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AI bursts in

HOW ARE WE USING TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM?



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A MAGAZINE FOR THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

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Be Fruitful and Multiply

Reformed Perspective's Mini-Tour comes to Alberta

APRIL 19-22

Families are having fewer babies and the world's population is expected to peak and then decline later this century. The world isn't prepared for the impact this is going to have.

What may be the greatest challenge of this century can also be a huge opportunity for the Church to shine. But that takes a willingness to have children, and to raise them faithfully.

In these presentations, Reformed Perspective's Mark Penninga will unpack data, history, and God's Word to make the case for embracing the gift of children with open arms.

WHO?

Ages 16-116, single or married, children or no children,
these presentations are suitable for all mature Christians.

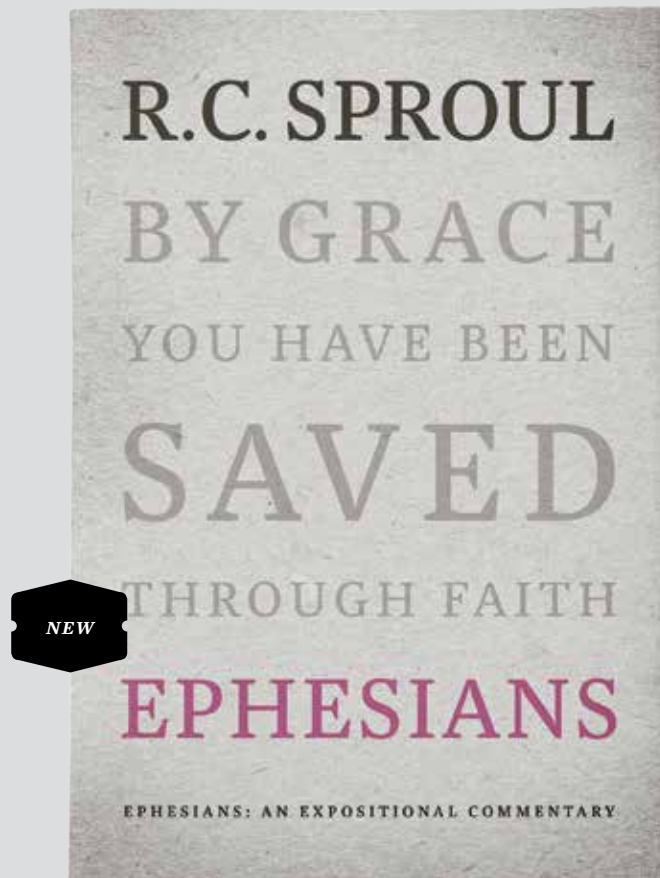
WHEN AND WHERE?

Edmonton: April 19 at 7:30 pm
Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church

Barhead: April 20 at 7:30 pm
Emmanuel United Reformed Church

Ponoka: April 22 at 7:30 pm
Parkland Reformed Church





TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE

The book of Ephesians is cherished for its doctrinal depths and devotional beauty. As we read the prayers and doxologies woven through its verses, we see how the grace of God stirs us to lives of worship and gratitude. In *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*, Dr. R.C. Sproul delves into the rich teaching, praises, and exhortations contained in one of his favorite books of the Bible. Take up this new verse-by-verse guide to gain greater insights into the grace of the gospel and the glory of the Lord in the redemption of His people. **Available now.**

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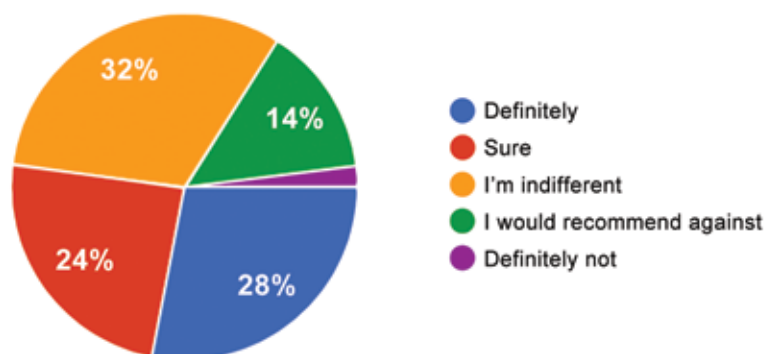
READERS' RESPONSE

YOU SPOKE: Print and Pod vs. Social Media

In the editorial in the last issue, we questioned the value of *RP*'s presence on social media and also made the case for investing more time and effort in our print publication and our podcasts. We also asked for your thoughts. Over 50 people responded by using the QR code to connect to an online form. Thank you so much!

This is what respondents had to say:

WOULD YOU ADVISE THAT RP KEEP PUBLISHING ON SOCIAL MEDIA?



IF YOU THINK WE *SHOULD* CONTINUE TO PUBLISH ON SOCIAL MEDIA, WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR THIS?

- "I look forward to working through your Saturday Facebook post throughout the week. It saves paper lying around too, as I can read the magazine online. Even the YouTube link for the podcast I get through Facebook."
- "It's a stopping point on social media and balances other media sources."
- "I think many youth receive much of their content on social media... it's accessible at any time, and can be retrieved anywhere... this has benefits for school, youth discussion groups, etc."
- "Most of what I read besides books, is digital. I prefer the social media feed because it allows me to read anywhere at any time. Social media also allows me to freely share what I read with others."
- "Outreach for believers and unbelievers."
- "Covers a larger demographic [and] maybe whets their appetite to read *Reformed Perspective*."
- "Social media is a tool, it can be used well but can also be abused. This is the case for many things in our life, even food, and requires self-control... Rather than social media making you feel "alone in a scary world," I've actually experienced benefits from "strangers" sharing about their mental health experiences. ... Social media will remain a crucial way to connect with young people and I think it's really important we keep putting good content out there."

IF YOU THINK WE SHOULD NOT CONTINUE TO PUBLISH ON SOCIAL MEDIA, WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN REASONS FOR THIS?

- "I think on the average, too much time is spent on devices as it is. Accessing *RP* in print, also allows for less chance of distractions. I would think readers would be more likely to read through multiple articles in a printed copy."
- "It is much harder if not impossible to be led down rabbit holes and/or led astray and/or be distracted from the main point when holding a physical publication."
- "Having it in print, means I'm reading on the couch with a coffee. Having it on my phone means I'm reading it on the toilet or in time stolen from my kids."
- "As mentioned in the article it is very hard to get your post to the people that subscribed. It was going that way even before I dropped social media 3-4 years ago."
- "We are on our devices enough. It is good to have hard copies to look at and a presence on our coffee tables to spur on discussions."
- "It facilitates discussion of profound and significant issues."
- "Social media lends itself increasingly towards short form content, so captions aren't being read by the average user. Not being connected for the past few years on social media I don't have knowledge of what *RP* posts. That said, it could be a good use to post things akin to Jason Bouwman's "Just Thinking" series (ie. more prompts to pique interest, but not big enough that you lose the intended message due to the limitations of the site)."

PLEASE SHARE ANY OTHER INSIGHTS YOU HAVE ABOUT WHETHER AND HOW RP SHOULD USE SOCIAL MEDIA MOVING FORWARD:

- "I live in South Africa and subscribe to your RoundUp email (ReformedPerspective.ca/RoundUp). I look forward to receiving it every Saturday. Print isn't an option for me as the postal system in South Africa is non-functional. Besides, I really enjoy the fact that I can read two or three *Reformed Perspective* articles per week and the Saturday Selections from other sources."
- "I love having both! I listen to *Real Talk* when I'm working or driving, and read the magazine when I'm relaxing!! A hybrid!"
- "I left social media without regret several years ago and use the *RP* app quite frequently (an option for those who still like to scroll)."
- "For Instagram or Facebook, I don't think you need to worry about the shorter length these are limited to. You can and do provide bite-sized pieces, graphics and videos which still encourage deeper reflection. Or in some cases it reminds me of what I read in the magazine, 'oh yeah, I was going to look into that book.'"
- "I really enjoy *RP*. It is part of my (retired) morning routine to open my tablet, read the devotional. Then click on recent articles. I like *Real Talk* but because they're so long, it takes some effort."
- "A lot of my social media "friends" are seekers or new Christians. If one reads a Christian post it may open the door for more discussion."
- "I have appreciated the weekly newsletter being emailed out and think that is a much better way to reach your digital readers and direct them to your website. I do also like the QR code survey. Keep that going."
- "Unlike the idea of focusing on your printed materials and podcast I think your most recent Guest Editorial was a wake up call for me. I confess to spending too much time scrolling through news articles like *National Post* and a lot less time on life-giving good news. Thanks."
- "I follow you on Instagram and probably Facebook but I rarely if ever click through to read an article, because when I'm in the "scrolling zone" I don't have the attention span for reading a full article. Social media are definitely designed to keep that attention span low, and if you can't keep up, you won't do well (in terms of the algorithm, getting views, interaction, having your posts recommended to others). It's exhausting to even think about! I do think there is absolutely value in posting articles on your website, making them easily shareable to friends and family, and sending out the Saturday email list."
- "At my company we have the same "issue." We don't get leads or new clients through social media but people do search to see if you have a presence to understand the professionalism in the company."

by Mark Penninga

The challenge of keeping technology in its proper place



I grew up in a home without a TV. But we did have a Commodore 64, a primitive computer (pre-Windows) that we used almost exclusively for games like Test Drive, Pac Man, and Ghost Busters. My smarter and older brothers were quick to figure out that if we added an antenna, the computer monitor could also be used as a TV. Before long, we were watching *Hockey Night in Canada* on Saturday evenings. And then we were also

hooked on some of the shows that came right after the hockey game, like *Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman*. We never watched all that much TV but somehow, without any big decisions being made by my parents, the home without a TV had become a home with a TV.

Similarly, I have been intentional about not getting onto social media. I have never signed up for a personal Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account. But in the past 24 hours I have

used Marketplace (a product of Facebook) to search for used bricks, Etsy to purchase plans to build a greenhouse, YouTube to figure out why our toilet isn't working properly, Church Social to prepare for a care group gathering this weekend, and Spotify to listen to music while driving. And that doesn't include the swath of online tools I use for work daily, like Google Suite, Slack, and Zoom. So, in spite of the line I drew to not get onto social media, by using all of

I highly recommend you pick up a copy of Crouch's book

these digital tools I've somehow signed up anyways.

A PARADIGM SHIFT

How do we move forward in a world where screens and social media use is hardly an option, especially when they can also be so toxic? Similarly, what are we to think of new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI), which creep into our lives, whether we are aware of it or not?

In preparation for this issue of the magazine, which dives into how technology is being used in Reformed schools as well as understanding AI, I went to the most prolific reader I know, RP's Editor Jon Dykstra, asking him what is the best book I can read on the subject. He pointed me to *The Tech-Wise Family*, by Andy Crouch.

I wasn't disappointed.

Crouch brought practical and biblical clarity to these questions and more. But his book did more than that. It gave me a paradigm shift for how I was looking at the whole topic of technology in our lives.

ALLOWABLE MAY NOT BE HELPFUL (1 COR. 6:12)

If we focus simply on whether something should be allowed, we often miss the point. It may have been possible to keep TV's out of the home before, but it is much more difficult to not allow screens today. Many Reformed churches which once discouraged TV's now welcome screens in church and at home as gifts from the Lord.

Andy Crouch offers a more helpful approach – *putting technology in its proper place* so that the things that should be our priorities, like family,

friends, and faith, remain priorities.

In a broken and depraved world, we so easily go from owning possessions like a phone, tablet, or gaming console, to being possessed by them. For example, sociologist Jean Twenge has shown that teen mental health has plunged since 2012, the year that a majority of Americans owned smartphones. And many senior readers, if they are honest, will acknowledge that their screen use has long crossed into the territory of becoming an addiction.

WHAT DOES HELPFUL LOOK LIKE?

Putting technology in its proper place requires discernment, something that is more difficult than rules. According to Crouch, technology is in its proper place when:

1. It helps us bond with the real people we have been given to love.
2. It starts great conversations.
3. It helps us take care of the fragile bodies that we inhabit.
4. It helps us acquire skill and mastery of domains that are the glory of human culture (sports, music, the arts, cooking, writing, accounting, etc.).
5. It helps us cultivate awe for the

created

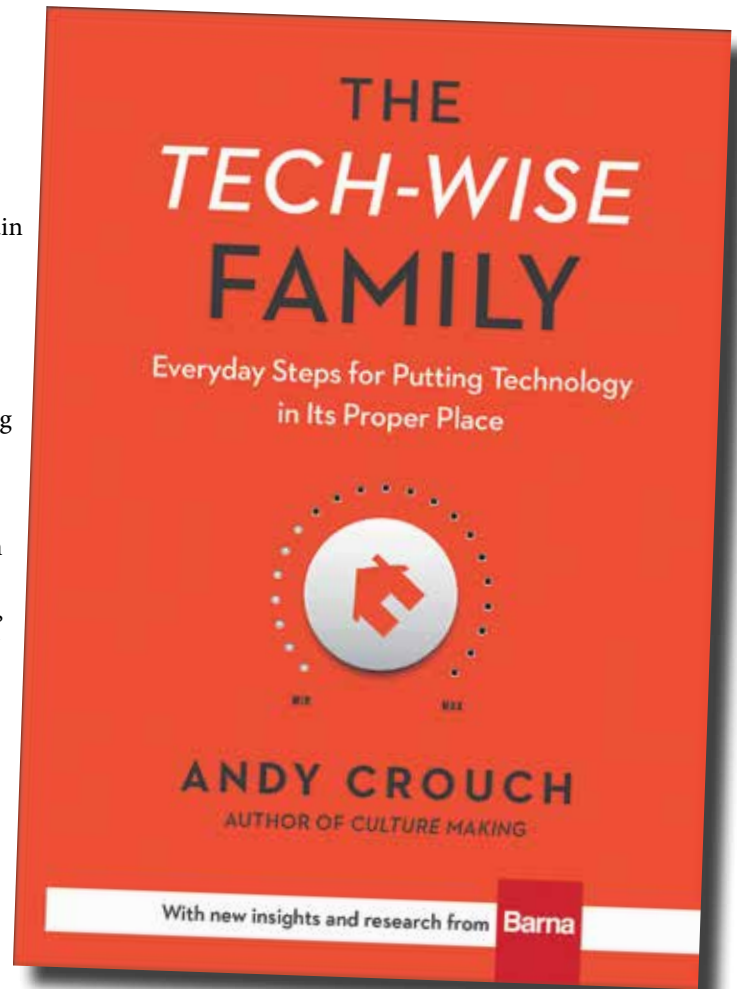
world we are part of and responsible for stewarding.

6. We use it with intention and care.

On the last point, he adds:

"If there's one thing I've discovered about technology, it's that it doesn't stay in its proper place on its own; much like my children's toys and stuffed creatures and minor treasures, it finds its way underfoot all over the house and all over our lives."

Take a moment to reflect on the technology use in your home and life. How does it align with the criteria above? Let's also do this reflecting



humbly, recognizing that the ultimate judge is not ourselves (we are very quick to justify what we like) but our God, who calls us to be faithful stewards of our time and gives us a high calling as a prophet, priest, and king (Lord's Day 12, Heidelberg Catechism).

TECH-WISE CHANGED MY THINKING

If you or your family struggles with managing technology, I highly recommend you pick up a copy of Crouch's book, as he shares practical advice about how to prioritize character, shape

our spaces with intentionality, structure our time, and apply all of this in the details of life, from our commutes in our vehicles to how we sleep.

This was a paradigm shift for how I was looking at things like social media, including whether media organizations like RP should utilize platforms like Instagram when these mediums cause so many problems for their users. It has made me realize that I was being naïve, and even hypocritical, if I thought we were even able to "flick the switch" on social media. After all, a good case could be made that even apart from

our Instagram and Facebook pages, RP's online presence (complete with a popular app, videos, website, podcasts, and newsletter) could also qualify as social media.

But it has also served to strengthen my appreciation for our board's decision to prioritize this print magazine and our Real Talk podcast, over social media and video.

UNPLUGGED IS DIFFERENT

Since most members of our churches also receive the magazine, we are able to bond, and sharpen each other, about

The Tech-Wise Family on **BOREDOM**

One of the biggest pulls screens have on us is their promise to "solve" our boredom. Have to wait in a line at the bank? Don't know when the doctor will see you? Have to get some work done and the kids are complaining about having nothing to do? It's screens to the rescue!

Or is it? In these quotes from *The Tech-Wise Family*, Andy Crouch presents a very different perspective on screens (and a very good reason to buy a copy of his book!).

A MODERN PROBLEM

"In the history of the human race, boredom is practically brand new – less than three hundred years old. The English word does not appear until the 1830s, and its parent word bore (as a noun – 'he is such a bore') appears only a century earlier..."

LOST SENSE OF WONDER

"The technology that promises to release us from boredom is actually making it worse – making us more prone to seek empty distractions than we have ever been. In fact, I've come to the conclusion that the more you entertain children, the more bored they will get."

"As screens – movies, TV, video games – present a world far more colorful and energetic than the created world itself, they not only ratchet up our expectations for what is significant and entertaining; they also undermine our ability to enjoy what we could call the abundance of the ordinary... And the ones who used to be able to see this ordinary abundance in all its glory,

in all its full capacity to delight and transfix our attention, were children. Children were the ones who simply went out to play in the ordinary world, even with no toys at all, because they had something far better than toys: grass and dirt, worms and beetles, trees and fields.... This world is lost to many of our children, and to ourselves."

"Boredom is actually a crucial warning sign – as important in its own way as physical pain. It's a sign that our capacity for wonder and delight, contemplation and attention, real play and fruitful work, has been dangerously depleted."

IDLE HANDS (& MINDS) ARE THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND

"Nearly half of teenagers who use porn, according to Barna's research, say they do so out of boredom – higher than for any other age group."

"...the most important things we will do to prevent porn from taking over our own lives and our children's lives have nothing to do with sex. A home where wisdom and courage come first; where our central spaces are full of satisfying, demanding opportunities for creativity; where we have regular breaks from technology and opportunities for deep rest and refreshment (where devices "sleep" somewhere other than our bedrooms and where both adults and children experience the satisfactions of learning in thick, embodied ways rather than thin, technological ways); where we've learned to manage boredom and where even our car trips are occasions for deep and meaningful conversation – this is the kind of home that can


what we find in these pages. For example, my church's Young Peoples Society picks an article from it at each meeting for their discussions (checking off the first two criteria from Crouch already). This simply isn't possible if each church member is plugged into their own source of information, oblivious to what others are reading or watching.

A print magazine in particular engages not just our hearts and minds, but also our bodies (we have to pick it up, hold it, gaze at it, flip the pages). Our heart rate slows as we settle into a comfortable position and slowly work

through the issue. RP's team has also been intentional about trying to make the reading experience delightful, with nicely designed pages, space for large pictures, a captivating kids' section and new sections like the artist profile. Our senses and hearts need to be fed along with our minds.

Our hope is that this magazine, and to varying degrees all of RP's resources, will strengthen your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ, will be used to start great conversations, will help you take care of your bodies and souls, and will develop awe for

God's creation.

