his house to give her. Indeed, he did have one copy, but it was spoken for by someone else. Yet when he heard her story, of how she had saved and saved these past six years for a copy of the Holy Scriptures, and how she had walked twenty-five miles to obtain it, he walked over to the cupboard and gave her the Bible.

“You can have it, lass,” he said kindly, “and I shall get another later for the one this copy was promised to.”

Mary smiled and thanked him and then began her long journey home again. And it is not hard to surmise how happy her parents were to see her again, and how glad they would have been that she had been able to meet her goal – the goal of serving her Lord through the acquisition of a Bible for their household so that she might read of Him each day and tell others of His great love.

(Rev. Charles Thomas was so moved

by Mary’s hunger for a Bible that he proposed to the Council of the Religious Tract Society that it form a society to provide Bibles in Wales. Consequently, in 1804, the British and Foreign Bible Society was born.)

Perhaps the trip that Mary undertook, a mere fifty miles, does not at all equal the length of nautical miles traveled by Laura Dekker. But oh, the difference between earthly dreams and heavenly goals.



Mary Jones, saving some wear and tear on her shoes

Infanticide again

Two “ethicists” argue for post-birth abortions

by Bill Muehlenberg

When academics call for baby killing, you know we have reached the outer limits of the moral atmosphere. Our mighty intellects, who are supposed to be training the next generation both mentally and morally, are often instead doing a great disservice.

To be well educated is certainly no guarantee of general intelligence or wisdom. To have a string of letters after one’s name is obviously not a sign of high moral acumen. Tragically we often have some of the most morally deficient and intellectually lackluster positions being argued for by our academics.

And when these people try to make a learned case for baby killing, we have proof that all is not well in academia. Today’s press presents us with yet another frightening example of this. Two more Melbourne-based academics are enlightening us on the case for infanticide. More on this in a moment.

But sadly this has been occurring for some time now. One of these profs is from Monash University here in Melbourne, Australia. We, of course, have had other advocates of baby killing from Monash, most notably Peter Singer. He is now at Princeton University in the US, but he began his notorious career here in Melbourne. Singer is a long-standing advocate of not only abortion and euthanasia, but infanticide as well. He believes the newborn must not automatically be considered to be persons, and they must be tested to see who should live and who should die. But enough on him.

Here we have two more “ethicists”

telling us that the newborn are not persons, and are therefore fair game for killing. One article introduces things this way:

Two ethicists working with Australian universities argue in the latest online edition of the *Journal of Medical Ethics* that if abortion of a fetus is allowable, so, too, should be the termination of a newborn.

Alberto Giubilini with Monash University in Melbourne and Francesca Minerva at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne write that in “circumstances occur[ring] after birth such that they would have justified abortion, what we call after-birth abortion should be permissible.”

History repeats itself

Yes, we have heard all this before. Not only by academics like Singer, but earlier experts and academics said similar things. A major element leading up to the “Final Solution” in Germany was the notion that some people – indeed whole classes of people – are not persons.

Decades prior to the Holocaust there were many academic positions and pronouncements which prepared the way for what Hitler and the Nazis did. For example, in 1895 the German legal scholar Alfred Jost wrote an influential volume, *The Right to Die*. And in 1904 the German Society for Racial Hygiene was formed. Of special importance was the publication in 1920 of Alfred Hoche

and Karl Binding’s *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung Lebensunwerten Lebens* (The Authorization of the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life). Here was promoted the concept of “lives not worth living.” The book spoke of the “incurable feeble-minded” who should be killed. It all led nicely to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* in 1926.

State-sponsored euthanasia was called for, with the idea that many humans had to be excluded from those deserving the right to life. Other writings appeared, with much discussion especially in the German medical community. All this helped pave the way for the Nazi programs when they came to power in the early 1930s.

As Henry Friedlander says in the opening of his important book, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide*:

Nazi genocide did not take place in a vacuum. Genocide was only the most radical method of excluding groups of human beings from the German national community. The policy of exclusion followed and drew upon more than fifty years of scientific opposition to the equality of man.

3 flawed examples

But back to our two Melbourne academics. They state this in their defense of infanticide:

Merely being human is not in itself a reason for ascribing someone a right to life. Indeed, many humans are not considered subjects of a right to life: spare embryos where research on



Two ethicists have argued that there is no significant difference between the unborn and the newborn. Christians agree! But whereas we conclude from this that the unborn must be protected, the two ethicists are arguing that this means we can kill the newborn.

embryo stem cells is permitted, fetuses where abortion is permitted, criminals where capital punishment is legal.

The Nazi doctors would have been proud of such rhetoric. But anyone exercising some intellectual and moral clarity would see just how slippery such weasel words are. The authors do not establish what they are seeking to argue for: the non-personhood of certain humans. They simply assert it. That an argument does not make.

The case for the non-personhood of these classes of humans has not been made. They simply take a backward step in ethical reasoning: proceeding from what is to what they believe ought to be – from abortion to infanticide. They assume description should lead to prescription. They think that if we are already killing some human beings, then it must be morally acceptable.