But reading this is a small part of your life. Before you flip the page, consider how the other sources of technology in your home and life measure up to Crouch's criteria. If you have someone else around you, consider reading Crouch's criteria about whether technology is in its proper place and ask them for their thoughts, perhaps even about how you are managing technology. And if your device happens to ping while you are enjoying a conversation with them, ignore it! 

equip all of us with an immune system strong enough to resist pornography's foolishness."

FIGHT FRITTERING

"There is a better way.But let me be direct and honest: this better way is radical. It requires making choices that most of our neighbors aren't making. It requires making choices that most of our neighbors in church aren't making. Let me put it this way: you don't have to become Amish, but you probably have to become closer to Amish than you think."

"So if you do only one thing in response to this book, I urge you to make it this: Find the room where your family spends the most time and ruthlessly eliminate the things that ask little of you and develop little in you. Move the TV to a less central location – and ideally a less comfortable one. And begin filling the space that is left over with opportunities for creativity and skill, beauty and risk."

– Jon Dykstra



NEWS IN *Perspective*

GAMBLING AS THE NEW NORM? CHRISTIANS NEED TO SAY NO

BY JON DYKSTRA

Estimates had Americans betting a record \$23 billion on Super Bowl LVIII, up more than a third from the \$16 billion that was wagered in 2023. Among the betters was one Cardinal Pritchard, who shared that he'd made a wager in an article for the news site *Not the Bee*. Pritchard didn't specify how much he bet, so it could have been trivial. What is notable is that he publicized it on a specifically Christian website and in making his admission there, he was acting as if it's no big thing for Christians to gamble. The irony is that he did so in an article on the enormity of America's gambling problem – Pritchard reported that an estimated 67.8 million Americans placed a bet on the Super Bowl, for an average of well over \$300 a bet!

Big, too, is just how common gambling has become – that works out to almost 1 in 5 Americans. Pritchard actually reported it as 1 in 4, but his math was off. Bad math is, of course, an ailment common to gamblers, who

make the repeated mistake of thinking that this time they'll come out ahead. But in a bit of computation that should be a part of every Christian high school



math curriculum, if you engage in any sort of regular gambling the odds are going to get you in the end. Why? Because casinos and online sites take their percentage, so what's paid out will always be less than what was paid in. Thus one of the reasons Christians shouldn't gamble is because it's a bad use of the resources God has given us. It's worse than what the one servant

did in the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25: 14-30) who buried the money his master entrusted to him, and didn't even put it in the bank to earn some interest. How much angrier would his master have been if the servant had come back with half a talent, having frittered the rest away in gambling? Or if he'd come back with a debt of several talents?

But what if you are an especially good gambler, defying the odds to actually win more than you lose? Would it be okay for a Christian to gamble if he could turn a profit? No, but for a different reason. When you win at gambling it is only because someone else lost. Whatever your gain, it is someone else's pain. Sometimes investing is likened to gambling, but a key difference is that if I make money on a business investment, it can be as the result of that business doing something to benefit many others. A company like Costco grows in value because it opens more stores that serve more people some good values. Your gain as a Costco stockholder comes at the general populace's gain too. But in gambling, you only win because someone else has lost. And that's not loving your neighbor (Matt. 22:35-40).

Add to this the number of people who get addicted to gambling and lose everything. And then consider how, in Canada, provincial governments have a big hand in pushing gambling, and thus a big hand in destroying these lives.

While I couldn't dig up the specifics for the Canadian Super Bowl wager numbers, gambling is big business in Canada too, as evidenced by the sheer volume of sports gambling ads on television. A peek at government coffers shows their own heavy dependence on gambling. Alberta, for example, is expecting to take in \$1.5 billion in 2023-2024, or, more than \$300 per citizen.

God's people need to understand why gambling is wrong so we can steer clear of this entrapment. And in steering clear we can also be a good neighbor to others by "denormalizing" gambling. Just say no, for everyone's sake.

TORONTO HOSPITAL EXPERIMENTS WITH ARTIFICIAL WOMBS

BY ALEXANDRA ELLISON

In mid-November, Toronto SickKids Hospital began the first experiments in its new lab, testing the creation of an artificial womb.

In 2017, artificial womb testing succeeded in keeping fetal lambs gestating in “bio bags” for up to 28 days. Lambs surgically removed from their mothers’ wombs at 105 to 115 days were transferred into the bio bags. Scientists from the Philadelphia-based lab claim this experiment showed promise as the first time an artificial womb could maintain fetal and organ development. These tests have been conducted with over 300 lambs. Toronto SickKids Hospital is following on with their own experiment, this time using pigs, not lambs.

Dr. Mike Seed, head cardiologist of the hospital, states that these experiments aim to develop better life support for prematurely born babies. The hope is to simulate a womb that would support continued growth and nurture of the fetus, providing a better chance at life.

IF THE PREBORN AREN'T RECOGNIZED AS HUMAN...

Now, just because we can do something, doesn't necessarily mean we should. In the pursuit of scientific advancements, there is a need for scrutiny, especially when it involves interventions that potentially disrupt the natural order established by

God, such as the sacred process of childbearing.

Of course, the idea that a baby born prematurely at 22 weeks could thrive in an “artificial womb” is appealing. However, can we trust those who evidently have little regard for the sanctity of life to continue their process of experimentation in a way that respects these smallest and most vulnerable of lives?

WHAT IF IT WASN'T HER BODY?

A recent *National Post* article, Sharon Kirkey's “Artificial wombs are coming,” explores the idea that advances in this medical technology could impact “abortion rights.” In Canada, pre-born children have no legal status until their first breath. University of Montreal bioethicist Vardit Ravitsky expresses concern about how this could “revolutionize our relationship to pregnancy, reproduction, and women's place in society.”

Could legislators change abortion policies to remove the pre-born child from the mother to finish gestation inside an artificial womb? Ravitsky warns that having such a womb capable of carrying on an unwanted pregnancy apart from the mother could result in the mother losing the “right to decide that this child will not live.” She poses the questions: “Is the pre-born child considered born when it leaves my body? Is it born when it leaves the artificial womb?”

An important truth that can be highlighted is that inside or outside of the womb (natural or artificial) life begins at conception. Although this bioethicist has a pro-abortion worldview, she strips away the jargon and euphemisms of what abortion is. Ravitsky says that when women say they want an abortion they are saying two things: “I don't want this pregnancy in my body,” and “I don't want this child to be in the world.” Abortion is not just the removal of pregnancy; it is at the essence the removal of the child from the world in a way that is utterly brutal and destructive to God's creation.

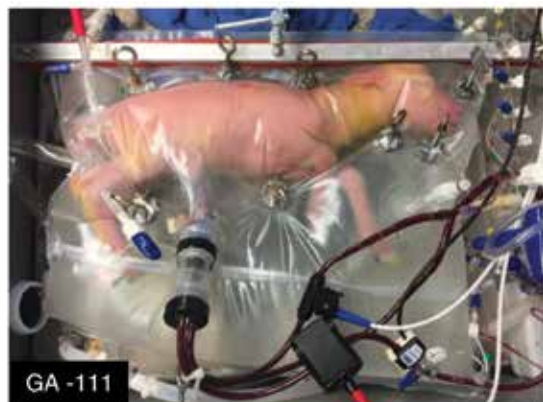
NOT A BRAVE NEW WORLD

Another concern is where this could all lead. The concept of an artificial womb is not new, with Aldous Huxley's dystopian classic *Brave New World* exploring the idea over 90 years ago. Huxley warned that separating reproduction from love and family bonds could lead to a less human and more controlled society. Eliminating natural reproduction from the God-ordained male-female process alters the structure of families. This transformation is evident in practices like in vitro fertilization and surrogacy, where same-sex couples are now able to create children, depriving the right for children to have both a mother and a father. The plotline of babies being born inside of incubated bottles now doesn't seem too far off.

As the medical field makes advances that may seem like “preserving” human life, there is a need for discernment. Society should avoid practicing science or legislation that would harm the pre-

born. Psalm 127:3-5 says “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them!”

Photo by Nature Communications, DOI: 10.1038/NCOMMS15112, used and adapted under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.



ALBERTA GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES TRANSGENDER POLICIES

BY ALEXANDRA ELLISON

In late January, the Premier of Alberta, Danielle Smith, announced several transgender policies concerning surgeries, hormone treatment, parental rights, sexual education, and sports. Smith delivered the policies in a video posted on social media.

PARTIAL BAN ON AMPUTATIONS AND HORMONES

Smith declared a ban on transgender top and bottom “surgeries” for minors aged 17 and under. Previously, “bottom surgeries,” involving the mutilation of a child’s genitalia, were already prohibited for minors. Levi Minderhoud is the BC Manager at the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), which has been advocating for these changes

right to prohibit them for minors.”

Additionally, Smith announced the ban on hormone treatments for children aged 15 and under. She clarified that children currently receiving hormones would not be affected. Those aged 16 and 17 could start hormones with approval from parents, a physician, and a psychologist.

PARENTAL RIGHTS IN THE CLASSROOM

Under the new policies, students aged 15 and under who wish to use another name and/or pronouns at school must get parental permission. Students aged 16 and 17 will not require permission, but parents will have to be informed by the school if their

not to opt-in, it could lead to the shutdown of these classes if only a few students participate.

FEMALE SPORTS

The new rules will also prohibit so-called “transgender female athletes” (aka, men) from participating in female sports. As Smith noted:

“There are obvious biological realities that give transgender female athletes a massive competitive advantage over women and girls.”

Although Smith failed to articulate that “transgender female” really means “male,” she did affirm the reality of biological differences between males and females (Gen 1:27).

TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE BACK

It wasn’t all good though. Children 16 and up will still be able to get hormones that may leave them irreversibly sterile. Smith also announced efforts to advance “transgender care” for adults. Currently, Alberta residents seeking transgender surgeries have to travel to Quebec. Smith aims to change this by bringing specialists to Alberta to facilitate these genital mutilations within the province. It’s important to care for those around us struggling with gender dysphoria, but it’s not caring to harm a patient’s body in an attempt to remake them into a gender they can never become.

These policies have faced significant backlash from transgender advocacy groups, some arguing that Alberta’s policies surpass the parental rights policies in Saskatchewan and New Brunswick.

John Sikkema, director of Law and Policy for ARPA, expressed gratitude for the announcement stating:

“ARPA is very thankful for Premier Smith’s policy announcement this week. We urge her government to follow through with implementing these sound policy changes, despite the predictable backlash by progressive activist groups and media.”



through the “Let Kids Be” campaign. He mentions that before this announcement, “top surgeries” – breast removals – were happening to minors:

“The *National Post* reported last year that hundreds of girls in Canada have had mastectomies under the guise of ‘gender-affirming care.’ These are not only medically unnecessary but also cause permanent damage to young women’s bodies. Alberta is

child is using a new name or pronouns.

Regarding sexual education lessons in the classroom, parents will need to opt-in to every lesson covering sex education, sexual identity, or gender identity.

Smith’s decision to implement an opt-in policy, rather than an opt-out policy, is significant, as it could remove contentious presentations from the classroom without facing a major political backlash. If most parents choose



ALBERTA TAKING STEPS TOWARDS NUCLEAR POWER

BY MARK PENNINGA

In the same week that Alberta was facing power shortages, the government announced they were going nuclear. On Jan. 13 the province was sending emergency alerts to residents asking them to limit their electricity usage because of pressure on their electrical grid from extremely cold temperatures. Then, on Jan. 15 an announcement was made of a partnership between two corporations to examine the feasibility of building small modular reactors (SMR) in the province. Currently there are no nuclear power projects west of Ontario.

The partnership is between Alberta company Capital Power and the crown corporation Ontario Power Generation, which owns four nuclear power plants and is responsible for close to half the electricity generation in Ontario. The two companies shared that their plan is to take two years to assess the feasibility of small nuclear reactors in Alberta.

This aligns with a strategic plan that was created by the governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and New Brunswick in 2022, towards the advancements of SMR's, which they called "the next evolution in nuclear innovation and technology."

Nuclear power is far more

reliable than "renewable" power options like solar and wind, which Canadian governments have been pushing for decades now. They are able to produce maximum power more than 92 percent of the year, compared with 35 percent for wind and 25 percent for solar.

"Nuclear energy offers humanity the safest, most efficient approach to harnessing natural resources for its use" explained Vijay Jayaraj, Research Associate for the CO2 Coalition. "As the densest energy source available, nuclear fuel requires the least amount of material and land for electricity production."

Safe electricity is necessary for lighting, heating, cooling, refrigeration, and most commercial activity. Although we take it for granted, it has been critical for alleviated poverty and promoting human flourishing. As Andrew Spencer, from The Gospel Coalition notes,

"as we prudentially consider technologies that balance the goods of society with the limits of creation, relatively clean sources of electricity like nuclear power are part of seeking the welfare of the city in which we dwell. (Jer. 29:7) This is especially true for people on the margins who cannot afford expensive electrical backups and are most at risk when the power goes out."

ONE DOWN, THREE TO GO: NEW BRUNSWICK'S PRIVATE ABORTION FACILITY CLOSES DOWN

BY ALEXANDRA ELLISON

Last week, Clinic 554, New Brunswick's only privately-owned abortion facility, shut down. Dr. Adrian Edgar, the facility's director, stated that its closure was due to Premier Blaine Higgs's refusal to fund abortions outside of public hospitals. New Brunswick has had a policy in place since 1985, prohibiting funding for abortions in "private hospital facilities."

Women who sought services at Clinic 554 were charged \$700 to \$850 for surgical abortions. For those unable to afford the costs, doctors would perform abortions pro bono. And providing surgical abortions for free was one of the reasons the facility got into financial trouble.

Despite Clinic 554's closure, surgical abortions continue to be performed in the province's three public hospitals – one in Moncton and two in Bathurst.

During a press conference, Edgar lamented:

"2024 brings the sad end to New Brunswickers' access to this level of skilled and tenderhearted state-of-the-art care."

To hear this man describe his practice of dismemberment as "tenderhearted state-of-the-art care" serves as a reminder of the deceitfulness of human hearts when not transformed by the grace of God (Jeremiah 17:9). We can be grateful then that such a man has been put out of business.



IN THE AGE OF THE SMARTPHONE, KIDS AREN'T PERFORMING AS WELL

BY JON DYKSTRA

Research released in December seems to indicate a general decline in student performance around the world over the last decade and a half.

These findings were based on the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), a test administered to almost 700,000 15-year-old students in 2022. The PISA has been run every two years for decades now. One of the takeaways from the latest results was that in the 16 years from 2006 to 2022, worldwide scores for math, reading, and science dropped from 10 to 20 points. According to PISA, 20 points represents approximately a year's worth of learning, so this amounted to between a half and a full year of learning lost in these three areas.

It's hard to get the *why* from such statistics. Some of that was almost



certainly due to COVID closures, with the sharpest declines in math and reading happening over the years 2020 to 2022. But as the author of one of the reports, Andreas Schleicher, noted, the trajectory was already downward beforehand. Schleicher pointed to "digital distractions" as a possible culprit.

"Students who reported being distracted by other students using digital devices in some, most or

every maths class scored 15 points lower in PISA maths tests than those who barely experienced this."

What can be done to improve scores? State schools are going to look to the government for the solution, and some have tried banning smartphone usage at school. The results have been mixed: good in some countries, and not as much in others, where students may simply be getting around the ban.

Christians can point to something that hasn't been tried: instead of more government intervention, what if we had less? Children who are on screens 5-7 hours a day (or even more) need parents (not a Big Brother) to step up and fill the void, both educational and emotional, that these phones and screens are currently filling.

SOURCE: Andreas Schleicher's "PISA 2022: Insights and Interpretations"

JUDGE: GOVERNMENT WASN'T LEGALLY JUSTIFIED TO INVOKE THE EMERGENCIES ACT

BY JON DYKSTRA

A year ago, Justice Paul Rouleau ruled that Canada's federal government acted appropriately when it invoked the Emergencies Act to clear out "Freedom Convoy" protesters who were camping out around Parliament Hill back in 2022.

But in January a different judge made the opposite call. Federal Court Justice Richard Mosley ruled that the government was not legally justified in invoking the Act.

For those who need a refresher, on Feb 14, 2022, the Canadian government invoked the Emergencies Act, claiming that the hundreds of semi-trucks and thousands of protesters that had been around Parliament Hill since late January of that year were a "threat to the security of Canada."

Invoking the Act gave the government increased powers. However, any increase of power for government has to come with a corresponding loss of freedom for their citizens. For example, the government gained the power to freeze protesters' bank accounts, and those they chose to do this to, lost the ability to access their own money. The government gained the power to ban protests, but, as Justice Mosley ruled earlier this week, they did so at the expense of citizens' Charter Right to freedom of expression.

However, as *The Globe and Mail's* Marieke Walsh and Sean Fine reported:

"The government failed to prove that there was an

emergency, as defined by the Emergencies Act, with the protests not meeting the high threshold of a threat to the security of Canada, [Mosley] said. The government 'cannot invoke the Emergencies Act because it is convenient, or because it may work better than other tools at their disposal or



Picture is by Michel Elzo/Shutterstock



ALL VOTES ARE NOT EQUAL

BY MARK PENNINGA

Come the next election, the House of Commons is set to add five more seats and see the ridings redistributed. These changes flow from a requirement in our constitution to do this after each census, to try ensure that each vote in Canada counts about

available to the provinces,' he wrote."

For Christians who have been wrestling with what the limits of government power are, this ruling presents another wrinkle. What does submission to government look like when one arm of the government declares something right, and another declares it wrong?

This ruling also confirms that just because a government official declares something doesn't make it so. Even as our country drifts from God, it is still a nation of laws, not just a nation of men – we don't have to submit to every whim of our political leader, but can appeal to a system of laws, including our Charter of Rights, that even the Prime Minister can be held accountable to.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland has announced the government plans to appeal.

the same when it comes to electing Members of Parliament. Populations change from movement within Canada and immigration, and a representative democracy is supposed to account for this.

Yet *Globe and Mail* columnist Andrew Coyne has shown that the new boundaries don't come close to representing where Canadians live, resulting in some votes being worth far more than others. Some of his findings included:

- Labrador, the smallest riding, has just 27,000 people. Contrast this with Edmonton-Wetaskiwin, which has more than 209,000. Both ridings send one MP to Parliament, so a vote in Labrador is worth eight times as much.
- The average Alberta riding has more than 125,000 people. Contrast this with PEI, where the average riding size is 39,000 people.
- The four Atlantic provinces and the three northern territories have a population below 2.8 million, yet they have more seats than Alberta, which had 4.8 million as of the 2021 census.
- The smaller ridings tend to vote Liberal. A total of 43,848 votes elected six Liberal MPs in

Newfoundland, PEI, and the territories. This is less than the average number of votes to elect a single MP in the six largest Conservative ridings.

- Canada's population has grown by 10 percent since the 2021 census, with three-quarters of the growth in Alberta, BC, and Ontario, which are all already under-represented in Parliament. This means that the new distribution is already far out of date, even before it takes effect.

These inequalities resulted from a series of decisions by our leaders. One of the most significant was the "grandfather clause" of 1985 which decided that a province cannot have fewer seats than it had that year. The most recent redistribution decided that Quebec can't ever get fewer seats. This means that the only remaining option to restore proportionality is to add seats.

But for this to be truly fair, based on Labrador's population, our House of Commons would need to grow from 337 MPs to 925! That is clearly unrealistic. But adding a measly three to Alberta and one to Ontario and BC doesn't even come close to being representative. If we were aiming for genuine proportionality, they should be getting 24 new seats.

It would be difficult to change the representation in the Senate, as a change to the constitution requires approval from all provinces. But Coyne noted that it could be done in Parliament:

"the 'grandfather clause' and the rest could all be amended or abolished by simple act of Parliament. Or are we incapable of living up to the same basic democratic principles that apply in other countries?"

Of course, other countries aren't our ultimate standard. A better standard is the basic biblical principles of fairness, justice, and impartiality. As Proverbs 16:11 instructs, "a just balance and scales are the LORD's."

CHRISTIAN HEALTHCARE WORKERS TAKING PROVINCE TO COURT OVER VACCINATIONS

BY ALEXANDRA ELLISON

In the fall of 2021, Hilary Vandergugten was working as a charge nurse in the emergency department of a hospital in the Fraser Valley when British Columbia health authorities ordered all healthcare workers to get the COVID-19 vaccine. Vandergugten wasn't willing, and like many in her position, lost her job. Two-and-a-half years later, Vandergugten is still unable to work as a nurse in BC. She can, however, practice just south of the border in the US.

"There is an obvious nursing shortage and doctor shortage in our province, but [Health Minister, Dr. Bonnie Henry] seems to completely ignore that," said Vandergugten. The BC Ministry of Health reports that almost 2,500 healthcare workers lost their jobs after refusing to get vaccinated, and that doesn't take into account healthcare workers who opted for early retirement, so the loss of healthcare workers could be quite a bit higher.

When Vandergugten refused to get vaccinated she was initially ordered to go on unpaid leave on Oct. 26, 2021. While on leave, Vandergugten went to her family doctor to get lab work done to prove that she had immunity from the virus, as she had already had COVID-19. However, her lab work was not accepted, and on Feb. 3, 2022, Vandergugten was officially terminated from her position at Langley Hospital.

CHALLENGING THE COURTS

During this time of uncertainty, Vandergugten started meeting with "the Ark," a fellowship of Christian healthcare workers who also lost their jobs due to vaccine orders. This fellowship joined a judicial court challenge started by doctors who had lost their privileges to practice in any hospital or government owned clinics.

"We as nurses started to get together in the Lower Mainland here in Greater

Vancouver, just a bunch of Christian nurses that had all found each other in this process. We just started getting together, supporting each other and praying and then became involved with this court challenge."

During this time, Vandergugten said that many court challenge opportunities came up, whether it be suing the union or the health authority. Yet, she says none of them aligned with the group's Christian values. They then were asked to join a case that resonated with them, challenging Dr. Bonnie Henry, BC's Health Minister, stating that her mandates were extreme and that she overused her emergency powers. Vandergugten's name was put on the affidavit, the legal document that served as the evidence for the case.

The courts heard their case for judicial review in November and December of 2023, and the group is currently waiting to hear a decision. The decision date was set for the end of February, but they now understand that the courts can delay until the end of June. Vandergugten notes:

"Lots of people at church are asking about it and praying for a favorable ruling. I will say to them, 'You know what, if there is an extension that also is in God's timing and God's timing is perfect.'"



Hilary has been able to work as a traveling nurse in the US.

Winning the case wouldn't automatically reinstate their jobs right away, but it could set a precedent for going forward with challenging their jobs.

"There's still a battle that we need to win. This is just one case. For us to actually get our jobs back and be reinstated to the jobs that we were in, is still a far way off."

CRAZY ANTI-VAXXER

Vandergugten says that for her, the decision to not get vaccinated was not what the mainstream media deemed as "crazy anti-vaxxers." Prior to the vaccine, she worked for months in the emergency department at the peak of the pandemic. Once the vaccine

came out, Vandergugten started seeing a rise in what she wondered were potential vaccine injuries. "Working on the frontline in the emergency department, there was an increase of early miscarriages and vascular injuries, strokes or blood clots or macular eye injuries. I knew that right away, that's a vaccine injury."

She says that it was disheartening to see this up close, especially when she felt any sort of disposition would mark you as a conspiracy theorist.

"It's hard to sort out actually. It's hard to validate for yourself, when you see what's happening in front of you daily at work, and try to have conversations with colleagues who refused to engage. People accused me that I was being crazy and making stuff up."

SPIRITUAL AND RELATIONAL GROWTH IN TIMES OF GRIEF

As challenging as this time has been, Vandergugten has found peace through solely relying on Christ.

"It has been very beautiful, right? Like, you rely daily, you know, for emotional support, for spiritual support that He will heal those holes, but also that He will open my eyes to others that are hurting, right?"

She says that one of the greatest gifts to come out of this has been the connections made with other Christian health-care workers through "the Ark" group. In addition to praying for each other, they have created work opportunities.

Although these professionals are no longer able to work in care homes because of their vaccine status, many people will reach out to "the Ark" group to find home care jobs for those who lost their jobs. She said some people will ask for unvaccinated nurses to take care of their loved ones instead of sending them to a nursing home.

"This has been an unbelievably beautiful gift of just strong Christian women, not all of the Reformed faith – there are Mennonites and Pentecostals. But it's just this beautiful gift from God that we can be together and pray for each other and encourage each other. And all of us have said our faith has become so much stronger."

In addition to her spiritual growth, Vandergugten says that this adversity has strengthened her marriage. She is grateful for her husband's

support in leading her family through this difficult time, and for his ability to defend and protect her. She mentioned how she didn't have the "traditional" type of marriage – she had always worked even if only part-time. This led her to let go and let her husband lead. "My marriage has become stronger because of it. It has been beautiful for our marriage, defending his wife repeatedly. My husband has this line, saying the collateral damage of COVID has been beautiful."

TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY LEAD TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Once Vandergugten and her sisters, also nurses, were fired, they thought they would prepare for the long haul, so they began the process of studying to get their American licenses. They have since passed these examinations and now have the ability to work south of the border. "We wrote our NCLEXs and got our American licenses. I actually work in Washington State, which is about an hour and 15 minutes from my home."

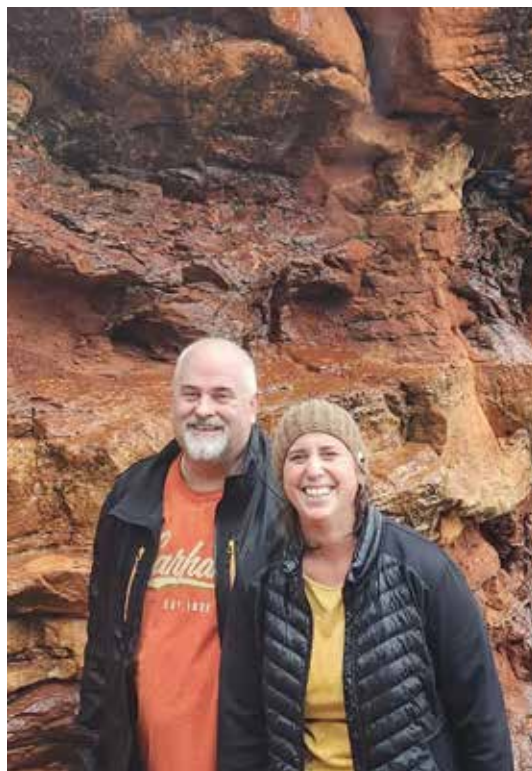
To continue to hold a nursing license, a nurse needs to maintain a certain amount of hours. Vandergugten is grateful to be able to continue getting hours, because if BC health authorities do ever open up the restrictions for unvaccinated nurses, she'll be able to return. She fears others will be ineligible to practice due to a lack of hours.

Although this work is a blessing, at times, Vandergugten also finds it painful. "It's beautiful that I'm able to work there, that I'm able to be back doing what I love to do and have done for 28 years," she said. "It's just painful that I have to cross the border and leave our healthcare system, with it being so short of so many nurses."

WHY BOTHER?

Vandergugten says that she received some pushback from others questioning why she would even fight something like this. She says that we still live in a country with a democratic judicial system so we should exercise our rights.

"We actually still live in a democracy, you've got elected people, who are making laws and rulings that affect the people, the common people like us, and then we have a judicial system that holds the elected people accountable," she said. "We need to continue to honor this process and use it because otherwise we are not in a democratic society and I'm not acting like a citizen of a democracy, rather, I'm acting like I'm a subservient part of a totalitarian government. Right? And those are some of those fundamental freedoms that people forget. We shouldn't be afraid to exercise that."



Hilary and her husband Sprout

JOEL BELZ (1941-2024) SHOWED WHAT CHRISTIAN JOURNALISM LOOKS LIKE

BY JON DYKSTRA

Joel Belz, founder of *WORLD* magazine, died February 4 at the age of 82 from complications due to Parkinson's disease. God used Belz to teach generations of Christians to see their world – every square inch of it – as the LORD's own.

In 1977, Belz, a one-time teacher, began working for *The Presbyterian Journal* (a publication that had some connections with the OPC and PCA). But he never lost his heart for educating children. So four years later he began a newspaper for middle school students, called *It's God's World*. Christian families welcomed the publication with its news from a distinctly Christian perspective, and asked for more. And

Belz began publishing papers for other age groups too.

Then in 1987, just three years later, Belz started up the adult version, *WORLD* magazine, done under the oversight of the same board as *The Presbyterian Journal*. As Mindy Belz, Joel's sister, shared, his first choice of name was *Worldview*. But at the time, that term was too unfamiliar, even among Presbyterian Christians, and so it was shortened. But Belz stuck with his goal of "worldview journalism" – reporting events from a biblical perspective that saw the whole of the world as Christ's domain.

It was tough going early on. After just 13 issues, the board of *The Presbyterian Journal* actually voted to close

WORLD. But in a reversal, they instead closed *The Presbyterian Journal*, and threw their support behind *WORLD*. From there it has grown to a team of over 100 today who reach a half million each month via materials for both students (GWNews.com) and adults (WNG.org). And since 1999 they've been training up generations of new Christian journalists via their *WORLD* Journalism Institute (WJI.world), whose graduates include *RP*'s Marty VanDriel, Alexandra Ellison, and myself.

Belz was an amazing man, but his legacy is so outsized that it only highlights the greatness of his God who made the man, and blessed his efforts mightily.

BC SAYS GOODBYE TO CELLPHONES IN SCHOOLS

BY ALEXANDRA ELLISON

Late January, the Premier of British Columbia, David Eby, announced that schools must implement restrictions on cellphones. It would be up to local districts to decide how these restrictions would be enforced, but Eby stated that the expectation is to remove phones from the classroom. One exception would be cases where students with disabilities require them as part of an accommodation.

Additionally, the government plans to launch two new services, one to help people remove explicit images of themselves from the internet, and the other to help victims pursue online predators for damages. Legislation is also planned to hold social media companies accountable for online harms. This means that the government could take legal action against major companies like Facebook, for harms to individuals they may have had a role in.

These changes come in the wake of the tragic suicide of Carson Cleland, a 12-year-old BC boy who fell victim to a sextortion scheme in October 2023. Sextortion is when an online predator tricks someone into sending nude images of themselves. Then the predator usually asks for money or for more explicit images. If the victim won't comply then



the predator will threaten to share these images with the victim's friends or family.

Parents must remain their children's first line of protection, but the pervasiveness of social media, and its negative impact on children, has gotten to the point where even proponents for smaller government, like Christian commentator John Stonestreet, are calling on the State to enact legislation to address these issues.

PROVINCE APPROVES PROTOCOLS TO GIVE OPIOID PRESCRIPTIONS TO MINORS

BY ALEXANDRA ELLISON

Recently, Adam Zivo reported in the *National Post* that the British Columbia government has authorized the distribution of opioid prescriptions to minors, without parental permission. This is being done under the province's "safer supply" or "harm reduction" strategy which involves the prescription of opioids, including fentanyl, to addicts. So, instead of trying to put these children into rehab to get off drugs completely, the program aims to provide individuals with "clean" drugs as an alternative or supplement to the illicit and toxic substances that they are addicted to.

Harm reduction is grounded in the belief that complete abstinence is an impossible goal. This perspective is evident in sex ed, where the focus is on teaching kids how to lower but not eliminate the risks of unwanted pregnancies and STDs – it's safer, but not at all safe, sex. One of the goals of harm reduction is often to "destigmatize" actions, whether it be in the case of "sexual liberation" or drug use. Some Christians see this shame-free approach as a way of loving your neighbor, yet it goes directly against what God says about sin. How can one come to repentance if you are told what you are doing is not shameful?

Despite the implementation of "safer supply" pilot programs across the country since 2020, the latest data from BC Coroners Service reveals that 2023 marked the third consecutive year with overdose deaths exceeding 2,000 lives.

Recent reports of "safer supply" programs have found serious cases of diversion, where people were getting government-funded drugs and selling them, and in some cases, bringing them to youth in suburban areas.

In an August report, the British Columbia Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) proposed protocols permitting nurses and doctors to prescribe opioids to both adults and minors.



The BCCSU, in outlining its protocols, has even admitted that "To date, there is no evidence available supporting this intervention, safety data, or established best practices for when and how to provide it." So, without any clear sense of concrete evidence that interventions like this work, they proceeded to recommend this process with loose requirements. The only requirement for minors to qualify is a "two prescriber approval system," wherein one medical professional interviews the patient, and the other signs off.

What raises serious concerns is the lack of acknowledgment for parents and their rights over their children within these protocols. According to the *National Post*'s Adam Zivo:

"While the B.C. government generally promotes its commitment to safer supply, it was oddly silent in this instance. I became aware of the new protocols only because two concerned addiction physicians contacted me shortly after their publication."

The absence of any requirement to inform or involve parents in the decision-making process for minors seeking prescription opioids may create incentives for young individuals to distance themselves from their families. The family unit, a child's God-given foundation of support and guidance, is bypassed in a manner that could contribute to strained relationships and increased risks for the young individuals involved.

Not only does the province allow access to safe supply drugs without needing parents' approval, but it also takes away parents' rights to get the help their child needs. In BC, parents can't make their kids go to rehab against their will.

Historically, the Church has been the place where individuals with addictions sought help, but in recent times, we have witnessed a shift towards government interventions driven by a worldview that doesn't value the family as God does. Amid turmoil and addiction, the only "safe supply" we can rely on is the love of Jesus Christ.

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

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TECHNOLOGY IN REFORMED SCHOOLS

by Alexandra Ellison

With great technological innovation comes great responsibility.

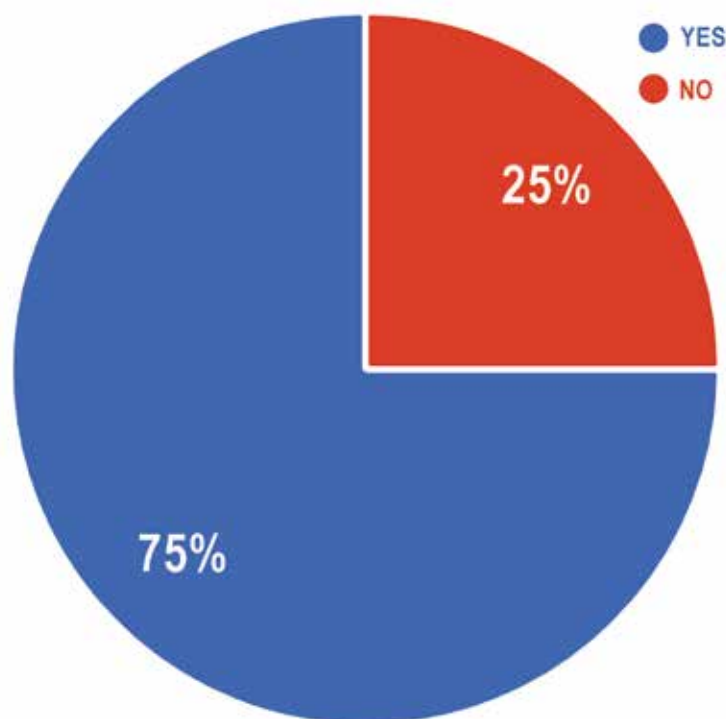
In an era where the digital landscape transforms the way we live, learn, and connect, Reformed Christian schools stand at the intersection, navigating the delicate balance between embracing innovation and upholding their Bible-based values. The integration of various technologies – whether computers, YouTube videos, cell phones, iPads, or the hot-button topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI) – is forcing a profound question upon Reformed Christian education: How can we ensure that the transformative potential of

technology aligns with and honors our Christian worldview? Are these tools mere distractions, pulling our focus away from the godly values our schools want to foster, or can these technologies be harnessed to deepen the connection between students and their Christian identity?

As the debate rages on between an impulse to retreat from technology entirely and the temptation to embrace it wholeheartedly, Reformed Christians have some complex decisions to make about how we will use technology in our classrooms.

SURVEY SAYS

To try to get an understanding of what's happening in Reformed schools across Canada, I asked 20 of them to participate in a survey exploring their approaches to screen time, technology policies, and the broader digital landscape within their educational environments. The participating schools ranged from elementary to high school and consisted of Canadian Reformed, United Reformed, and confessionally Reformed (but not associated with a specific church) schools. Of the contacted schools, 12 schools responded.



Have you had to deal with emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence being used in the classroom?

Questions ranged from yes or no questions to also allowing principals and school administrators to expand their answers in anonymous anecdotes. I also spoke with school principals who were willing to share more about their experiences.

Among our survey respondents, the majority (92%) have specific policies regarding the use of technology in the classroom or on school property. It's encouraging to know that most schools are recognizing a need to regulate the technology being used on campus. Most schools had guidelines for "Computer Usage Policy" for devices owned by the school as well as an "Acceptable use of personal devices policy."

ONE SCHOOL SAID NO PHONES AT ALL

Marc Slingerland is the principal at Calvin Christian School, a K-12 school in Coalhurst, Alberta. Slingerland said that his school has tried a few approaches with different rules for personal devices in different grade levels. Across the board, they had a no-phone policy, "no phones allowed to be seen or in class." However, they found that for older students in grades 11 and 12, some parents felt more comfortable with them bringing phones to school knowing that they would be driving to the campus. Taking this into consideration, the policy was changed to allow for grades 11 and 12 to use phones during breaks in the foyer. The hardest part was that this became a long haul of policing students – Slingerland says they have now reverted to the original plan.

"There's a set time and a set place at which it's allowed. It's constantly policing the boundaries and if they're just going to the locker to get a book, they can easily quickly just check it. So, we actually went back. This is now our second year with no student devices on school property at all."

WHEN TO INTRODUCE?