They, of course, have things back to front here. We first should be examining the moral and ontological status of these groups. We should determine if they are, in fact, persons. And if they are, then of course killing them is quite wrong. It is not my intent here to argue that case. I and others have sought to do that elsewhere.

The fact that embryos are now being destroyed does not mean it is morally licit. That which is legal is not always moral.

As just noted, it was quite legal in Nazi Germany to kill all sorts of classes of human beings. But that legality did not mean it was therefore morally right.

The same is true of the unborn child. Simply declaring that such a human is a non-person is not based on science, it is a philosophical precommitment. In Singer's case it is utilitarianism and pragmatism. He has simply assumed ahead of time that certain groups are non-persons, and can therefore be bumped off at will.

And these two academics also have great misunderstandings about the nature of capital punishment. No one argues that those warranting the death penalty have somehow become non-persons. It is exactly because they are persons, and have committed heinous crimes against other persons (such as murder), that the state takes these issues so seriously.

So we have three cases appealed to by these ethicists, and none of them stand up under scrutiny.

Conclusion

So this is simply the same old story of some intellects and academics telling us that certain people are not persons, and therefore must forfeit the right to life. They have simply made a pronouncement based on their secular utilitarian worldview.

They have not established their case, and they have not proved in any sense of the term that the unborn and others are in fact non-persons. But by lending more intellectual and professional credibility to the case for baby killing, they make it seem all the more acceptable, and will undoubtedly sway many.

This is a great abuse of medical ethics and the academic community. Using the classroom and scholarly journals to make the case – coolly and calmly – for baby killing is not an indication of professionalism and progress. It is a sign of barbarism and regress. And we have seen it all happen before.

Have we not yet learned the lessons of history? Apparently not.

To learn more about the culture of death that existed in Germany before World War II (and to a lesser extent in other Western nations at that time) visit Regent University's online presentation "Useless Eaters" at Regent.edu/acad/schedu/uselesseaters. Bill Muehlenberg is an Australian columnist who blogs at BillMuehlenberg.com. This article is reprinted with his permission.



A close look at euthanasia

Thoughts on the documentary *How to Die in Oregon*

by Jonathon VanMaren

Generally, people don't like a story where all the main characters die. However, that is precisely the point of a new HBO documentary entitled *How to Die in Oregon*, which traces the lives — and deaths — of a number of people after the passage of Oregon's notorious 1994 assisted suicide, or "Die with Dignity" law.

Pressured to die

The documentary begins with the sad scene of a volunteer from an assisted suicide group called "Compassion and Choices" asking an old man surrounded by his family two questions: "You know you have the right to change your mind?"

and "Do you know what this medication will do to you?"

The man answers gruffly that he wants to die, and affirms that he knows he is choosing suicide. The scene closes morbidly as the man breathes his last.

This documentary is a perfect example of how those who reject biblical truth are selling their message to the next generation. "I'm very against religion telling me what to do," declares one man defiantly. And the message of "dying with dignity" is cleverly sold to viewers as it follows the lives of a number of elderly people and cancer victims, all asking for "medication" that will kill them, and saying things that, while intended to be comforting, should chill all of us:

- "I don't want to be a burden."
- "It's the decent thing to do. For once in my life I'll do something decent."
- "I just want to close my eyes and drift off..."

Emotion instead of truth

The film is eminently visceral, and incurs powerful emotions. It follows the journey of one likable, dignified woman with cancer as she tells her children and husband that when she loses certain functions, she wants to take poison to end her own life. As the documentary records her grief, the grief of her family, and the gut-wrenching pain she suffers from her

The world's error vs. God's truth

by Jon Dykstra

The world has two different views about life that seem contradictory.



Randy Stroup, as he appeared in the documentary

On the one hand there are people in the world who will do just about anything to prolong their life — they fearfully cling to it. Though they may be sick, weary, full of aches and pains, they are desperate to put off death for another year, another month... another day.

And then there are those who believe their lives simply aren't worth living. Life is something to be disposed of, much like the trash.

Two seemingly contradictory views, but what they share in common is that they both oppose God's Truth. Life is a gift from God, and is therefore precious and should be treated that way. It is to be treasured, not thrown away. But it is also not something we should cling to in desperation. Christians know that, because of what Christ has done, we need not fear death. Or, in other words, life is a gift to be treasured, but not worshipped.



cancer, you begin to feel empathy. Her suffering tore at my guts while I watched. You slowly begin to understand why she's making the decision to die.

That is because when we abandon any objective truth, then decisions become about how one feels, not about what is right. Compassion becomes not what is best for someone, but what will make them feel the best temporarily.

The documentary does not once address the fact that death is the gateway to an eternity. It does not acknowledge that we will not just "close our eyes and drift off," but, rather, we will face our Creator. It cites people talking about how they want ultimate control over their lives, without examining whether or not that control is really ours to take.

Why is life valuable?

Neither does it address more fundamental truths. Why is human life valuable in the first place? And what are the dangers, the "slippery slope" of assisted suicide?

When God is taken out of the picture we succumb to utilitarianism — the belief that life is valuable only when it is enjoyable. And then it can be argued that suicide in the face of suffering is the right answer. Of course, if God does exist, then life is valuable, not because of what we get out of it, but because of *Who* it is from — life is valuable because it is a gift from God. And then our desire for the "right" to choose our own time to die is just more evidence of our complete societal rejection of the sovereignty of God. This documentary tries to normalize death, ignoring the fact that death is inherently unnatural — a punishment for our original sin that should never be considered normal.

And while the secularists will immediately accuse me of a slippery slope argument, how can we not examine the implications of allowing the practice of medicine to extend to the gruesome business of ending lives? We have only to look at the Netherlands, where reports tell us many are euthanized without their consent, and the elderly often fear going to the hospital because doctors have become dispensers of death as well as life.

They cannot be sure that what the doctor is putting in their IV bag is medicine — because the word "medicine" has been mangled to include poison.

Poison is cheaper than medicine

Indeed, the documentary does admit the possibility of this, citing a man named Randy Stroup. Stroup was suffering from prostate cancer, and asked his health insurance provider to cover new chemotherapy treatments. Instead, he received a letter informing him that while his prognosis wasn't good enough to waste money on chemo, they would pay for "end of life treatment." Essentially, they quietly informed him that his life was no longer worth fighting for, and that if he wanted to die, they would pay for the poison.

When Stroup went public, the Oregon Health Board reversed its decision. However, this scenario is just a little preview of what is to come. With many reports citing the desertion of elderly parents and relatives in care homes by the younger generation, we should ask ourselves not just what a terminal cancer patient would do with a perverse law like this, but what impatient and greedy children might do as they see "their" inheritance slowly shrinking to pay for the care of their parents. When love waxes cold and human life is valueless, there may be many who will say in despair, "I don't want to be a burden" and actually believe that taking their own life is "the decent thing to do."

For Canadian readers, take note. The documentary also interviews a woman named Nancy Niedzielski, who helped crusade for the legalization of assisted suicide in Washington State. On her way to an interview with a Canadian radio station, she comments: "Evidently this is a hot topic in Canada."

Take up the fight

And so it is. We must remain vigilant against the further eroding of our Christian heritage and further attacks on the value of human life, created in God's image. When you receive requests for assistance by those who seek to combat euthanasia and other attacks on human life, please

TURNING THE TIDE Dignity, Compassion And Euthanasia

29 min; 2007

reviewed by Jon Dykstra

Turning the Tide is an effective counter to *How to Die in Oregon*. The strength of the documentary lies in the expertise assembled on camera: pro-life advocate Wesley Smith; Bobby Schindler, the brother of Terri Schiavo; Canadian Senator Sharon Carstairs, who headed a Senate committee on euthanasia; Alex Schadenberg, the head of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition; and from our own Canadian Reformed circles, Adrian Dieleman. They make it clear what a slippery slope we are on, and outline a series of solid, compelling arguments against assisted suicide.



The film does have a glaring weakness: it hardly even mentions the spiritual dimension, shuffling it off to a small five-minute segment in the bonus features section of the DVD. Because they hardly dare mention God's name, the film ultimately isn't able to explain why the life of every person — disabled, elderly, depressed, or otherwise — is precious. We are, all of us, made in God's image.

However, it is an eye-opening documentary and, for its short length, an extensive look at this deadly quest. It should be mandatory viewing in our Christian schools. The DVD comes with a discussion guide, and can be purchased from visionvideo.com.



respond. The churches are the conscience of the nation. If those consciences fall silent, what can we expect? Look to the Netherlands, and say, "Not here. Not in Canada."

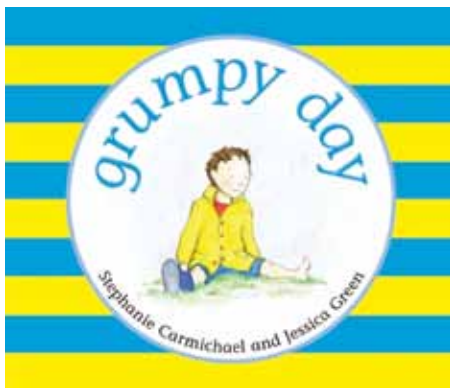
Here, we can still fight.



BEST BOOKS: For children and parents *reviewed by Jon Dyksta*

These three picture books are by the team of Stephanie Carmichael and Jessica Green, and are wonderful for the way they demonstrate how parents can “easily and naturally talk about God with [our] children throughout the day.” In that way the books are as much for parents as they are for our kids - mum and dad in these stories serve as examples to us on how we can seize on the many little opportunities that pop up throughout the day to show our little ones the wonders God has wrought.

The publisher, Matthias Media, has made all three of these books available, in their entirety, online at: Matthiasmedia.com/growth/childrens-curriculum. (There you will find a fourth book in the series, called *The Birthday Party*, which is not recommended because the lesson the book teaches — that God loves everyone — is not true. See Psalm 5:5; Lev. 20:23; Prov. 6:16-19; and Hos. 9:15).