When it came to the introduction of school computer labs or school iPads into classrooms, the prevalent sentiment was that the early stages of a student's development may be better navigated

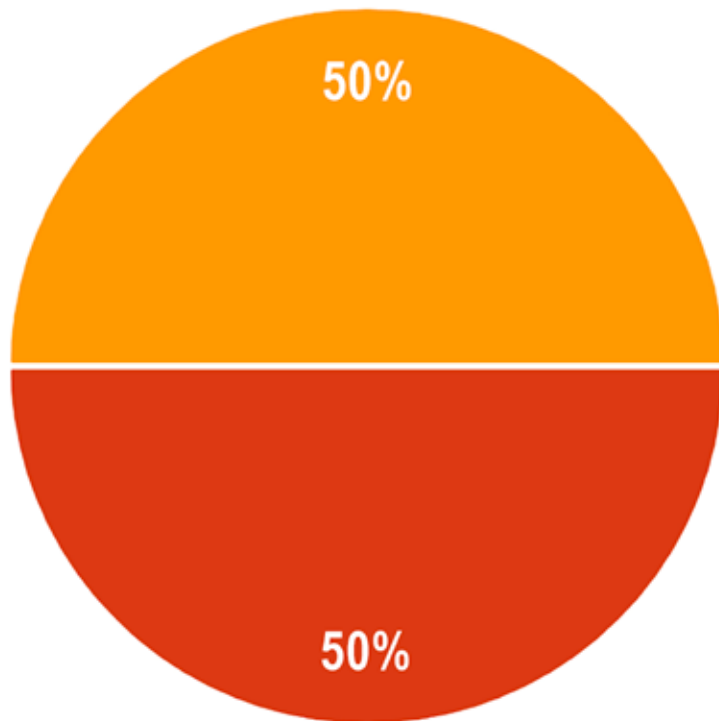
without the intrusion of technology.

Paul Wagenaar is the principal at Jordan Christian School, a K-12 school in Lincoln, Ontario. When it comes to the younger grades, Wagenaar says that it's rare for their school to introduce digital tech to students under grade 5.

"We intentionally keep technology out of the classroom in the early years as much as possible. The extent of the technology would be that each classroom does have a projector. Once in a while, there will be a video or something that will be shown to the students. But no use of iPads, or any electronic device in our classrooms up until grade four."

Regarding the survey, most schools (with elementary-aged students) said that it's between grade 3 and grade 5, that they start introducing technology like computers or





- RESTRICTED OR BLOCKED
- PERMITTED WITH SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

How is the use of YouTube videos or other online content regulated in the classroom?

laptops. “The exposure to technology in younger grades is limited to the teacher’s laptop and projector,” one principal said.

BENEFITS IN OLDER GRADES

When it comes to older grades (grades 8 to 12), some schools pair each student with their own iPad or laptop just for their own personal use. This type of “1-to-1” approach aims to enhance the educational experience by embedding technology into the curriculum. This allows teachers to foster personalized learning, and prepare students for the digital demands of the modern world.

Jordan Christian School has taken this approach in their high school. Their principal shared that each student has an Edsbee account, which is a web-based K-12 learning platform for teachers to upload assignments, and mark grades and attendance. The teacher will then enforce when the laptops should stay closed during lessons, and when the laptops can be used. Wagenaar says that he has found this useful in preparing students for post-secondary endeavors.

“We feel that they need to be prepared for the world in which they live as well. So I think the benefit of students having their own device is that in those four years, they really learn it well, and they’re well prepared for college or university or the workforce.”

While some schools take the 1-to-1 approach, others opt for the use of computer labs or Chromebook carts.

“The portable laptop cart has made student access to and use of technology much more convenient, with more opportunity than a standalone computer lab,” said one principal.

In terms of technology tools deemed helpful, the respondents highlighted a variety of platforms and applications such as Kahoot, Google Classroom, Google Docs, and educational apps like IXL and Scratch Jr.

Conversely, some tools, like YouTube, were identified as unhelpful due to potential distractions and inappropriate content. Interestingly, 75% of schools also said they have dealt with emerging

technologies like AI in the classroom, including instances of students using AI to complete homework assignments.

FILTERS AND FIREWALLS

A large challenge in having digital devices in classrooms is the ability to monitor students, and keep them from getting into trouble online. All schools said that they use online security safeguards and firewalls to protect students from inappropriate websites and distractions (i.e., computer games). For many schools, it's up to the teacher to enforce policies on how to use digital devices in class. Some principals voiced that they turn the screens on an angle so that the teacher can see what's happening on the screen.

One survey respondent mentioned that they use an app called "GAT Shield" which gives teachers access to see all of their students on their own devices.

"Teachers can also lock webpages, close tabs, push websites, and send out individual or class-wide messages. Additionally, we have filters set up using some of their presets and our own to flag explicit material, inappropriate language, violent images – weapons, etc.," this respondent noted. "When a student has tried to access this material, it sends a link/screenshot to the teacher and account administrator's emails."

In some of the specific policy guidelines, if students use devices in a way that violates school policy it can lead to the device's confiscation for a period of time.

YEARS OF RESEARCH

With firewalls in place blocking video and audio streaming apps like YouTube and Spotify, it can help to combat distractions – yet distractions to videos or inappropriate online content are not the only things Christian classrooms should be aware of.

In 2020, researchers and professors David I. Smith, Kara Sevensma, Marjorie Terpstra, and Steven McMullen put together a three-year study on the use of technology in Christian schools titled *Digital Life Together: The Challenge of Technology for Christian Schools*. This comprehensive study relied on a variety of research methods from documentary

3 THINGS WE NEED TO TELL OUR KIDS ABOUT CHATGPT

by Jon Dykstra

ChatGPT and the many other new AI text generators might strike parents as problematic, since kids are now able to turn to this tool and, with just a few prompts, churn out their homework. Need a 600-word essay on the biblical perspective on why abortion is wrong? ChatGPT can output it in less time than it'll take most students to type the request.

Isn't that cheating?

Yes, if the teacher wanted students to write it on their own.

But it also isn't hard to imagine how teachers could also incorporate AI tools into lessons on not only writing, but editing and analysis. How good is the AI essay? Where is it weak, and what might it be missing? Did the opening grab you? Would its argument be more powerful as a dialogue? What other prompts could we use to tighten it up?

AI possibilities are enormous but yes, ChatGPT does also open up new temptations for kids to shirk the work they are supposed to be doing on their own. That means that we, as parents, are going to have to remind and reinforce to our kids a few important points:

1. **God loves a hard-won C.** Or to put it another way, God doesn't care about your marks: if you get a low grade but tried hard, great, but He hates an ill-gotten A. And your parents think the very same.
2. **Cheating hurts you** (Prov. 10:2). A basketball player might be able to build a robot that shoots better than he does, but it isn't going to help him learn how to shoot. If an assignment is intended to help a student learn to write, getting someone or something to write it cheats the student out of what they could have learned. Cheating is also a matter of character – if you'll cheat on something as little as an essay, what kind of person are you becoming? You do become what you do.
3. **Knowing how to write remains an important skill even in the era of AI**, because of all the skills a student has to learn to be able to write like: research, organizing thoughts, and learning to discern truth from error and stronger points from weaker ones. That'll help you write an essay, but also choose a career, and even assess who you might want to marry.



video, interviews with students, staff, and teachers, as well as focus groups. Two of the authors, Marjorie Terpstra and David Smith, are researchers at Calvin University's education department. Something notable they found in their research was students' openness to talk about their online shopping habits during class. Smith noted:

"The most common form of distraction was going shopping. It wasn't playing games. It wasn't social media because that was mostly filtered out by the school. It's really quite a recent thing."

He mentions that distractions have always been a thing with or without technology in the class. Whether it's passing paper notes or a student hiding the book he's reading under his desk, it's not a new phenomenon. But, online shopping in class is something all too new. During one of the student interviews for the book, Smith mentions a student who was proactively

open with her shopping habits... in Bible class. She shared:

"It's great because in Bible class, you can take notes faster and you can get the assignments written faster, and then while the teacher's talking, you've got time to go shopping."

Smith says that parents and educators need to be aware of this online shopping phenomenon because this consumerism mindset is often something that is tossed under the rug:

"Access to sexual material online, access to the wrong views about sex, some worry about cyberbullying and violence and violent material and so on. Very little worry about shopping, right? Because that's not something that the Western middle-class Christians worry about very much, we're as gung ho about that as everybody else."

Smith says that as Christians, we need to be counter-cultural in not

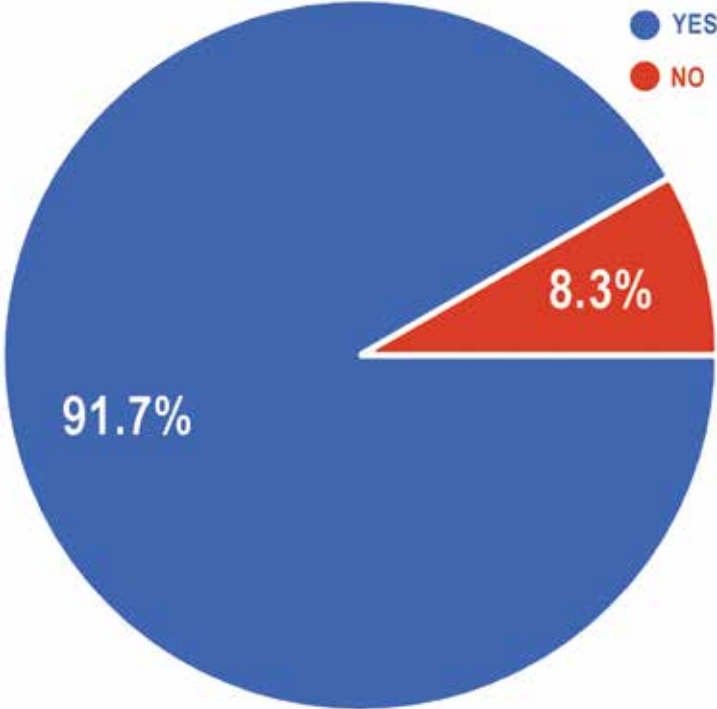
succumbing to the world's ideas of "spending time lusting after consumer goods." Parents and teachers need to change their mindset to acknowledge these discrepancies by teaching students to be discerning with their online habits.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION SHOULD BE DESIGNED TO EQUIP STUDENTS FOR THE REAL WORLD

Overall, in conducting this survey with Reformed schools it's evident that technology in the class is something that we cannot run from. Instead we should be teaching students to use it well. Terpstra alludes to an important truth, that Christian education is an opportunity for students to grow in community with one another, learning how to live and make choices.

"They get to enact their faith right now. It's not like you are in school so that someday when you grow up, you can enact your faith, but technology and other choices that we can make can help them to be Christians right now." RP

Does your school have a specific policy regarding the use of technology in the classroom or on the school property?



AI USED TO ENHANCE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION?

by Alexandra Ellison

It seems that every day there's a new headline talking about the next big thing Artificial Intelligence (AI) can do. It can be so overwhelming, that parents may be tempted to just push the whole business out of their minds.

But that could come with tradeoffs from missed opportunities. As AI expert Jason Toeves has pointed out, AI advances open up a realm of possibilities to transform the classroom into a dynamic space where learning is personalized and deeply relevant to each student's individual aspirations.

How can AI be used to personalize curriculum? Toeves shared an example of how a student who wants to become a hairdresser might ask, "How is this relevant to my future career?" Well, an educator could leverage ChatGPT – one of the growing number of text-based AI systems that create unique online text – to craft math worksheets tailored specifically to the art of hairstyling. This student would then see math that matters to her, connecting theoretical concepts with her real-world aspirations.

Toeves does, however, urge discernment in using AI, especially in subjects like History or Science.

"Using some of the platforms like ChatGPT out of the box can be helpful, but there should still be a teacher in between the student's interaction with that content. If you're creating customized, personalized lessons or homework for students, it could be really valuable.... Where I get concerned and would really advise caution is when you start to deal with Christian values, the world's values, in the sense of different topics."

In the survey, 75 per cent of teachers expressed their concern

about Artificial Intelligence (AI) being used in the classroom for homework assignments. Yet, Toeves urges teachers to not write off AI too soon – he says there is potential to help advance Christian education.

He says teachers should start slow by asking the question "What are those specific tasks as teachers that we want to do with our students that we can't do today, but would like to make that personalize learning or help them?"

Toeves says that teachers should encourage students to try Chat GPT for a worldview lesson. For example, he says that teachers should ask their students to try asking AI a set of questions... that they know it won't be able to answer.

"Use the word transvestite, which OpenAI's ChatGPT will push back on.... it's not a politically correct kind of thing. So if you craft questions that are very intentionally testing the [AI's] safety or moderation screens then it's really hard for students to just copy-paste [what it spits out]. They actually have to do the work and understand how to dig deeper and explain, why would there be these moderation barriers or safety barriers?"

After taking part in an exercise like this, teachers can then have an opportunity to emphasize Christian values. They can also teach students how to discern between what is true and politically correct, and what is artificial vs. what is human. As AI technologies quickly advance, Toeves says students will continue to use them outside of the classroom. Knowing this, teachers can get involved in discipling students to use AI well.

Real Talk just did an episode on tech in the classroom, so be sure to check out [RealTalkPodcast.ca](https://www.realtalkpodcast.ca) to learn more.

What teens want their parents to know about social media

by Alexandra Ellison

This past month I had an opportunity to interview a group of Christian teens, and ask, what do you wish your parents knew about social media? The full video is available online but here's some of the highlights.

"Sometimes it can be really distracting when you want to just do your work," one teen warned. That sentiment was echoed by others, like Makayla, who lamented how social media can eclipse real-world interactions. "If you are with a person, sometimes they're too busy on their phone to actually be with you."

However, beyond distractions and disconnects, there exists a deeper concern among some teens – a spiritual

unease. Isabella cautions against the intoxicating allure of social media fame, urging a vigilant approach. "Some people on these platforms might get caught up with the fame they might be getting.... And want what the public wants instead of what God wants."

It's not all problematic, though. Luke, in a testament to his faith, intertwines his religious convictions with his digital footprint. Makayla, too, sees social media as a conduit for sharing one's worldview. "You can tell your opinion on your worldview and share those views on social media."

Overall, what teens want their parents to understand is the multifaceted nature

of social media. It's not merely a tool for entertainment or communication but also a battleground for attention, a canvas for self-expression, and sometimes, a crucible for spiritual discernment. Go to [RPTV.ca](https://www.rptv.ca) or scan the QR code for more.



Is AI just another tool or something else?

by John Stonestreet & Shane Morris



We must ask how the technology fits into the Creation story lest it takes away from meaningful work and connection.

It's not uncommon to hear artificial intelligence described as a new "tool" that extends and expands our technological capabilities. Already there are thousands of ways people are utilizing artificial intelligence. All tools help accomplish a task more easily or efficiently. Some tools, however, have the potential to change the task at a fundamental level.

This is among the challenges presented by AI. If in the end it is not clear what AI is helping us to achieve more efficiently, this emerging technology will be easily abused. AI's potential impact on education is a prime example.

Since the days of Socrates, the goal of education was not only for students to gain knowledge but also the wisdom and experience to use that knowledge well. Whether the class texts appeared on scrolls or screens mattered little. Learning remained the goal, regardless of the tools used.

In a recent article at *The Hill*, English professor Mark Massaro described a "wave" of chatbot cheating now making it nearly impossible to grade assignments or to know whether students even complete them. He has received essays written entirely by AI, complete with fake citations and statistics but meticulously formatted to appear legitimate. In addition to hurting the dishonest students who aren't learning anything, attempts to flag AI-generated assignments, a process often powered by AI, have the potential to yield false positives that bring honest students under suspicion.

Some professors are attempting to make peace with the technology, encouraging

students to use AI-generated "scaffolding" to construct their essays. However, this is kind of like legalizing drugs: There's little evidence it will cut down on abuse.

Consider also the recent flood of fake news produced by AI. In an article in *The Washington Post*, Pranshu Verma reported that "since May, websites hosting AI-created false articles have increased by more than 1,000 percent." According to one AI researcher, "Some of these sites are generating hundreds if not thousands of articles a day. ... This is why we call it the next great misinformation superspreader."

Sometimes, this faux journalism appears among otherwise legitimate articles. Often, the technology is used by publications to cut corners and feed the content machine. However, it can have sinister consequences.

A recent AI-generated story alleged that Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's psychiatrist had committed suicide. The fact that this psychiatrist never existed didn't stop the story from circulating on TV, news sites, and social media in several languages. When confronted, the owners of the site said they republished a story that was "satire," but the incident demonstrates that the volume of this kind of fake content would be nearly impossible to police.

Of course, there's no sense in trying to put the AI genie back in a bottle. For better or worse, the technology is here to stay. We must develop an ability to evaluate its legitimate uses from its illegitimate uses. In other words, we must know what AI is *for*, before experimenting with what it can *do*.

That will require first knowing what human beings are for. For example,

Genesis is clear (and research confirms) that human beings were made to work. After the fall, toil "by the sweat of your brow" is a part of work. The best human inventions throughout history are the tools that reduce needless toil, blunt the effects of the curse, and restore some dignity to those who work.

We should ask whether a given application of AI helps achieve worthy human goals – for instance, teaching students or accurately reporting news – or if it offers shady shortcuts and clickbait instead. Does it restore dignity to human work, or will it leave us like the squashy passengers of the ship in Pixar's *Wall-E* – coddled, fed, entertained, and utterly useless?

Perhaps most importantly, we must govern what AI is doing to our relationships. Already, our most impressive human inventions – such as the printing press, the telephone, and the internet – facilitated more rapid and accurate human communication, but they *also* left us more isolated and disconnected from those closest to us. Obviously, artificial intelligence carries an even greater capacity to replace human communication and relationships (for example, chatbots and AI girlfriends).

In a sense, the most important questions as we enter the age of AI are not new. We must ask, *what are humans for?* And, *how can we love one another well?* These questions won't easily untangle every ethical dilemma, but they can help distinguish between tools designed to fulfill the creation mandate and technologies designed to rewrite it. RP

HEARD OF BREAKPOINT?

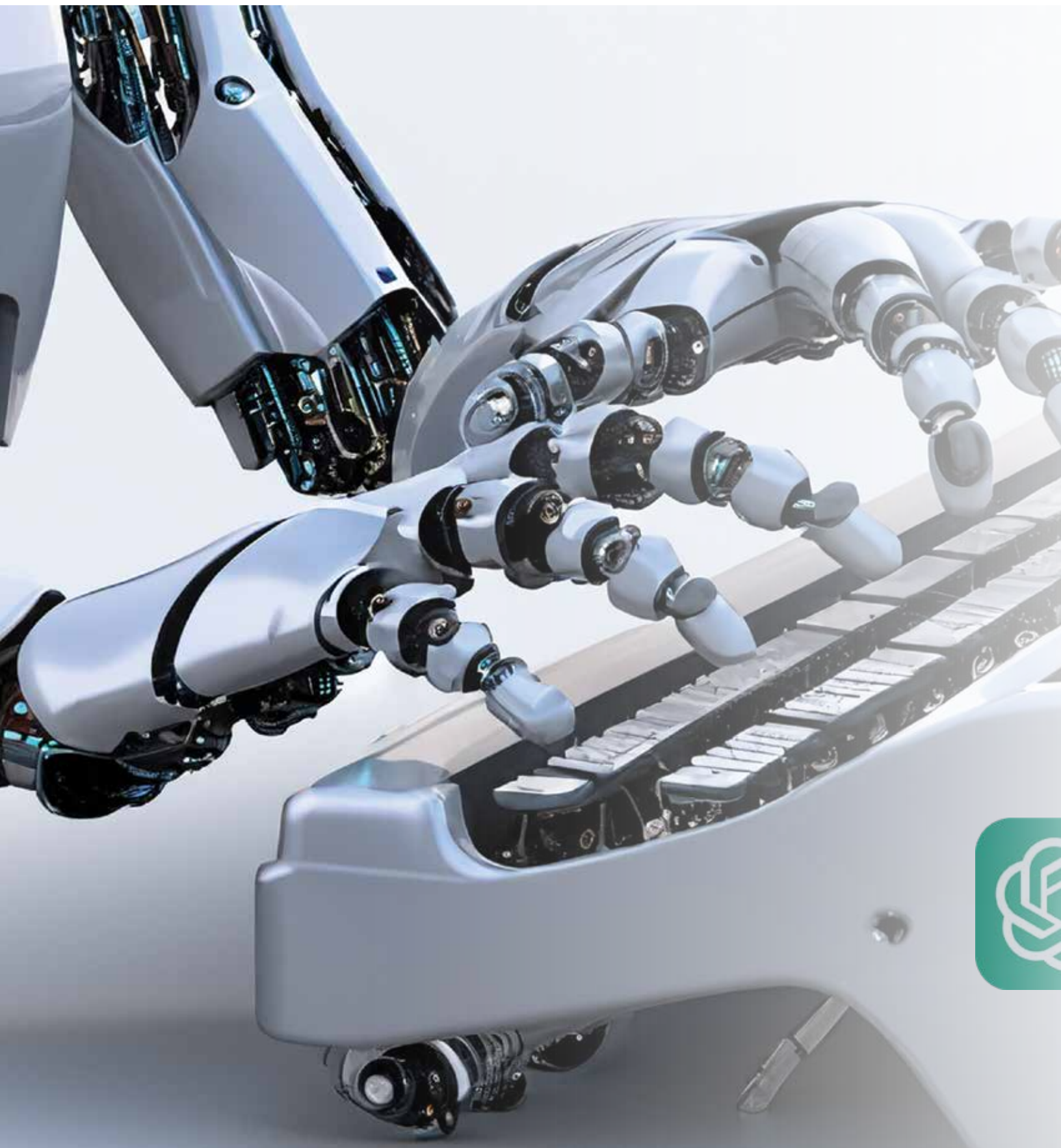
This column was first published on Jan. 8, 2024 to Breakpoint.org, and is reprinted with permission.

We're sharing it because it's a good article on an important topic. But we have another reason. We wanted to give RP readers this sample of Breakpoint's Daily Commentaries to, hopefully, pique your interest. Breakpoint has an American focus and is not specifically Reformed (though some writers are), so we differ in some notable respects: they are anti-evolution and RP is specifically 6-day creationists; and we'll highlight problems with the Pope both when he is acting Roman Catholic and when he is not while they stick to the

latter. So, as with everything, there is a need to read with discernment.

But when it comes to the hottest cultural battles of our day – sexuality, gender, the unborn, and God's sovereignty over "every square inch" of creation – they get it right *consistently*. And they are timely too, often replying to events that happened just the day before. That's why Breakpoint articles have been featured in our online "Saturday selections" column for years now.

If this article did grab your interest, then you may want to sign up for free at **Breakpoint.org** to get their daily commentaries delivered right to your inbox.



DEMYSTIFYING CHATGPT

Lots of potential, but the output
is only as valuable as the input

by Thomas VanDrunen

About a year ago, the research firm OpenAI made a version of its text-generation tools available for free use from its website. The chatbot, called ChatGPT, accepts a prompt from the user, such as a question or a request for a piece of writing, and responds with a seemingly original composition.

If you have experimented with this tool, you may be impressed with its ability to produce natural-sounding English paragraphs – or perhaps you find it eerie and wonder what changes tools like this will bring.

HOW LARGE LANGUAGE MODELS WORK

To demystify what language tools like ChatGPT are doing, here's a game you can try at home. To play, you'll need to select a book and pick a letter of the alphabet. I'll play along while I write.

A) One letter

I have a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* handy, and I choose the letter *m*. Open your book at random and find the first word on that page that contains your letter. For me, the word is *mind*. In the word that you found, what letter occurs immediately after the letter you were looking for, just as *i* comes next in *mind*? That letter is your new letter.

Now flip to a new page and repeat. The first *i* that I see is in the word *it*, so that means *t* is my next letter. Do it again. On the next page that I turn to I see *t* in the word *delectable*, so *a* is my next letter. So far my letters have been *m-i-t-a*.

On my next turn, I find *a* in *about* and take the letter *b*. I then find *b* in *Beelzebub* and take the letter *e*. Finally, I find *e* in the word *be*, and since it's followed by a space rather than another letter, this ends the game.

Looking back, the letters of the game make the word *mitabe*. That's not a real word, of course, but it's not

completely random either. The letter-level statistics of the English language led this process to make something that looks more English-like than we are likely to have gotten by grabbing six tiles out of a bag of Bananagrams.

B) Two letters

This game becomes more interesting if we level it up. Instead of looking for the first occurrence of our most recent letter, what if we searched for the first time our last two letters occur together?

If my last two letters were *be*, then I would need to a look for a word like *become* and take *c* as my next letter. The effect is that we are using a larger context as we string out our sequence of letters.

This version of the game is tedious to do by hand, but we can automate it using a computer. Drawing from the text of *Pilgrim's Progress* and using two letters of context, an algorithm replicating this game generates the text:

SETTERE HEY IST ING TO WAS NOR HOUT SAY
SUPOSTIANY

If we sift through the gibberish, we find five real English words – and the rest are at least pronounceable.

C) Four letters

If we try again, but this time with a context of four letters, we get:

WOULD BUT THIS ONE COUNTRY AND
SMOKE TO HAD KEPT

Although this is nonsense, all the words are real, and shorter strings of words could make sense together.

D) Nine letters

Finally, if we level up the game to use nine characters of context, sentences begin to take shape:

SO CHRISTIAN AND HOPEFUL I
PERCEIVE IS AGAINST A WALL

Grammar aside, this is remarkably close to real English.

WHEN IT GETS BIGGER STILL

To get a layman's understanding of how technology like ChatGPT works, imagine a great leveling-up of this game. Instead of being played on one laptop, it is run on giant server farms of leading tech companies. Instead of using *Pilgrim's Progress* as a source text, it is trained on humankind's entire digitized corpus. Instead of using a few letters of context, it uses a sophisticated model of human language. And instead of using a starting letter, the process is induced by a question or request from a user.

When you enter a prompt into ChatGPT, you are really asking a statistical question: Based on information gathered from innumerable digital texts, what is the most likely response to this prompt?

I tried giving ChatGPT the prompt: "Versify the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism into common meter so that it could be sung by a congregation." It responded with:

*In whom is all my trust and joy,
My comfort and salvation?
In Jesus Christ, the sinless One,
The source of my redemption.
My only comfort here on Earth,
My only hope in heaven,
Is that I am not my own, but His,
For all my sins are forgiven.*

The meter is forced, but one has to admit that many would-be hymnwriters have done worse.

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF TEXT-GENERATORS

ChatGPT and similar tools that generate text or images are one example of advances in technology that use algorithms built from data rather than being

human-handcrafted. You probably have used some of them: data-generated algorithms can identify faces in photographs, control autonomous vehicles, make medical diagnoses, and detect fraudulent transactions.

One effect of this trend is that the technologies become more difficult to understand, even for experts, since the tools are often shaped by deep patterns in the training data that are beyond human perception. They exude something of a magical quality, especially when they are presented with evocative terms like *artificial intelligence*.

Yet it is important for Christians not to attribute anything magical to unfamiliar technologies. Even without precise expertise in trending technology, we still can develop an informed awareness of the benefits and risks.

A) Output only as good as the input

For one, technology generated from data is only as good as the data it is generated from. A tool like ChatGPT reflects the attributes of the texts that it is trained on.

I gave ChatGPT the prompt, "Explain how the Auburn Affirmation affected the career of J. Gresham Machen" [Editor's note: Machen is one of the founders of the OPC denomination]. It responded with a page and a half of text that got the basic facts right and read like an answer on an essay test.

But what stood out to me was the uniformly positive terms it used when referring to Machen. He was a "staunch defender of conservative, orthodox Christianity," to which he had "unwavering commitment," making a "courageous stand against the Auburn Affirmation" and founding the OPC, "where he could continue to champion conservative Reformed theology."

No doubt readers will be sympathetic to this portrayal. But it is worth asking why ChatGPT would give Machen heroic verbs and adjectives while describing the proponents of the Auburn Affirmation in dry, factual terms. My speculation is that people interested enough in Machen to write about him have tended to be his admirers, and so ChatGPT is imitat-

ing the dominant sentiment in material about Machen.

But does this pass the shoe-on-the-other-foot test? What would ChatGPT produce if we gave it a prompt for which most of its source material was written by enemies of the gospel?

B) Truth isn't a particular priority

Furthermore, the fact that these tools produce the most probable response to a prompt, based on the data they are trained on, means that truth itself is not a particular priority. I once asked ChatGPT who was the most famous person to play against the eighteenth-century chess-playing automaton known as the Turk (actually an elaborate hoax). The response mentioned Napoleon Bonaparte and Benjamin Franklin – each of whom did face off against the Turk at one point – but it went on to claim that "one of the most famous opponents of the Turk was the Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart," describing their chess match in dramatic detail. This appears to have been synthesized whole cloth – I can't trace down any verification that Mozart ever encountered the Turk.

One of my colleagues at Wheaton College, where I teach, described how he caught a student passing off a ChatGPT-generated term paper as his own work. The paper was more-or-less B+ quality, and its bibliography had respectable-looking citations. As it turned out, though, ChatGPT had made the citations up: the claimed authors were real scholars and the journals were real, but the articles themselves didn't exist. This is what we can expect when the most probable response is not the most truthful response.

C) Temptation to students

This serves to highlight the most obvious risk induced by ChatGPT and similar tools: it provides a new and perfectly convenient way to plagiarize. A student – or a professional writer, for that matter – can whip out a paper in seconds by giving a prompt to a free online tool.

At present, teachers can use services that detect AI-origin of text (itself an application of data-driven algorithms),

”
*ChatGPT's answers
are only as good as
the fallible human-
produced text it is
trained on.*

but we can expect that successive generations of text-producing tools will prove to be better at eluding detection. One can imagine an arms race ensuing between text generators and generated-text detectors, with teachers never being able to trust their students again. And what of the rights of the original authors whose work is used to train these tools?

D) Do away with drudgery

On the other hand, it is all too easy to bemoan the potential harms in a new technology and to overlook how it can be used for good. Tools like ChatGPT can be used not only as a cheat for writing, but also as writing aides: You can feed it a paragraph you have written and ask it to polish it up – make it more formal, or less formal, or more succinct, or with a more varied vocabulary. It can act, in a way, as a smart thesaurus.

Another colleague of mine told of a student who defended the use of ChatGPT in writing a paper as a natural progression from tools that are already accepted: If we use spellcheck to eliminate spelling errors and Grammarly to fix syntax, then isn't it only wise to use the latest tools to improve our rhetoric as well?

One may quibble with this student's logic, but technological changes throughout history have automated menial tasks, allowing humans to focus on things that are more meaningful. After all, some writing tasks are so much drudgery. You do not want your pastor using ChatGPT to write a sermon, but perhaps you wouldn't begrudge a businessperson

using an automated writing tool that can turn sales data into a quarterly report.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Text-generation tools are part of a suite of data-derived technologies that have gotten much media attention and that seem to have the power to change society as much as the internet and smartphones have done, if not more.

How should we live in light of advancements in science and technology? There are many ways Christians should not respond: we shouldn't idolize technology or make a false gospel out of it – we should not share the world's fascination for the next new thing or hope for scientific deliverance from life's problems. But neither should we approach it with fear or regard it with superstition.

I also would argue that it's irresponsible to ignore it.

First, to any extent that we use tools like ChatGPT, we should see to it that we work with complete integrity. This is in the spirit of Paul's exhortation to Timothy that in his ministry of the Word he should be "a worker who has no need to be ashamed" (2 Tim. 2:15) – whatever our calling, our work should be worthy of approval. Students at any level of schooling should note their school's and teachers' policy on writing assistants and follow them scrupulously.

The Christian school that my children attend has ruled that no use of ChatGPT is appropriate for any of their schoolwork, and, with admirable consistency, they have banned the use of Grammarly as well. Some of my colleagues have experimented with allowing limited use of ChatGPT as a writing aide in college courses, but with clearly-defined boundaries, including that students must cite to what extent ChatGPT was used. For any professional or personal use of these tools as writing aides, we should ask ourselves whether we are presenting our work honestly.

Second, we should exercise a healthy skepticism toward material generated by tools like this. One use of ChatGPT is as a replacement for a search engine when looking up information. You can Google "how to keep wasps out of my humming-

bird feeder" and receive a list of websites, each website giving advice about bird feeder maintenance; alternately, you can ask the same question to ChatGPT and receive a single, succinct summary of tips that it has synthesized from various sources. There is a pernicious draw to attributing authority to information delivered to us by computers.

We should remember, though, that ChatGPT's answers are only as good as the fallible human-produced text it is trained on. Moreover, for the sake of loving our neighbors, we should bear in mind that tools trained on data will reflect, if not amplify, the biases and prejudices of its input.

Finally, if we use algorithms to manipulate text, we must treat the holy things of God as holy. In the experiment at the beginning of this article, I sampled letters from the text of *Pilgrim's Progress*. When I do a similar experiment in one of the courses I teach, some students are curious what would happen if we sample from a book of the Bible. But I believe that is not a respectful use of God's Word.

Earlier I showed the result of asking ChatGPT to versify part of the Heidelberg Catechism, but I certainly do not advocate using AI-generated texts in congregational singing. One feature of ChatGPT is that it can imitate the style of an author or genre. You could ask ChatGPT to write a story in the style of the Bible, but don't – that would be blasphemous.

I find the Westminster Larger Catechism's words about the sixth commandment – that it requires "a sober use of meat, drink, physick, sleep, labour, and recreations" – to be applicable to many other areas. Let's pray for wisdom to discern the sober use of humanity's tools in every age. RP

The author is a member of Bethel Presbyterian in Wheaton, Illinois, and professor of computer science at Wheaton College. This is reprinted with permission of the OPC denomination magazine New Horizons (OPC.org/nh.html) where it first appeared in their January 2024 issue.

Fostering? I could never!

by Mark Wanders

“Oh, I could never foster. I could never part with kids after having them in my home for a while. It would break my heart. Fostering is not for me.”

So many times we’ve had people say things like this to us.

It can be a bit awkward. I mean... we foster... and we have for years. What’s that say about us and our hearts? You think that we don’t grow attached? Or that goodbyes are easy? Or that there’s no risk to our emotions?

It’s not like we are so uniquely cut out for the task. Fostering is hard work and time consuming. It stretches you and can be taxing on home life.

But it’s also beautiful in that it teaches you to love a stranger; to embrace a needy child. In essence, it’s the core of the gospel at work: to love a stranger. As former strangers now loved by God, wouldn’t He in turn want us to love strangers? It seems pretty important to Jesus in light of eternity.

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matt. 25:44-46).

Imagine... making time to care for the needs of strangers can affect our eternal destiny!

I wonder if people who say, “I could never do that,” are also covering up a bit of a fear of the unknown, or attempting to disqualify themselves, or maybe just justifying not interrupting their life with other kids. Whatever the reasoning, be sure to talk about it with God.

Maybe the timing is not right for you, or you have circumstances that are not conducive to fostering at this time. That’s ok. But for the most part *fostering is something everyone can participate in*, especially if you confess Christ and keep in mind what is important to Him.

TAKING A HUGE RISK

There’s a point where you have to set aside your worries and fears (says me the worrywart) to not focus on the hurt of goodbyes, but instead to think about the joy of hellos. To think about welcoming a child (yes, the least of these) into your home. With thousands of kids in need of care right now, there’s

opportunity for you to open your door, and welcome one of them into your heart and your home.

And yes, opening the door of your home, means opening your heart. And opening your heart means taking a huge risk... to love and to care for someone. When we love and care for someone, we risk that someday we may have to part ways, and say goodbye. But, better to have loved and feel the pain of separation, than not to have loved at all.

We were made for relationship. We welcome people into our lives all the time: a new birth, a new friend, a new neighbor, a new wife, a new husband, a new family member, a new community, and maybe a new foster child. And whenever we welcome someone in, we know that at some point we’ll have to say goodbye. Kids grow up and move out, we might travel around, we might leave the country, and any one of us might die at any time.

We part ways with people all the time. Life is full of goodbyes, and sometimes heart-wrenching goodbyes that leave us marked forever. Love is like that – it’s risky. And while we live on this side of heaven, love will be severed at some point.

But as in any relationship, we don’t focus on the goodbyes. We focus on the time we get to be together, and then make the best of it.

So, if you’re still thinking you are not even slightly prepared to foster because you can’t handle the pain of separation, I beg to differ. We face separation in all relationships. And if it’s fear of the unknown or not wanting interruption, well, that can be challenged.

What if your life up to this point has been the training ground for you to take in someone new, to take in a stranger to love? What if life training for you included being stretched in new ways through fostering?

OUR STORY

My wife and I have six children. They’re all grown up now. All of them except for one have moved out of the house.

We often got strange looks when traveling about as family. People would ask, “Are these all your kids?” (No, we just collect them as we go.) “Yes, they’re all our kids.”

“Must be a lot of work!”

“Well, they didn’t all come at once and they all do help each other.”

“Same woman?”

“Yes, same woman.”

And people would walk away in amazement. One guy pulled me aside and said, “Must’ve cost you a fortune!” I responded, “But the rewards far outweigh the costs.”

Contrary to today’s cultural ignorance, large families are a wonderful thing. Kids are not a “cost,” they are a reward, a gift. And you raise them to contribute. Not only to society, but to the Kingdom of God.

Despite some bickering and some fighting once in a while, there is a beauty to forming your own little family community that interacts with the broader community. Family is the place we learn how to live together as disciples of Jesus, how to love, forgive, grow in patience, accommodate, take care of the needs of others, reveal blind spots, and discuss how to live in our crazy world. Family is the training ground from which we shoot forth our kids like arrows into the world to go and make a difference in the name of Jesus. *Life can be dreadfully lonely without family.*

When a couple of our oldest kids moved out of our home, we then had empty bedrooms. We wanted to fill them and invite others into that “family” thing we do, learning to live together as disciples of Jesus. So we thought to foster. Opening our doors to new children meant introducing them to Jesus. No force, just display.