Grumpy Day

24 pages, Softcover, 2011

On a rainy day the family is stuck inside, and the kids are grumpy - Emily can't get her dolls to sit upright, and little Ben can't get his blocks to stack. But with a little help from mum, and a hug, too, these problems are overcome. Unfortunately, nothing mum can do will fix Luke's problem. He wants to kick his soccer ball, and you can't do that in the rain. Luke asks why God can't make it rain some *other* day. Mum explains that's something God can do, but that He might want it to keep raining today. They can tell God that they are grumpy about the rain, but “God is God, and He is in charge of the whole world [so] He knows what is best.” Luke and mum pray, and then they head to the kitchen for an orange, while the soccer ball sits “next to the back door, ready for when God decides to stop the rain.”

The Rag Doll

24 pages, Hardcover, 2010

Luke, Ben and Emily loved seeing their Auntie Sarah, because “Auntie Sarah loved seeing them.” And it didn't hurt that she had all sorts of toys at her house. Emily's favorite is an old rag doll called Polly. A few days after their visit to Auntie Sarah, Emily's mum surprises her with a rag doll of her own, which, of course, makes little Emily ecstatic. She names her doll Annabelle and thinks her Mum is quite clever for knowing how to make a rag doll. Mum points out that she is not as clever as God. “God made you. And he made you so that you can grow and laugh. You can do a lot more things than Annabelle can.” Emily realizes that not only did God make her, he made Mummy, too, and her little brother Ben! The story ends with Emily thanking God for making them all.



Over the Fence

24 pages, Hardcover, 2010

Luke loves to kick his soccer ball. But he doesn't have anyone to kick it around the yard with him: his sister Emily likes dolls, not soccer, and his little brother Ben is just too little. So when a new neighbor moves in, with a boy the same age as Luke, he is eager to find out if this boy likes soccer too. He is so eager he races to his dad to find out more. His dad is busy fixing the mower, and promises that they can go visit next door after he is done. But Luke wants to know now! If Dad doesn't know more about the boy, who does? Dad explains that the boy's parents do, and his old friends, and, of course, God, too, because God made this little boy. Just like he made Luke. A face-to-face meeting finally occurs, and Luke is happy to discover that, yes, the boy likes soccer too!

Jon Dykstra and his siblings blog on books at ReallyGoodReads.com

The end of embryonic stem cell research?

We're seeing some encouraging setbacks in this field

by Margaret Helder

It has been thirteen eventful years since James Thomson of Wisconsin ushered in the era of “regenerative medicine,” but this does not mean that regenerative medicine has become a reality. It hasn't. However, many scientists have great hopes that their research efforts may some day come to fruition.

The term “regenerative medicine” applies to the idea that doctors will be able to treat people who suffer from defective cells or diseased organs, with healthy cells or with healthy human tissues grown in culture. It was the starting source for such cultures that Dr. Thomson successfully discovered. Armed with the knowledge that a human fertilized egg has the capacity to develop into all the different cell types and organs of our bodies, Dr. Thomson and others began to investigate how they could harness this potential.

What he did was to allow human fertilized eggs to grow and develop into five-day-old embryos with about 100 cells. He then cut out a layer of cells inside this developing embryo. These are the stem cells which have the capacity to develop into any of the cells of the body, and he then discarded the rest of the embryo's cells – the developing child has been destroyed.

The stem cells are then maintained in continuous culture. Some of these cells are later used for various experiments. The objective is to find what conditions affect the development of these cells into more specific (differentiated) cell types.

Stem cells can divide indefinitely but differentiated adult type cells cannot.

In search of clinical application

Dr. Thomson's discovery was hailed as a great achievement by many in the scientific and medical communities. Almost overnight it transformed medical research. But not everybody was happy about these developments – Christians, and others who value human life, were horrified at this wholesale destruction of human individuals (the embryos, though small and less developed, are no less human than bigger, older people).

Dr. Thomson and other likeminded researchers were well aware of the ethical implications of experimentation done with stem cells from human embryos. James Thomson, in fact, made sure that no right-to-life pressure could be exerted against his research. In 1995, three years before his successful achievement, he established himself in an off-campus laboratory. He had been based at the University of Wisconsin, but now he relocated to a building owned by the non-profit University of Wisconsin alumni foundation. The move meant federal restrictions against research on human embryos did not apply to him because he was not operating in a government facility. Also, no pressure could be applied to the University of Wisconsin to cut off general funding or research monies, since Dr. Thomson was not officially connected

to the university. Obviously he had made his plans carefully.

Funding for Dr. Thomson's research also came from private sources. A major supporter was Geron Corporation of Menlo Park, California.

This biotechnology company had been founded in 1990. Typical of the optimistic go-getter spirit in biotechnology of this time, Geron funded both John Gearhart of John Hopkins University (seeking stem cell cultures from aborted babies) and James Thomson working on embryonic stem cells. In return for the financial support, Geron was to receive commercial rights to successful applications. Geron thus was the pioneer company in this work, and it quickly built up an extensive portfolio of intellectual property rights based on patents. The race was on to find commercial applications for this work. The term “regenerative medicine” was coined, and medical research laboratories around the world began to seek ways to use stem cells in the treatment of disease. Naturally Geron was in the forefront of this effort.