We called a family meeting to share with our kids our idea to begin fostering and to inquire of them if they’d be supportive of that. All were in favor (whether moved out or not).

ONE AD, ONE PHONE CALL

And then something crazy happened. My wife Joanne saw an ad in the newspaper for Bridgeway Homes, a fostering agency out in Cobourg, Ontario. She called and inquired about fostering. After a number of months of training and inspections, we became an official fostering home for them. But here’s the thing: Bridgeway only ever put out one ad in the Niagara area newspapers. And Joanne was the only *one* person to respond to it. Coincidence? I don’t think so.

Through Bridgeway we began fostering. Numerous children came to stay with us, mostly for respite, so usually it was for one or two weeks at a time. One girl, a young teen, who had experienced a lot of moving around, got approval in mid-November to stay with us over Christmas and into the new year. She had had some deep questions about life that she had unpacked with me in my office and was so content to stay with our family that she was bursting with joy the day she unpacked. “Mark, I get to spend Christmas with you guys! I’m so excited!”

Two days later the Children’s Aid stopped by our house when she was at school. They grabbed her stuff, told us they had found a placement for her and had to act quickly, and then went to pick her up from school to take her away. No goodbyes.

Man, that hurts. One thing that hurts more than goodbyes, is not having a chance to say goodbye. I was crushed for days. “Mark.... Christmas with you guys....”

Yes, fostering can hurt. I always hope that the kids we were



Mark and AJ some years back

blessed to have would be blessed in return for having met us.

And then along came AJ, the foster boy we had for seven years. He had no idea of who God was, but after only 4 days with us he was already asking if he could pray. And in less than a month, he was asking my wife and I if he could call us “Mom” and “Dad”. About 3 years ago, when hospitalized, we were told he would die, so we experienced those kinds of goodbyes. But God’s plan was recovery! And now recently, due to increased care needs, he was moved out of our home – another goodbye.

Fostering... it’s living, loving, laughing, leaving.... but often lasting.

EVERYONE CAN PARTICIPATE

Remember I said, “fostering is something that everyone can participate in.” I did not say fostering is something that everyone can *do* (although I think most can). But fostering is something everyone can participate in. This is where “wrap around” is key. If you cannot foster yourself, everyone can help – everyone can *wrap support arms around someone who is fostering.*

You can open your home for visits or respite, you can drop in

Fostering is something everyone can participate in

and help out, you can make a meal for the foster family, you can take foster kids out on trips with your kids, you can support the foster parents, you can offer to drive for outings, you can ask how to be of help, and you can pray for all involved.

DISPELLING A FEW EXCUSES

But I just can't.

How about talking about it? And also take it to God. List off all your reasons and tell Him why you can't. It's not like God will be shocked or overwhelmed. But He may ask you to shift from "I can't" to "trust Me." And if you seriously can't take someone in yourself, find someone who did take a child in and ask how you can be of help, how you can be part of a "wrap around."

I'm too busy.

When in life will you not be busy? It's generally when we are laying on a hospital bed or recovering at home that we finally slow down and realize we've been occupying ourselves with a whole lot of "stuff."

And in times we are not occupied, we are preoccupied. We like to busy ourselves! Being busy is what we gravitate to. Often we hear, "So, are you keeping busy?" The challenge for the rest of our life is to create space in our schedules — space in which we allow God to act. Maybe even space for a certain child to enter into.

The timing is not right.

We can always come up with reasons why the timing is not right. We're too young. We're just married. Our family is too big. Our family is too small. We don't know what to do. The system is too complicated. We're too old. And the list goes on.

Analyze your situation and write down what it is that you think is getting in the way and see if, how, and when the obstacles can be removed. Some might be legitimate, others might be you just making excuses. But do determine a time.

Fostering is something that everyone can participate in. I don't say this to make you feel guilty, I say this to make you think about it. I have shared our experience; yours will be different.

THINK PRO-LIFE

Perhaps you've never considered that being pro-life is synonymous with being "pro-fostering." Pro-life means having an open door. If someone didn't abort as we've asked, and now can't raise their child, it's logical that a pro-lifer would step up to help. And that may include fostering.

But wait, what about all the sign-up requirements for fostering agencies?

When they come to assess your home and start asking you about life, simply state what's right and true and allow the chips to fall where they may. Be shrewd as serpents, innocent as doves. We proclaim truth even in this, and suffer the consequences if need be (or the agencies do if their requirements exclude us). But imagine if fostering agencies had 500 Christian homes in the waiting and it was only one or two silly stipulations getting in the way. That would make it their problem. But you and me would stand ready to serve.

Obviously in all circumstances you do not want to jeopardize your own health or family. It's of no use stepping up to help another child or family only to ruin your own. But just be honest with yourself and your family whether the reasons for avoiding fostering or a fostering "wrap around" are substantial enough to wait for another time. We may set the bar so high for an "ideal time" that it never comes. And we'd say that old line once again, "Fostering? I could never!"

No, we don't want to go there. Remember, these things are of eternal significance.

"God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out prisoners with singing." – Ps. 68:6 RP

*Mark Wanders lives in Smithville, ON with his wife Joanne.
He writes regularly on his blog site: www.theartisanpost.com.*

Safe Families is another way you can help

Back in our May/June 2023 issue we reported on "Reformed communities stepping up to provide 'Safe Families.'" This was an organization taking off in the US and Canada that sought to provide short term help for families going through difficulties. As the article details, "What sets [Safe Families] apart is that they do this outside of the government system.

Yet their effectiveness has made them a go-to place for child welfare agencies, who regularly refer families to them, encouraging these families to make use of their care so that they don't get into a crisis mode where the government needs to intervene."

Scan the QR code to read the rest or find it at ReformedPerspective.ca





Growing In Grace Equipping For Excellence Learning For Life

Dufferin Christian School
invites applications for full-time openings at the
ELEMENTARY & HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL
for the 2024-2025 school year.

Both B. Ed and CCRTC graduates are encouraged to apply. An interest in teaching French is considered an asset.

DCS is a K-12 Reformed school with over 280 students located 45 minutes southwest of Winnipeg, Manitoba. It offers a highly supportive community, attractive facilities, competitive wages and a friendly atmosphere.

Applicants must be communicant members of a Canadian Reformed Church or a Church in ecclesiastical fellowship with the same.

Applications should be sent to Dufferin Christian School
Box 1450, Carman, MB, Canada, ROG OJO
Attention: Mr. Julian Visscher
OR EMAILED TO: boardsecretary@dufferinchristian.ca

For more information, please contact:
Principal: Dr. Chris deBoer at 204-745-2278 principal@dufferinchristian.ca
Chairman: Mr. Anton Borst chairman@dufferinchristian.ca



Growing In Grace Equipping For Excellence Learning For Life

Dufferin Christian School
invites applications for the role of an additional
VICE PRINCIPAL
for the 2024-2025 school year.

DCS is a K-12 Canadian Reformed school with over 280 students located in Carman, Manitoba. It offers a highly supportive community, an enthusiastic and cohesive staff, a robust administrative support team, and an experienced and committed board.

Interested individuals are encouraged to reach out to the current Principal or Board chairman for more details, and to discuss the roles and responsibilities.

Applicants must be communicant members of a Canadian Reformed Church or a Church in ecclesiastical fellowship with the same.

Applications should be sent to Dufferin Christian School
Box 1450, Carman, MB, Canada, ROG OJO
Attention: Mr. Julian Visscher
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For more information, please contact:
Principal: Dr Chris deBoer, 204-745-2278, principal@dufferinchristian.ca
Chairman: Mr. Anton Borst, 204-745-8935, chairman@dufferinchristian.ca

Coaldale Christian School

CCS is a growing K-12 Reformed School with over 200 students in beautiful Southern Alberta, offering Prairie town living in an amiable community of believers. We are 15 minutes away from the historic city of Lethbridge (pop. 104,000), and 2.5 hours from the heart of the Rocky Mountains. \$400,000 gets you into an established neighbourhood, with new subdivisions to select from. 330+ days of full sunshine comes free.

coaldalechristianschool.com



Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.
Psalm 119:105

Inviting applications to fill the
following positions:

Elementary Teacher
Special Education
Administrator
Music Teacher

Duties to commence for the
2024/2025 School Year

Applicants must be members of a Canadian Reformed Church or one with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship.

Inquiries may be directed to
Principal, Jeff Van Raalte
(403) 345-4055 | jeff.vanraalte@coaldalecs.com

Applications may be sent to
Chair of Personnel Committee, Pete Harthoorn
peter.harthoorn@mnp.ca

Due to a rapidly growing school community,

Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elementary School



invites applications for the following positions for the 2024-2025 school year:

FULL TIME JUNIOR TEACHER
FULL TIME LEARNING RESOURCE COORDINATOR
FULL TIME PRIMARY TEACHER

We also have
possible openings for

FULL OR PART TIME PRIMARY TEACHERS
FULL OR PART TIME EDUCATIONAL OR TEACHER ASSISTANTS

ACRES is set on a 100-acre property in a beautiful rural area in Niagara/Haldimand. We serve several Reformed churches in the area and are blessed with a close-knit staff, a supportive community and a student population of about 250.

For more information, please contact Mr. Clarence Blokhuis at principal@acreschool.ca. Applicants should be members of a Canadian Reformed Church or sister church.

Applications for teachers should include resume, statement of faith, philosophy of education and two letters of reference.

Applications for educational assistants should include resume, a statement of faith and two letters of reference.

Applicants interested in a part-time job-sharing position are also welcome to apply. Applications may be sent to hrcomm@acreschool.ca

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+

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particularly (but not limited to) those with expertise in English, HASS, Design + Technology

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- be able to use cutting edge resources and technology to enhance teaching.
- be able to be registered to teach in Tasmania and work with vulnerable people.

Competitive salaries cover all award entitlements as listed in
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INTERESTED?

- For more information contact Mr D Coote - Principal cooted@jcs.tas.edu.au
- Find application forms at www.jcs.tas.edu.au/employment
- Send completed applications to Mrs K Wielstra - Assoc Sec wielstrak@jcs.tas.edu.au



Free Reformed School Association TAS t/a
John Calvin School, Launceston
49-53 Howick St
South Launceston TAS 7249



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UNSURE WHAT TO DO NEXT SCHOOL YEAR?

ARPA Canada is running a 4-month internship to train Reformed young people – ages 18-25 – for political action.

WORLDVIEW TRAINING

Interns will participate in seminars, book discussions, and reading & writing assignments designed to better understand what it means to be involved in the public square as a Christian.

POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

Interns will gain practical experience working half-time for an MP on Parliament Hill. There is no better way to understand Canada's political system than to be directly immersed in politics.



For more information, go to arpacanada.ca/internship



My Dog Ate the Evidence for Evolution

3 EVOLUTIONARY THEORIES THAT ARE BASED ON THE LACK OF EVIDENCE FOR EVOLUTION

by Jon Dykstra

There are plenty of great, readable books that expose the many problems with evolutionary theory. These include Gordon Wilson's *Darwin's Sandcastle*, Change Laura Tan and Rob Stadler's *The Stairway to Life*, and Marcos Eberlin's *Foresight: How the Chemistry of Life Reveals Planning and Purpose* (just to name a few).

But what about something shorter? My daughter is sometimes allowed to take a notecard full of key facts with her into a test. That's what I was looking for: not a

book-sized rebuttal, but something short enough to remember and use.

That meant it couldn't involve stacks of studies and countless facts to counter the evolutionists' mountain of materials. Those facts can be had, and include revealing quotes, like this infamous admission by one of the world's leading evolutionary biologists, Richard Lewontin (1929-2021). Back in 1997 he acknowledged that it wasn't the evidence that drove evolutionists to accept Evolution, but their ideology:

"Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science *in spite* of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite* of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite* of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.

"It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door."

As impressive as that admission is, it's just one guy. I was after something bigger, and also simpler – an argument where, even if I didn't recall all the details, I might still be able to recall and relay the gist of it.

What I found are three instances where evolutionists have accidentally acknowledged the lack of evidence for their theory. That acknowledgement comes, not from anything they've said, but instead by the "sub theories" they've offered to explain away the missing evidence. And what's the evidence for these "sub theories"? Only that Evolution needs them to be true.

This is akin to the student who, to explain why he hasn't handed in his homework, claims his dog ate it, and when he's asked for proof that his dog did indeed chow down on the assignment, he points to what's missing: "My dog must have eaten it, because my homework's not here, right?"

As his teacher knows, the missing paper isn't proof at all; the boy is simply presuming the very thing – that he actually wrote a paper – he was being asked to prove. And when he resorts to this kind of logical contortions, all it really evidences is that he has nothing better to offer.

I think the same is true in the three evolutionary examples that follow. The most compelling evidence on offer is only the lengths evolutionists are willing to go to, to prop up their theory.

TWO PILLARS

When it comes to the Theory of Evolution we all know the basics: once there was no life on this planet, but then sim-

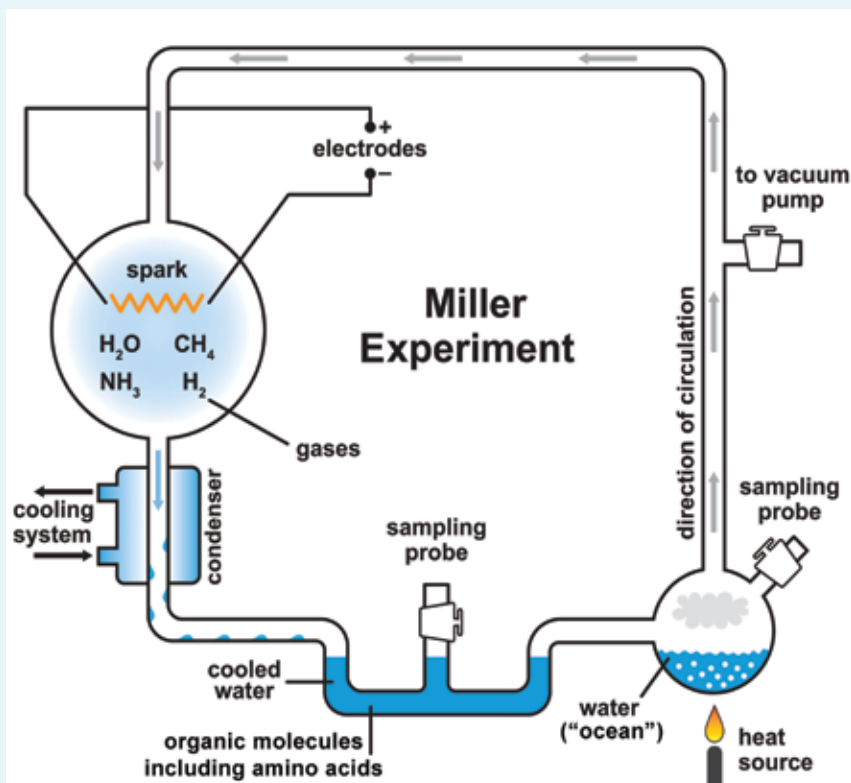
FAMOUS EVOLUTIONARY "PROOF" CAN'T TELL ITS RIGHT HAND FROM ITS LEFT

The Stanley Miller experiment (also known as the Miller-Urey experiment) consisted of a closed system with tubes connecting a heated water (ocean) chamber down below, with a gaseous chamber above, with sparks simulating early Earth lightning.

One of the problems with the Stanley Miller experiment is that it turns out amino acids come in left-hand and right-hand varieties – mirror images of each other – and the experiment produced equal quantities of each.

But our bodies don't use both. Living creatures use the left-hand sort, and just as you can't fit your right hand into a left glove, the cell can't use right-handed amino acids – they aren't a good fit. In fact, their presence can harm cells, and at a minimum, they would need to be sifted out. That means, even before the first cell ever formed, there would need to be some sort of mechanism present which could separate the righties from the lefties. That separation can be done in a lab through intelligent intervention. But who or what could do the selecting on early Earth after that lightning bolt blasts out that first batch of amino acids? Cells don't exist yet, so there are no cellular mechanisms present to do the separating – there's nothing in place.

It'd be more accurate to say the Stanley Miller experiment didn't produce building blocks of life so much as a muddled mess.



ple cells formed in the primordial soup. After millions of years, and through the process of natural selection, these simple cells eventually spawned more complex cells and even more complex organisms, until finally we arrived. Greg Koukl has called this the “Molecule to Man Hypothesis.”

And as Koukl also noted, if we’re going to take this nice story seriously, then evolutionists would have to prove two key things:

- 1) That life can come from non-life
- 2) That transitions from one kind to another do happen.

These two ideas are so pivotal to evolutionary theory that if they can’t both be proven, then Evolution wouldn’t have a leg to stand on.

1. LIFE FROM NON-LIFE

The idea that life came from non-life used to be known as *Spontaneous Generation*. Maggots, it was thought, were spontaneously formed in dead rotting meat, and many believed that mice and flies were formed the same way. After a bit of investigation this was shown to be untrue.

Today the idea persists under a different name: *Abiogenesis* (literally life from not life). Everyone knows maggots could never spontaneously form from non-living matter, but what if the organisms being formed were much simpler? What if it was only a single cell? And what if we gave it millions and millions of years to develop? Could it happen then?

Well, if you read the scientific literature you’ll hear that yes, under those circumstances abiogenesis could happen, and indeed did happen. However, even though scientists are very sure it happened, even they’ll admit they haven’t worked out exactly *how* it happened.

But isn’t Evolution supposed to explain the “how” part?

To be fair, they do have a variety of interesting ideas, but all of their proposals have serious problems.

Let’s take a look at the best-known

example – the Stanley Miller experiment in 1953. Though it happened 70 years ago, this experiment is still getting in the news today, because it was so influential. For decade upon decade the experiment has been cited in textbooks as proof that life could arise through a series of random chemical reactions. It’s so pivotal, that many a time it is presented as *the* proof for life from non-life, with no others given.

So what happened in the experiment? Miller subjected a mixture of chemicals to an electric spark. The mixture of chemicals was supposed to mimic Earth’s early atmosphere and the electric spark was supposed to represent lightning.

A week later, Miller discovered that some amino acids had been formed, which was significant because amino acids are a vital component of living cells. It should be noted though, that amino acids are not living themselves, but are merely a necessary component of cells. So they are a basic building block of life in much the same way that steel is a necessary building block for cars. These amino acids were presented as proof that life could arise from random chemical interactions.

Consider for a moment how overstated this claim was. Miller hadn’t shown how life could be created from non-life, he had only shown how one necessary component might be formed. Going back to the car analogy, this is akin to someone zapping a rock of particularly pure ore and then declaring that the puddling blob of molten metal that results proves a car could come about by chance.

Overstatement aside, there were other significant problems with the experiment and its results. For example, at one point many evolutionists thought that Earth’s early atmosphere was in some ways the opposite of what we have today: they believed back then it was hydrogen rich and lacking oxygen. Why? Well, at least in part because they needed it to be that way; oxygen would have interfered with the chemical reactions that they needed. And yes, to work, Miller’s experiment required a lot

of hydrogen and absolutely no oxygen.

But today even evolutionists will concede that our environment has always had oxygen in it. And that means that the amino acids could never have formed here on Earth via anything remotely resembling Miller’s method.

THE FIX: EXTRATERRESTRIAL LIFE FROM NON-LIFE

So here’s where things get interesting. Put yourself into the shoes of an atheistic scientist who knows that Abiogenesis couldn’t have happened here on Earth. What “logical” conclusion will he be forced to draw? That’s right – *life must have originated on some other planet first, and then come to Earth!*

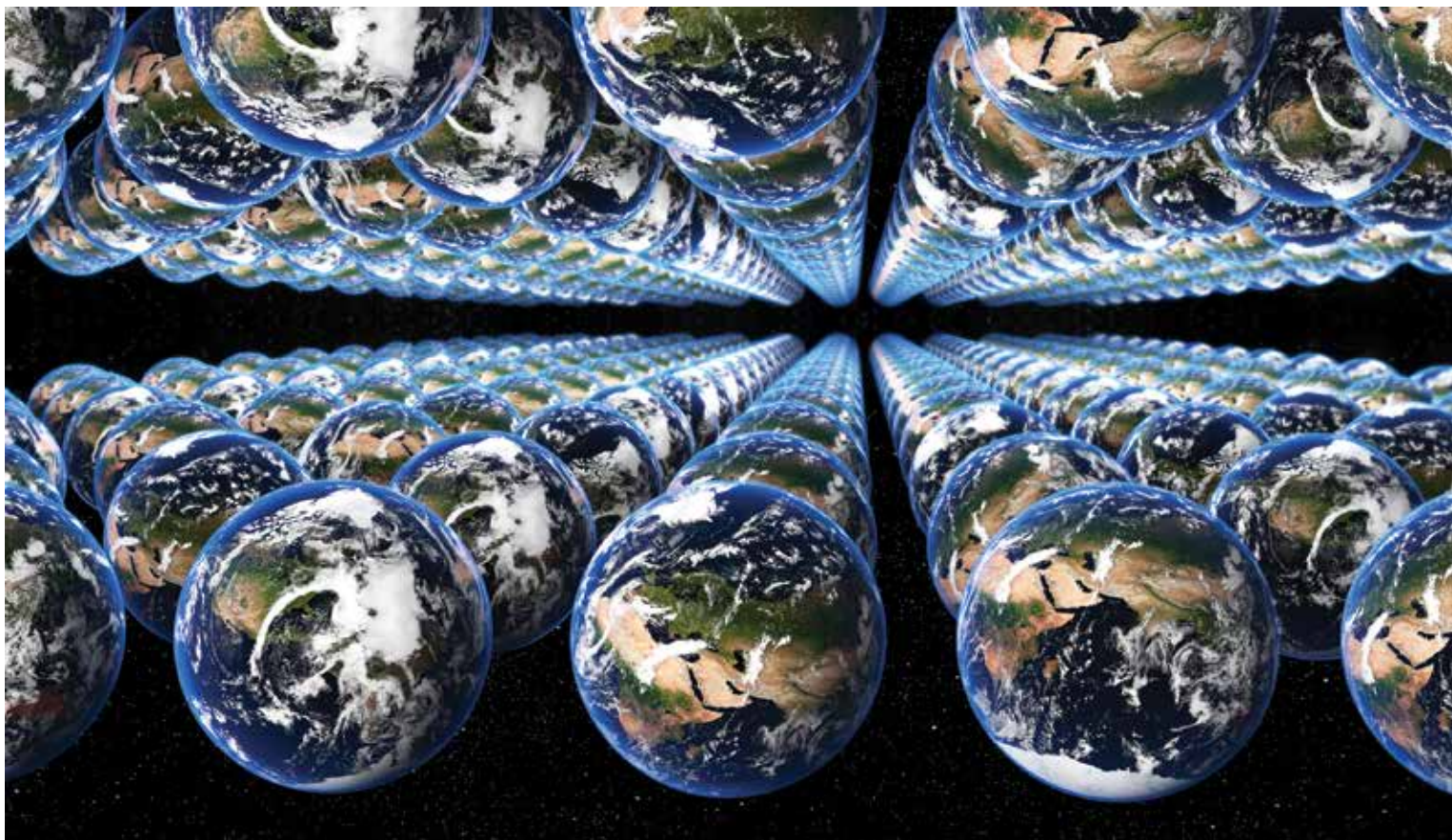
This idea is known as *Panspermia* and while it’s not evolutionists’ consensus position, that it is seriously discussed at all only emphasizes the problem that evolutionists have with life arising here on Earth.

The only “evidence” for Panspermia is that life exists here on Earth and it seems impossible for it to have started via evolutionary processes on Earth... therefore it must have started elsewhere. So Panspermia – this theory of an extraterrestrial origin for life – is actually an acknowledgement that evolutionists can’t explain how life could have arisen on Earth.

2. TRANSITIONS FROM ONE KIND TO ANOTHER

Things don’t get any easier for evolutionists when it comes to transitional forms. Evolutionary theory says that molecules evolved into man over millions of years and via millions of tiny changes. So when we start searching through the fossil record we should come across literally millions of transitional forms as one species turned into an entirely new one.

Now, depending on which side of the creation/evolution debate you are talking to, the fossil record either doesn’t provide any examples of these transitional forms, or there are museums’ worth of such fossils. The *Archaeopteryx* has often been mentioned as a transition between dinosaurs and birds, and you can go



This multiverse theory has become a staple in Star Trek and Marvel superhero movies, but... there is no actual evidence for it.

to Creation.com or AnswersInGenesis.org, to learn about how it and other supposed transitional forms fails as a true transition.

(The short summary: if birds evolved from dinosaurs or reptiles, then feathers must have evolved from scales and their wings must have evolved from arms. The Archaeopteryx has true wings and detailed advanced feathers, similar to those of bird species today. It only seems fair that when evolutionists are asked for transitional forms between reptiles and birds they should have to produce the half feather, half scale versions – the true transitional forms. The Archaeopteryx is at best a questionable example of an intermediary stage.)

But what I want to highlight is the kind of argument evolutionists have to resort to if they acknowledge that there aren't good examples of transitions. How would they explain away that lack of evidence?

THE FIX: TRANSITIONS FEW AND FAR BETWEEN

Well, if someone absolutely refuses to believe in Creation, what “logical” conclusion will they be forced to come to? Then Evolution must have happened in quick spurts, leaving few evidences of transitions in the fossil record!

This theory is called *Punctuated Equilibrium* and was first proposed by Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge in 1972. Again, this theory is not based on the evidence, but rather the lack of it: we're missing the transitional forms that would be needed to prove Evolution, but since Evolution must be true – that presumption is beyond question – then Evolution must not need transitional forms all that badly after all.

Punctuated Equilibrium is an acknowledgement that evolutionists don't have the abundance of transitional forms that they expected to find. It's

also worth noting that until Gould and Eldredge, the lack of transitional forms was not really acknowledged. As Gould put it in 1977, “The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of palaeontology.” Creationists were pointing out the lack of transitional forms long before Gould and Eldredge...but secular scientists don't listen to creationists.

3. THE ANTHROPIC PRINCIPLE

At this point we should see the beginnings of a pattern in the Evolution/Creation debate. And the Anthropic Principle only makes that pattern all the more evident.

The phrase “Anthropic Principle” was first coined to describe the amazing way in which our universe seemed to be designed specifically for human life. For us to live here on Earth it seems we need physical constants, laws, and properties to fall within certain narrow ranges. In *Designer*

Universe: Intelligent Design and the Existence of God, authors Jimmy H. Davis and Harry L. Poe give these three examples:

- **Protons and electrons have to have just the right charge.** Atoms are composed of two charged particles: a positively charged proton and a negatively charged electron. The proton is 1,836 times larger than the electron and yet these two particles have exactly equal charges. If the two charges weren't exactly equal in magnitude, if say, there was a charge difference of only one part per billion, all the pieces of your body would fly apart.
- **Our Sun has to be just the right type of star.** The Sun is not a typical star, being bigger than 95 per cent of all other stars. These smaller stars aren't as hot so a planet would have to orbit much closer to stay warm enough. But at closer distances the rotation of a planet becomes locked so that one side always faces the star. This would cause one side of the planet to freeze and the other side to burn (sort of like our moon, or like Mercury). Additionally, our sun is a single star. 70 percent of stars are estimated to be binary or multiple star systems. It is hard to imagine how habitable planets could exist in such systems.
- **Jupiter is just what we need, just where we need it.** Jupiter turns out to be in just the right orbit and the right distance away to protect Earth from bombardment by killer asteroids or comets. Jupiter's large size and high gravity makes it act as an asteroid and comet catcher. Some other stars have Jupiter-like planets orbiting them, but in most cases they are either in the wrong orbit, or are too near the sun, or may be spiraling inward toward the sun. While our Jupiter is necessary for life on Earth all the other "Jupiters" detected so far would prevent life from living in those systems.

These are just a few examples of the anthropic (man-centered) nature of our universe. When you add all the factors

together that would have to be just so for life to exist in our universe it turns out the odds against life are astronomical. The odds are so amazing even evolutionists are astounded. This makes the Anthropic Principle a powerful piece of evidence for a universe Designer.

THE FIX: AN INFINITE MULTIVERSE

But imagine you are an atheist and evolutionary scientist who has been confronted with the Anthropic Principle and the astronomical odds against life in this universe. What logical conclusion are you going to be forced to draw if you want to remain an atheist? That's right – if the odds are infinitely stacked against life in any one universe, wouldn't the odds even out considerably if there was an infinite number of universes? This universe would then just happen to be that one universe in a million billion where the odds all worked out in our favor.

This multiverse theory has become a staple in Star Trek and Marvel superhero movies, but once again there is no actual evidence for it. None at all. It's another evolutionary story used to fill in for a lack of evidence. Thus the Multiverse Theory is an acknowledgment of just how implausible it is that an undesigned universe would be so well-suited for life.

ONE LAST EXAMPLE

I'll include one bonus example of an evolutionary theory based on a lack of evidence: the Oort Cloud. This is a theorized cloud of icy planetesimals that are said to be on the outer fringes of our Solar System.


This cloud is beyond the limits of our current observational technology, so how do we know it is there? Because evolutionists need it to be. We still have comets, and if our Solar System is 4.6 billion years old, as evolutionists presume, then any icy comets passing around the Sun should long ago have melted away. So, the continuing existence of comets would seem to be evidence of a Solar System that is much much younger – just thousands, not billions of years old. But, no, evolutionists see them instead as evidence of a comet breeding ground way, way out there where billions of icy

chunks will sometimes bump into each other in just such a fashion as to direct an ice ball inward towards the Sun, starting a new comet. So the evidence for the Oort Cloud is lacking, and based only on the fact that Evolution needs it to exist.

CONCLUSION

I haven't tried here to provide facts to counter the evidence for Evolution. Instead what we've explored is how evolutionists themselves have highlighted the lack of evidence for their theory by coming up with theories to explain away that lack.

Evolution's two pillars – life from non-life, and species' transition to new species – were supposed to have lots of proof to back them up. But evolutionists have had to come up with "sub theories" – Panspermia and Punctuated Equilibrium – to explain why that proof is missing. And these sub theories are themselves supported, not by evidence, but by the lack of it.

When Christian scientists pointed out the amazing odds against a universe supporting life, evolutionists answered this evidence with another unsupported story – the Multiple Universe Theory. Finally, the Oort Cloud is yet another example of evolutionists, instead of relying on evidence, turning to stories that already assume Evolution is true. 

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the two pillars of evolution?
2. Explain "Abiogenesis." Is it possible?
3. Explain "Panspermia." What does the theory of Panspermia show?
4. What problem is there with the theory of transitional forms?
5. What is meant with "Punctuated Equilibrium"? Why have evolutionists come up with the idea?
6. What is the "Anthropic (man-centered) Principle"?
7. What is the "Multiple Universe Theory"?

A version of this article was first published in the January 2003 issue under the title "The Science is underwhelming."




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A LAMENT FOR OUR NATION

by Levi Minderhoud

Lament is not a common word today. It is rare to hear of lamentation in our secular culture, and even within the Church we don't often speak of lament. And yet, I believe lament is one of the most important – and biblical – postures that we can take as Christians in the public square today.

WHY LAMENT?

Consider our situation. We see (at least) 87,000 abortions every year here in Canada.

Over 13,000 died by euthanasia last year, and that number grows every year.

We've seen our fundamental freedoms eroded. Conscience rights for health care workers aren't adequately protected. Our governments have redefined marriage by liberalizing divorce laws, recognizing same-sex marriages, and even starting to legitimize polyamorous relationships. The entire concepts of motherhood and fatherhood are fractured by our country's policies on in vitro

fertilization and surrogacy, and jurisdictions like Ontario are recognizing that kids can have many (not just two) parents. Hundreds of kids are pursuing medical gender transitioning, rejecting the bodies that God has given them. Counseling children to love the body and identity they have been given has been outlawed by conversion therapy legislation. Human trafficking, pornography, and prostitution are rampant in society. And our country, ostensibly still founded on the principle “that recognizes the supremacy of God,” has insisted that all cultures and all religions by-and-large are equal.

Sin and brokenness are pervasive in all aspects of Canadian society. Let’s consider some potential unbiblical options of how to respond to this sin before coming to why we need to lament for our nation.

UNBIBLICAL RESPONSES

1. *Do not grumble*

One response – the most unbiblical response – is to grumble. We can be tempted to complain to God, to each other, and to ourselves.

But complaining is antithetical to the Christian life. The Israelites of the Old Testament were famous for grumbling. They complained about bitter water or a lack of water (Ex. 15:24, 17:3), about a lack of food (Ex. 16:2), their misfortunes (Num. 11:1), the strength of the Canaanites (Num. 14:2), and their leadership (Num. 16:11, 41; 17:5). In most of these instances, God punished His people. He had just brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and, rather than worshipping and praising Him, they complained.

Rather than “grumbling or disputing,” Paul calls on Christians to be “blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). We confess that “it is impossible for those grafted into Christ by true faith not to produce fruits of gratitude” (HC Q&A 64).

2. *No need to fear*

Another response to a bleak political situation is fear and anxiety, but this too is an unbiblical response. We may fear persecution from our culture, tyranny from our government, or censure from media companies. But in Philippians 4, Paul instructs followers of Christ, “do not be anxious about anything.” Christ Himself commands us “do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on” or about anything else for that matter (Matt. 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-31). The most frequent command found in Scripture is “do not be afraid.”

3. *Do not be angry*

Another common response to this sin-filled world is anger. Anger can be a powerful motivator to inspire people to speak up and to act. And, unlike complaining or anxiety, there is

some biblical justification to be angry (e.g., Eph. 4:26). When people sin and transgress the law of the LORD, there is a reason for righteous anger. Jesus Himself became angry on occasion with a righteous anger (Mark 3:1-6 and Mark 10:13-16).

Scripture, however, portrays human anger as a negative phenomenon in almost every instance. Proverbs often counsels the wise and the righteous to refrain from anger (Prov. 14:29, 15:18, 16:32, 19:11, 22:24, 29:22). The apostle Paul commands believers to put away anger on several occasions (2 Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:8).

Our fallen anger makes us susceptible to sin. (Perhaps why Eph. 4:26 says “be angry *and do not sin*.”) Anger can easily lead to hasty and thoughtless words and actions. Perhaps this is why James admonishes believers to be “slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:19-20). Like fire, anger can be a beneficial and God glorifying tool when used in the right way, yet it can easily grow out of control and cause great spiritual (not to mention temporal!) damage.

So instead of complaining, fearing, or being angry about the state of our nation, a more biblical response is lament.

AN EXAMPLE OF LAMENT

Scripture is full of laments, but the best example of lamentation flows from the prophet Jeremiah and the people of Judah in exile.

Put yourself in their shoes. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. Clear your mind.

Imagine you are a young Jew living around 609 BC. You and your people are led by King Josiah. Your life revolves around a divinely inspired calendar of feasts and sacrifices. In fact, you just celebrated a Passover the likes of which hadn’t been observed since the days of the judges. You observe a weekly Sabbath day of rest, a year of Sabbath rest of the land every seven years, and a year of Jubilee every 50 years. You periodically visit the glorious temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, perhaps the most ornate, beautiful, and costly structure on earth. There the Levite singers and musicians make music to God and the priests offer sweet incense to the LORD. God has promised that a descendent of David would sit on the throne of Judah forever. In fact, the current king “turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might” so that there was never a king that came before him or after him that pursued the LORD with such fervour (2 Kings 22-23). Life is good.

During your lifetime, all that comes crashing down. The Egyptian Pharaoh Neco kills godly King Josiah, hauls his successor, King Jehoiachaz, in chains to Egypt, exacts a heavy tribute from Judah, and sets up a puppet king, Jehoiakim, on the throne. After a stint under Egyptian oppression, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon puts your country under tribute. When King Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon, bands of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites begin raiding your country. King Nebuchadnezzar comes back with a vengeance, besieges and conquers Jerusalem, carries away all the trea-

And lament isn't just mourning what has been lost. A lament has hope.

asures of the temple and the king's house, and carries away all the royal family, all officials, all the mighty men of valor, all the smiths and craftsmen, and 10,000 more captives. Only the poor remain under another puppet king, Zedekiah.

Thankfully, the temple, the center of Jewish life, still stands. But your religious leadership pollutes this temple. Then Zedekiah rebels against Babylon too, prompting Nebuchadnezzar to return again to besiege Jerusalem and trigger a terrible famine in the city. When the city falls, Nebuchadnezzar slaughters Zedekiah's sons in front of him, gouges out Zedekiah's eyes, and carries him off to Egypt. But at least the temple still stands.

A few years later, Nebuchadnezzar attacks Jerusalem a third time, destroying every building in Jerusalem, including the temple, and tearing down the walls. Even the poor people who were originally left in Jerusalem are carried off to Babylon, except for the poorest of the poor who are left to work the land. And even after all this, the poorest of the poor rebel against Nebuchadnezzar, murder the governor, and flee in fear to Egypt, the very place that God had led them out of slavery 890 years before. And so, the land lays desolate.

Your nation is utterly destroyed. Your whole religion revolving around the temple, sacrifices, and feasts is impossible. There is no descendant of David seemingly on the throne. It's a horrific state of affairs. What was the response of the Jews carried off to Babylon?

They responded with lament. We get a glimpse of this in Psalm 137: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion." But the main lamentation over the exile is written by the prophet Jeremiah. While there isn't a book of Complaining, of Anxiety, or of Anger in Scripture, there is a book of Lamentations. For almost the entire book, Jeremiah recounts and laments the destruction of Jerusalem. The book opens:

How lonely sits the city that was full of people!
How like a widow has she become, she who was great
among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces has become
a slave.
She weeps bitterly in the night with tears on her cheeks;
Among all her lovers she has none to comfort her;
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.
Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard
servitude;
She dwells now among the nations but finds no resting
place;
Her pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her
distress.