Pressured to pay for it

Soon there was pressure on the federal government in the United States to fund this research. In 2001 James Thomson was the lead plaintiff in a court case *Thomson vs. Thompson*, seeking to force the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund stem cell research. Later

that year President Bush, in response to considerable political pressure, reluctantly agreed that federal money (from the NIH) could fund work on some stem cell lines which had already been created...but the federal government would not support the destruction of any further embryos.

The pressure to fund this research came especially from people with diabetes, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injuries, heart disease, degenerative eye diseases and other conditions. In short, there were a lot of people hoping for a rapid cure. In fact, support for funding this research crossed party lines, coming from both Republicans and Democrats.

It was soon discovered that the work was difficult as well as expensive. Geron, in particular, "burned through money" in its pursuit of a commercial success story.

In April 2008, almost ten years after James Thomson's discovery, many stakeholders met in Maryland for the US Food and Drug Administration's first public hearing on the safety of therapies based on human embryonic stem cell cultures. The problem is that stem cells are able to divide indefinitely. In the wrong place in the body or at the wrong time, this would be defined as cancer.

The question arises as to how effective the attempts are to turn stem cells into specific cell types such as nerve cell precursors. If the differentiation is not 100% effective, can researchers identify and eliminate such stem cells? How many partially differentiated cells in a treatment would be acceptable? This obviously is a very important concern. The question arises as to how much risk is justified in treating patients. If they can live indefinitely with a condition, is it ethical to subject them to a treatment which might result in cancer? Assurances were sought that any embryonic stem-cell-derived cell products were optimized for function and safety.

The next month, in May 2008, Geron submitted a 21,000-page document in support of its application to conduct the

first clinical trial on people. Geron had found that nerve cell precursors were relatively easy to drive from embryonic stem cell cultures. In addition, some dramatic results with animal studies had impressed investors. The proposal then was to inject about 2 million differentiated nerve-cell precursors into patients who had recently suffered spinal cord injuries. The cells would be injected into the spinal cord at the site of the injury. However, the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) turned down Geron's application.

In January 2009, three days after the

inauguration of President Obama, the FDA approved Geron's application for its first clinical trial. It seemed to be "all systems go" until the FDA put the clinical trial on hold again in August of that year. Finally in October 2010, Geron began their clinical trial. The first dose was given to four patients, out of eight expected to participate.

There was another player in the clinical trials race as well. Advanced Cell Technology of Santa Monica, California, applied in November 2009 for approval



THIS ARTICLE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE LETTER G:
Geron Corporation and Greenpeace are, together, largely responsible for the drop in embryonic stem cell research.

to treat vision loss in 12 young patients with childhood Stargardt's macular degeneration. A year later this company received approval for phase I/II trials. Then in January 2011, the FDA issued permission to this company to treat patients with age-related macular degeneration as well. In July of 2011, Applied Cell Technology began their clinical trials, nine months after the start of Geron's trial.

An abrupt end

While Geron has long been considered the undisputed leader in stem cell therapies, in large part thanks to its patents on techniques used to grow and manipulate embryonic stem cells, there have recently been signs that all was not well. In February of 2011 long term CEO Tom Okarma resigned. Geron began to seek additional investors to support their stem cell work, but none was forthcoming. Then suddenly on November 14, 2011, Geron announced that it was abandoning work with embryonic stem cells altogether. The final four patients in the clinical trial that was underway would not be treated. Sixty-six people, most with very specialized training, would lose their jobs. In the future Geron would concentrate on two cancer treatment drugs which show more potential for profit than the stem cell work did.

Reaction to the Geron announcement came quickly. Geron shares plunged in value overnight. Some people wondered what Geron had observed in the four patients involved in the clinical trial. Was there merely no effect, or something worse? Geron may have been expecting some signs of improvement in the patients although this was not part of the stated expectations from the trial. Some critics declared that the Geron announcement signaled "a symbolic end to the era of embryonic stem cell research that many researchers worked so hard to launch" (abnews.go.com Nov. 17/11). Others suggested that this might be the end of American superiority in biotechnology. Yet others took a more philosophical view, pointing out that there are others in the field.

The journal *Nature* pointed out that the

Geron announcement closely followed a landmark ruling that products and processes involving human embryonic stem cells are not patentable in Europe (Nov. 24/11, p. 459). This was the other blow to embryonic stem cell research which could have worldwide fallout.

Greenpeace to the rescue?

In 1999 Oliver Brustle of Germany received a patent on the derivation of nerve cell precursors from embryonic stem cells. His initial work involved rats and mice, but his patent claimed to apply to humans as well. Germany's embryo protection act of 1990 forbade research on human embryos, but said nothing about cultures derived some time ago from human embryos. Scientists rationalized that government money could support work on established cell cultures, while private money could support the actual destruction of human embryos to produce new stem cell lines. We see the same attitude towards this research in the United States, especially in judicial circles

Greenpeace, for reasons I find hard to follow, challenged Brustle's patent on ethical grounds in 2004. In 2006 the Federal Patent Court in Munich decided in favor of Greenpeace, but Dr. Brustle was sure that he could overturn this on appeal. He took his case to Germany's Supreme Court. In November 2009, this court seemed to side with Dr. Brustle. However, this court referred the case to the European Court of Justice to clarify some ambiguous points of law. Everyone believed that Dr. Brustle had won.

Then in March 2011 Judge Yves Bot of the European Court delivered a preliminary opinion in favor of Greenpeace. The case would now go to the European Court of Justice Grand Chamber to be decided by 13 justices. No further appeals are possible after the Grand Chamber verdict.

On October 18, 2011, the Grand Chamber found in favor of Greenpeace. Not only that, but the justices actually went much further than the preliminary opinion had. The court defined a human embryo in the broadest possible way when it said that a human embryo is made up of a human egg activated to

divide by fertilization or other artificial means. Thus any work with human eggs comes under this definition. In addition, the judgment declared that any research involving human embryonic stem cells is immoral because such cells are originally derived from fertilized eggs. The court therefore declared that even procedures that indirectly involve the destruction of any embryo are immoral and cannot be patented!

Many scientists were astounded by the ruling. Without patent protection, they said, who would want to work in this field? Money is such an important objective. Furthermore, since the highest court declared not only that patents are against the law, but also that all such research is immoral, some are questioning whether government funds should support such research. On November 23, 2011, the European Parliament's official cross-party working group on bioethics urged that financial support be denied to embryonic stem cell related research on the grounds that such work can now be legally challenged.

Conclusion

Thus as the year 2011 closed, the field of regenerative medicine suffered some serious setbacks. In the United States the courts have consistently supported government funding for research involving embryonic stem cells. Still researchers there are worried, too, because it is hard to predict when the legal climate might change. In Europe, the courts very unexpectedly ruled in favor of an extremely conservative position.

And Christians could not be happier! Such a ruling, as well as the lack of progress in this field, means that funding for research is harder and harder to come by. The sight of the leading company in the field jumping ship may be a sign of things to come. Is this a signal to others to abandon an unprofitable pursuit? Whether the motivation to abandon such research is economic or ethical, we Christians will certainly applaud this trend. The destruction of human lives is too high a price to pay for advances in medical science.





SOUP & BUNS

Easy cooking

by Sharon L. Bratcher

"I'm still trying to figure out this whole wife-thing."

I smiled as this three-week newlywed and I talked about meal preparation. It is now her task to plan and deliver meals for her seminarian husband, and it'll take a little while to get used to it.

I remember the joy of "finally" having my own kitchen. Everything was shiny and new, including the marriage. We were learning to mesh our lives together and narrow them onto one path. Some of our early assumptions included food. When I returned from food shopping, my new husband asked incredulously, "Why would you buy Skippy peanut butter?" Well, how was I to know that my family was Skippy but his was Jif?

Time-saving tips

I enjoyed planning our meals to suit both of us. Because I worked full time, I discovered a few time-saving measures that first year, and later on added more when I was home all day with young children. Here are some of the best ones.

Always, always cook enough for several meals. This way you have less messy cleanup and less prep time. It's not called leftovers, it's called wise planning. Cooked meat and poultry and most starches keep for 3-4 days in plastic bags or containers in the refrigerator and longer in the freezer.

Chicken - Bake a cookie sheet full of seasoned boneless chicken breasts or chicken leg quarters if you are home. Otherwise, just drop a frozen chicken, all by itself (really!) into a crock pot and come back 4-8 hours (high or low) later to savory cooked poultry. Prepare ahead by removing the innards when it's purchased,

and re-wrapping it to freeze. Use the meat for chicken cacciatore (spaghetti sauce and rice); chicken salad (mayonnaise and chopped celery); chicken stew (cream of chicken soup, steamed carrots, potatoes, celery and onions); sweet 'n sour chicken (store-bought sauce and rice) or chicken divan (white sauce, broccoli and toast.)

Beef - Chuck roast can also be dropped in the crock pot with a bit of salt. Turn it on – that's it.

Are you caring for children or grading papers? Bake your hamburgers in the oven for about 15 minutes instead of tending their frying. You might also brown several pounds of hamburger at a time, and use it for spaghetti, shepherd's pie, Impossible Cheeseburger Pie, Sloppy Joes or chili.

Starches - Potatoes are very tasty cooked in a dry crock pot for 4-8 hours, possibly overnight. Serve as is with butter and veggies, or slice and fry/bake/microwave, or shred and fry with oil on medium high heat for hash browns.

Planned-over rice (remember, these aren't leftovers) can be rejuvenated when heated with a little water or mixed into a casserole. Pasta will taste like it's fresh if you boil water and pour it over the refrigerated pasta and let it sit for 1-2 minutes. There's no limit to the hot or cold combinations you can make quickly with any of these!

Biscuits - Stir together homemade or Bisquick mixture and drop the biscuits onto a cookie sheet, avoiding the rolling. Use powdered milk in them to save money and time, and add nutrition by putting in extra. These fill out a meal or provide an awesome breakfast inexpensively and

quickly.

Casseroles - I call mine "Leftover Surprise." Take any meat(s), any starch(es), any cooked veggies, and mix them together with any can of creamed soup. Top with shredded cheese or spaghetti sauce, and it'll look and taste like someone else's creation in a cookbook.

Don't let cooking get in the way

Two valuable tips for a crowd: serving grapes and watermelon wedges takes a lot less prep time than fruit salad; and serving a large amount of a few items takes less time and effort than serving multiple items.

There are times for being a chef and cooking something special, trying a new recipe, or concocting something that takes hours of preparation. There are also times when you might work together and enjoy camaraderie with other women (or men!) in the kitchen. But sometimes the other obligations of life keep you very busy. At those times, when you plan your menu, consider the amount of chopping, stirring, adding, tending, and standing up that will be required. Then choose items that are tasty, but simple to make.

As a friend and I discussed big family dinners, she said, "I rarely get to play with the grandchildren because I'm always so busy in the kitchen, even with my kids helping me."

My response to this disappointed friend was, "It doesn't have to be that way."

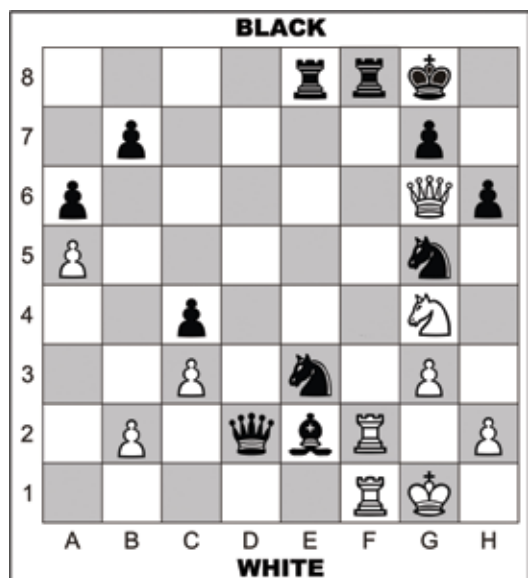
Whatever your situation, thoughtful planning and simple choices can provide delicious nutritious food without overwhelming you or separating you from all of the fun.



ENTICING ENIGMAS AND CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

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

Chess Puzzle # 186



WHITE to Mate in 3 or, If it is BLACK's move, BLACK to Mate in 3

NEW PUZZLES

Riddle for Punsters #186 – "Rise and Shine, Off to School!"

When Cynthia arrived at school each day, she looked forward to being en _____ ened by her teachers. She was a br _____ student and all her teachers said that she was a real de _____ to have in class. She was a hard worker but did not mind having a _____ homework assignment on occasion.

Problem to Ponder #186 – "Going overBoard, but what else Coin he do?"

Cynthia's little brother, Joseph, loved to collect coins and play chess. One day he decided to put one penny on the corner square of his chessboard, then 11 pennies on the next, 21 on the next, and so on. How many pennies would be on the tenth square? How many would be on the last (64th) square? How many pennies would there be in total on the chessboard? What would their total value be in dollars and cents? What would the total value be if Joseph used loonies instead of pennies?

SOLUTIONS TO THE FEBRUARY PUZZLE PAGE

Answers to Riddles for Punsters #185 – "Plentiful Pre-nuptial Planning"

When Jasmine became engaged, she needed to find out which stores she should go to look for a suitable wedding gown, so she asked her sister to **ad dress** the problem. She needed to know who to invite to the wedding, so she **en list** ed her mother's help. She needed to decide which dainties to serve at the reception, so Jasmine asked her food-knowledgeable cousin to give a **hand** choosing some finger foods.

Answers to Problem to Ponder #185 – "Aquarium Arithmetic"

On Tuesday Stephanie had ten more goldfish than Betty who had five fewer fish than Gregory. On Wednesday each of them bought two more fish. Betty now has half as many goldfish as Gregory while Stephanie has three times as many goldfish as Betty and there are now a total of thirty goldfish. How many goldfish did each person have on Tuesday?

Let B be the number of goldfish Betty had on Tuesday, so Stephanie had B+10 and Gregory had B+5. Therefore, on Wednesday B+2 = 1/2(B+5 +2). Multiplying both sides by 2, 2B+4 = B+7. Subtracting B and 4 from both sides results in B=3. Thus, S=B+10=3+10=13 and G=B+5=3+5=8. **Therefore, on Tuesday Betty had 3 goldfish, Stephanie 13 and Gregory 8.**

[Check: On Wednesday Stephanie has 13+2 which is indeed three times as many as Betty's 3+2, and those 15 + 5 fish, combined with Gregory's 8+2, do indeed total 30 goldfish.]

SOLUTION TO CHESS PUZZLE # 185

WHITE to Mate in 2

Descriptive Notation

1. B-K6 ch K-R5
2. N-B3 mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Ba2-e6 + Kg4-h4
2. Nd2-f3 ++

BLACK to Mate in 2

Descriptive Notation

1. ----- B-Q6 ch
2. K-N1 R-B8 ch
3. N-B1 RxN ch
4. K-N2 R-R7 mate

OR

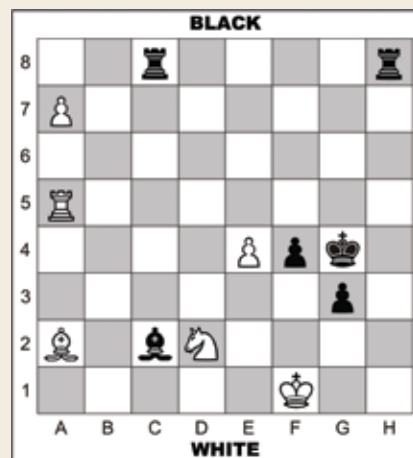
1. ----- B-Q6 ch
2. K-N2 BxP ch
3. NxB P-B6 ch
4. K-N1 R-B8 mate

Algebraic Notation

1. ----- Bc2-d3 +
2. Kf1-g1 Rc8-c1 +
3. Nd2-f1 Rc1xf1 +
4. Kg1-g2 Rh8-h2 ++

OR

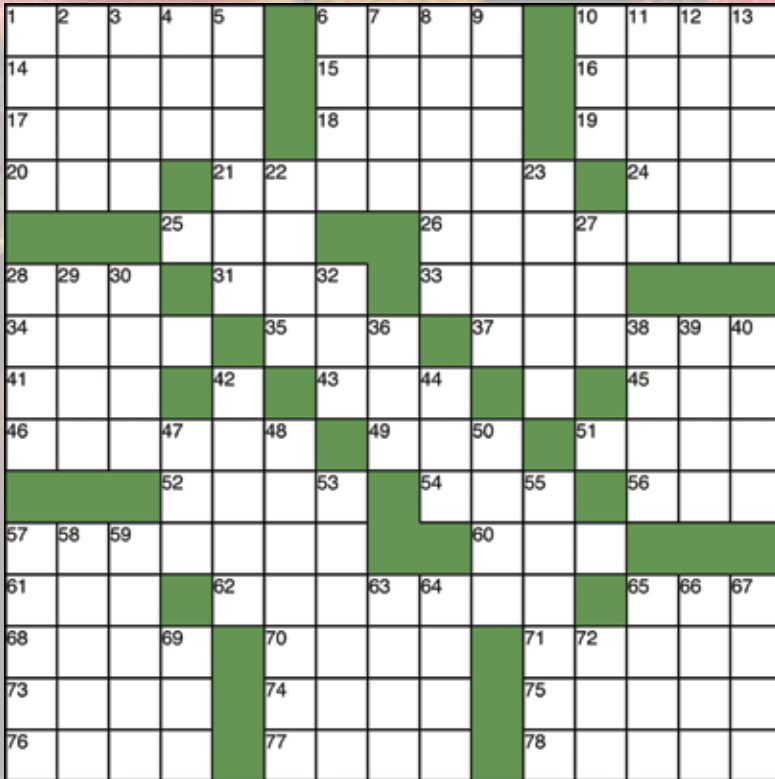
1. ----- Bc2-d3 +
2. Kf1-g2 Bd3xe4 +
3. Nd2xe4 f4-f3 +
4. Kg2-g1 Rc8-c1 ++



Crossword Puzzle

Series 19 No 1

Last Month's solution
Series 18 No 11



ACROSS:

1. Kind of neck adornment
6. Stare at
10. Author of new devotional "En Route"
14. One who travels on snow
15. A blessing
16. Lady's name
17. Kind of lab dish
18. In a second, for short
19. Sign of fatigue
20. Two; Aussie slang
21. Type of chocolate
24. Moved very fast in a race
25. Not old
26. Ontario river with large falls
28. Doctor of optometry
31. Ready to go
33. "Having a tongue", languages (comb. form)
34. Crossword direction
35. Spring runner
37. Feels sharp, stinging pains
41. Egg (comb. form)
43. Kitten sound
45. Metal bearing mineral

DOWN:

46. Entertain lavishly
49. In a liquid form
51. Computer consumer
52. Talk deliriously
54. Arid
56. Look at something
57. Resident of 49th state
60. Gas (comb. form)
61. Again, musically speaking
62. Regards highly
65. Beatrice, to her pals
68. Direction
70. Retirement savings accounts (abbr.)
71. This broke the camel's back
73. Large plant
74. French color
75. Delete on a computer
76. Fast jets
77. Irish Gaelic
78. Locations

DOWN:

1. Snakes
2. Depict unfairly
3. Place of inhabitants
4. Over, poetically speaking
5. Local Aboriginal peoples
6. Ishmaelite keeper of camels in David's time (1 Chr. 27)
7. Shallow bell
8. Not winning
9. Imposes as a burden
10. Pig pen
11. Fancy headdress
12. Third president of Egypt, to his friends
13. Food from heaven
22. Female ruminants
23. Ruth's mother-in-law
27. Ontario area around Toronto, briefly
28. Smell
29. Peaceful bird
30. Drink greedily
32. Hat
36. Church seat
38. Flower

DOWN:

39. Playing card
40. Dry
42. Satisfy thirst
44. Day of the week, briefly
47. Letters of the alphabet
48. Action intended to avoid
50. British streetcar
53. To enter, in Paris
55. Affirmative answers
57. Aids a criminal
58. Deceitful people
59. Useful thing
63. Corn parts
64. Italian city, medieval fortress
65. Unpleasant child
66. Comfort
67. Overwhelms with admiration
69. Your, in France
72. Three (comb. form)

Joyce