WHAT IS A LAMENT?

Lament, properly speaking, is a uniquely Christian activity. It isn't complaining, though it certainly recounts all the evils of this present age. It isn't anxiety, although the situation certainly seems bleak and full of uncertainty. And it isn't primarily angry, despite the calls for judgement on Babylon found in the final verses of Psalm 137. And lament isn't just mourning what has been lost.

A lament has hope.

That's why, smack dab in the middle of the book of Lamentations and in the middle of perhaps the most hopeless period of Judah's existence, Jeremiah confesses, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (3:21-23).

One hundred and one years ago, Thomas Chisholm plucked these words out of Lamentations to create the hymn *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. It is a beautiful hymn of hope and praise. But it helps to remember its scriptural context. God's faithfulness is wonderful indeed when we consider how He changes not; how all nature witnesses to His great faithfulness, mercy, and love; and how His presence cheers and guides us, as the hymn's verses recount. But those truths aren't the context for Jeremiah's confession when he says, "great is thy faithfulness." Lamentation over the destruction of Judah and the captivity of the Jews (Jeremiah is in captivity himself) is the context. God's faithfulness is always important, but it tastes the sweetest when it is juxtaposed with the evils of this world.

LAMENTATION TODAY

Politically, culturally, socially, economically, religiously – really any way you can think of – we are in a far better position than Judah was at the start of the exile. As we've already recounted, we certainly face many evils in this dark world that tempt us to respond with complaints, fear, or anger. But I think that the best response is lament. We can lament instead of complaining about the failure of political leaders to follow God's will. We can lament rather than fear the cultural hostility to orthodox Christianity. We can lament rather than rage about the injustices in the world. And lament does more than just look around at others. It confesses our own wrongdoings, remembers the faithfulness of our sovereign God, and prays for His intervention.

And so, I lament for our nation. And I'll do it with a song, a Jeremiah lament-style version of *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*:

O LORD, our nation reviles and forgets Thee.
We have departed from thy righteous law.
We deserve judgement and none of thy favour,
But I call this to mind and so have hope:
Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases –
Great is thy faithfulness, LORD, unto me!

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

HOW INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM BEGAN

Freedom of the press is a very recent and very rare development



by Marvin Olasky

In this chapter 23 excerpt from Marvin Olasky's book "Reforming Journalism," we get a glimpse at how the press first won the freedom to speak truth to power. It all began with the Reformation understanding that God's Word is our highest standard, above even the King or the church.

When one Christian in 1690 tried to put out a regular newspaper, he encountered trouble. Benjamin Harris had been jailed in London in 1679 for publishing an independent newspaper, *Domestic Intelligence*. After his release, Harris headed to America and, with help from Cotton Mather, published in 1690 the first newspaper in America, *Public Occurrences Both Foreign and Domestic*. Harris said its purpose was that "Memorable Occurrences of Divine Providence may not be neglected or forgotten, as they too often are."

Harris's combination of reporting and teaching showed when he reported

"a day of Thanksgiving to God" for a good harvest and noted, concerning a tragedy averted, that God "assisted the Endeavors of the People to put out the Fire." But when Harris emphasized God's sovereignty over politics, controversy followed. He criticized royal officials for allying with Indians, and he reported on adultery in the French royal family: King Louis XIV

"is in much trouble (and fear) not only with us but also with his Son, who has revolted against him lately, and has great reason if reports be true, that the Father used to lie with the Sons Wife."

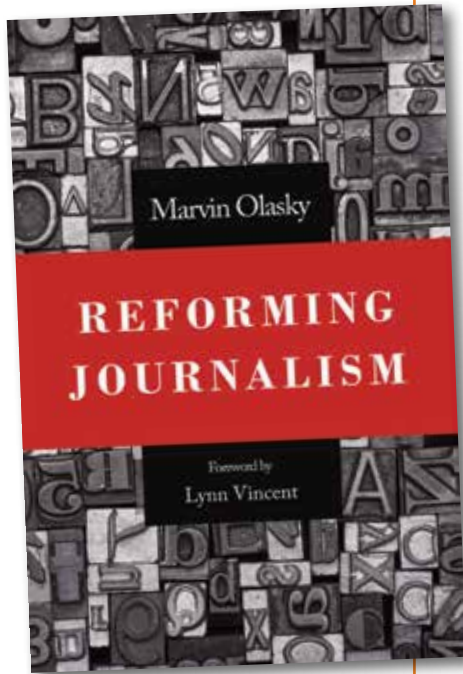
British officials, hoping at that time for peace with France, were refraining from comments that could arouse popular concern about trusting those of low morals. Since sexual restraint was not common in the British royal family, they may have thought such news was non-news. Four days after Harris published, officials suppressed his newspaper and said any

further issues would give him new prison nightmares. Harris gave in.

Other newspapers emerged over the next four decades and provided a service in helping readers to know "how to order their prayers and praises to the Great God." Local news continued to be reported in reverential context, as in this coverage of a storm:

"The Water flowed over our Wharfs and into our streets to a very surprising height. They say the Tide rose 20 Inches higher than ever was known before.... Let us fear the GOD of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

In 1727, colonists felt an earthquake's "horrid rumbling" and "weighty shaking.... The strongest Houses shook prodigiously and the tops of some Chimneys were thrown down." Aftershocks over the next nine days "mightily kept up the Terror of it in the People, and drove them to all possible needs of Reformation."



This excerpt from Marvin Olasky's *Reforming Journalism* is shared here with the permission of P&R Publishing. Dr. Olasky is a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute, and was the long-time editor-in-chief of *WORLD* magazine, which is certainly among the best Christian news publications ever. *Reforming Journalism* is a history of reporting done right, and also a how-to for writing and reporting in the future, which is why it would be a wonderful addition to any Christian high school English class. And it would be a great read for anyone interested in how Christianity brought us a free press.

PASTORS TAUGHT THAT EVEN THE KING IS ACCOUNTABLE

Until the 1730s, no editor after Benjamin Harris took the risk of criticizing officials, but pastors during the first three decades of the eighteenth century introduced new ideas to their congregation. Minister Ebenezer Pemberton argued in 1710 that

“kings and royal governors must govern themselves by unalterable Principles and fixed Rules, and not by unaccountable humors or arbitrary will. They take care that Righteous Laws be Enacted... as are necessary for the Safety of the Religion & Liberties of a People. [Rulers] that are not skillful, thoughtful, vigilant and active to promote the Public Safety and Happiness are not Gods but dead Idols.”

The *New York Weekly Journal* in the 1730s reflected those views. The editor, John Peter Zenger, played the organ each Sunday in a Dutch Reformed church. He listened to sermons and then printed criticism in his newspaper of William Cosby, New York's royal governor. Cosby clearly thought he was above the law. When a farmer's cart slowed down Cosby's coach, the governor had his coachman beat the farmer with a horsewhip until he nearly killed him. When Cosby desired some land owned by Indians, he stole their deed and burned it. When Cosby granted new lands to those who applied legally, he demanded and received bribes often amounting to one-third of the estates.

EDITORIALIZING FOR THE RULE OF LAW

Zenger sent a message in the second issue of his newspaper by publishing a piece that differentiated an absolute monarchy from one based on biblical principles of fixed law and limitations on power. In an absolute monarchy, the article argued, the “Will of the Prince” was over all, and “a Liberty of the Press to complain of Grievances” was impossible. In a limited monarchy, however, “Laws are known, fixed, and established. They are the straight Rule and sure

Guide to direct the King, the Ministers, and his Subjects.” Law (applying biblical principles) was above the king, not under him, just as the Bible itself was over all human royalty.

An essay in the *Journal* pointedly asked, “If we reverence men for their power alone, why do we not reverence the Devil, who has so much more power than men?” The article concluded that respect was due “only to virtuous qualities and useful actions,” and it was therefore “as ridiculous and superstitious to adore great mischievous men as it is to worship a false god or Satan in the stead of God.” Subjects had the right to evaluate their king; obedience was not guaranteed. Governmental authority must be limited, and such limitation is possible only if individuals are free to speak the truth to those in power. Biblical principles restrained power: “Power without control appertains to God alone, and no man ought to be trusted with what no man is equal to.”

HOW TRUTH BECAME A DEFENSE

Cosby brought a charge of “seditious libel” against Zenger and threw him into jail. Journalists at that time had little defense against such accusations; if they proved their statements were true, they might be even worse off. (Under English law, truth made the libel worse by making it more likely the statements would decrease public support for the king and his officials. A common legal expression was “the greater the truth, the greater the libel.”) Jurors were only to determine whether the accused had actually printed the objectionable publication. If they agreed he had, judges decided whether the statements in question were critical and deserved punishment.

At Zenger's trial in 1735, however, defense attorney Andrew Hamilton placed Zenger in the line of Martin Luther, John Foxe, John Stubbes, Marchamont Nedham, Increase Mather, and others. Zenger was one more victim of “the Flame of Prosecutions” by a government filled with “arbitrary Attempts of Men in Power.” Hamilton argued: “If a libel is understood in the large and unlimited sense urged by Mr. Attorney... Moses,

...he turned directly to the jurors and suggested they declare Zenger innocent even though he admitted to printing the material in question

meek as he was, libeled Cain; and who is it that has not libeled the devil?" Hamilton said Zenger was merely following the lead of Isaiah, who attacked corrupt leaders as "blind watchmen" and "greedy dogs that can never have enough."

Zenger's defense, essentially, was that if God's authors produced such a critique, so could he. Judges in red robes and white wigs were ready to convict Zenger for his criticism of the royal governor, but the jury included "common People" among whom Zenger's newspaper had "gained some credit." A packed courtroom sympathetic to Zenger kept the judges from silencing Hamilton when he turned directly to the jurors and suggested they declare Zenger innocent even though he admitted to printing the material in question and was thus guilty un-

der British law. Hamilton argued Zenger deserved support because he had been "exposing and opposing arbitrary power by speaking and writing Truth." The jurors agreed. They delivered a verdict of "not guilty." Royal officials decided not to provoke a riot. Zenger went free.

A FREE PRESS IS BORN

The verdict meant little, legally. A runaway jury had disobeyed English law and gotten away with it. But the verdict reverberated through the colonies and through England itself, encouraging Christian editors and discouraging officials from trying printers for seditious libel. No official brought a case of that sort anywhere in America after 1735. The year after the Zenger case, *Virginia Gazette* editor William Parks exposed

corruption, including the stealing of sheep by a member of Virginia's legislature. Threatened with prosecution, Parks used the Zenger defense of truth-telling. When he produced court records showing the accusation was accurate, officials dropped the case against him.

By the 1750s, most American newspapers were independent of governmental control and free to provide, as *Maryland Gazette* editor Jonas Green promised his readers, not just "a Weekly Account of the most remarkable Occurrences, foreign and domestic," but also an examination of "whatever may conduce to the Promotion of Virtue and Learning, the Suppression of Vice and Immorality, and the Instruction as well as Entertainment of our Readers." RP



One of the world's first "newspapers," Ancient Rome's *Acta Diurna*, was a government publication that posted only what the authorities wanted to share, and it garnered a readership with its sports section: the latest gladiatorial results. While Julius Caesar could use the *Acta* to attack his opponents, they couldn't criticize him or his decisions. This was journalism as a tool of the ruler.

In the years leading up to the Reformation, European princes and church officials banned the publication of news or books (including the Bible) they didn't want the masses to know. The idea that people should be free to criticize their rulers was hardly thinkable until the Reformation highlighted that even authorities are accountable to the higher power of God.

Today we take the idea of a free press so for granted that when our government owns one of the country's largest media companies – CBC TV and Radio – and then decides to subsidize most of the rest, few citizens see a reason to object. But how can media outlets hold the government to account when that same government holds their purse strings?

Journalism has long been bought or banned

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

BY JON DYKSTRA

THE WORLD'S ONLY PRO-LIFE COMEDIAN?

Nicholas De Santo is an Iranian-Italian who performs what he calls the “only pro-life stand-up act” which, he notes, also means it is “the world’s funniest pro-life stand-up act.” Here’s a good bit from a set he did at London’s Backyard Comedy Club to a very receptive audience.

“So, in the US the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade and that was a serious blow to casual dating and casual sex, but it was a major victory for babies who want to live so, that’s half full. And it was a major victory for Catholic biology. Do you guys know Catholic biology? I was born in Italy; I went to Catholic school. According to Progressive biology, they say “my body, my choice” because according to Progressive biology a woman, at some points in her life, she has a second beating heart, an extra pair of kidneys, and four extra limbs. But according to Catholic biology, a woman throughout her life has only one brain, one heart, and so forth so. In other words, if you are a woman and you ever find a second beating heart in your body, it’s not your body! And if you’re a man and you ever find a second beating heart in your body, it’s not your body...and also you are not a man.”

WHY TODAY’S TEMPERATURE?

Those that hold to a millions-of-years-old earth also hold that the earth has been both vastly warmer and enormously cooler during that time. So why then do the global warming proponents among them think that the temperature we have now is the one we must maintain?

This is an urgent question, as it is on the basis of today’s temperature being the right one that carbon taxes are being implemented, fossil fuels are being made more expensive, and consequently energy, and all that requires energy to produce (i.e., homes, food, heating, clothing, and, well, everything) more expensive as well. That’s even making things tough in Canada, but it’s that much worse for those around the world who have much less.

ENGLISH: THAT WEIRD AND WONDERFUL LANGUAGE

I’ve wondered if dad jokes might be a particularly or at least especially English thing. As a mishmash of so many other languages, there’s so much potential for wordplay. Here are just a few puns and ponderables:

- Before was was was, was was is.
- The word *queue* is just a Q followed by four silent letters
- *Jail* and *prison* mean the same thing, yet *jailer* and

prisoner are opposites

- You have fingertips, not toetips, and yet you can tiptoe, not tipfinger
- How can wise man and wise guy be antonyms?
- We have players in a recital, and reciters in a play.
- *Cough*, *rough*, *dough*, *bough*, and *through* should rhyme but don’t.
- While you can drink a drink you can’t eat an eat or food a food.
- Your nose can run and your feet can smell!

WHY ENGLISH IS SO HARD

They say Albert Einstein didn’t speak in full sentences until he was five. Maybe he just didn’t have anything to say, or perhaps learning English is hard enough to challenge even a genius. Just consider one small part of the process that, at first glance, might seem easy: creating plurals. Dog becomes dogs; cat becomes cats – it’s as easy as adding an S, right? Not so fast! Below is a part of a poem, credited only to Anonymous, that tackles the problem of plurals. This is just one verse, but there are many more plural problems where this came from!

If the plural of man is always called men,
Why shouldn’t the plural of pan be called pen?
If I speak of my foot and show you my feet,
And I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth,
Why shouldn’t the plural of booth be called beeth?

WHY ENGLISH IS HARD - PART II

A native English speaker knows never to speak of a “red massive bull.” Instead, he’d describe it as a “massive red bull” ...but he wouldn’t know why. That’s because there is a rather precise ordering of adjectives that we all mostly know, even though we don’t know that we know. While it isn’t absolutely fixed, the order of adjectives most English folk agree to goes roughly like this: *quantity, opinion, size, age, shape, color, origin, material*. So, for example, we might ask for three Grade A eggs (*quantity, opinion*) but not Grade A three eggs. Or we’d talk about one hundred, enormous, old, round Englishmen (*quantity, size, age, shape, origin*) but not English, round, old, enormous, one hundred men.

This knowledge is a gift to you as a native speaker, but it’s quite the challenge for any latecomer to our country. So, the next time you hear your Dutch grandmother, or maybe some newer immigrant, talk a little peculiarly, you’ll know why (and you’ll be sure to cut them some slack).

HOW ENGLISH IS GOING TO BECOME EASY

While our native tongue does sometimes tie us up, the next generation can look forward to a much-simplified version. I had my own ideas for streamlining things that involved doing away with the letter C completely, substituting K where it was a hard sound and substituting S everywhere else. Can’t we all agree that’d be niser? I took the idea to Merriam Webster (the

dictionary lady) and she asked what I was going to do with the C in CH and I couldn't come up with much of an answer for her.

Anyways, Merriam did share with me her own simplification plans, giving me a peek at an upcoming edition of her dictionary. She's managed to do what I could not – they've streamlined everything! She wasn't sure exactly when this edition was coming out, but she knew it would be very soon. Here are a few entries from the first page:

a [ā] noun Anything that identifies as the letter A
Aaron [ae rihn] noun Anything that identifies as Aaron
ABBA [a ba] noun Anything that identifies as ABBA
asinine [as i nīn] adjective Anything that identifies as being asinine

EQUAL PAY LAWS HURT THOSE THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO HELP

There's both a theological and practical objection to "equal pay for equal work" laws, no matter how well-intentioned they might be. The practical objection is laid out by Milton Friedman in the quote below:

"...the actual effect of requiring equal pay for equal work will be to harm women. If women's skills are higher than men's in a particular job and are recognized to be higher, the law does no good, because then they will be able to compete away and can get the same income. If their skills are less, for whatever reason...and you say the only way you are able to hire them is by paying the same wage, then you're denying them the only weapon they have to fight with. If the unwillingness of the men to hire them is because the men are sexist pigs... nonetheless you want to make it costly to them to exercise their prejudice. If you say to them you have to pay the same wage no matter whether you hire women or men then here's Mr. Sexist Pig: it doesn't cost him anything to hire men instead of women. However, if the women are free to compete and to say 'Well now, look, I'll offer my work for less,' then he can only hire men if he bears a cost. If the women are really good as a man, then he's paying a price for discrimination. And what you are doing, not intentionally but by misunderstanding, when you try to get equal pay for equal work laws is reducing to zero the cost imposed on people who are discriminating for irrelevant reasons. And I would like to see a cost imposed!"

The theological objection is covered in the "Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard" (Matt. 20:1-16). While the parable is about grace, not economics, what it illustrates economically is true too: "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" If an employer wanted to pay the last worker more than the rest, but pays others what he agreed to, what business is the last worker's wages to us?

ON THE POINT OF BEING OPEN-MINDED

"My friend said that he opened his intellect as the sun opens the fans of a palm tree, opening for opening's sake, opening infinitely for ever. But I said that I opened my intellect as I opened my mouth, in order to shut in again on something solid."

– G.K. Chesterton

MO WILLEMS' SAGE ADVICE

Mo Willems, the author of the delightful *Elephant and Piggie* children's book series, has some good advice for adults too. Here's a trio:

- You only have one chance to make a twenty-third impression.
- Better to say, "I love you more than ever" than "I used to love you less."
- Better to say, "You are one in a million" than "There are 7,960 others just like you out there."

SOME TRUTHS ARE SIMPLY WRITTEN ON OUR HEARTS

In a 1998 debate with atheist Peter Atkins in which Atkins touted science as the ultimate arbitrator of truth, William Lane Craig highlighted how there are fundamental truths that science can't prove. Craig is a theistic evolutionist, but does well here.

"I think that there are a good number of things that cannot be scientifically proven, but that we're all rational to accept. Let me list five.

"Logical and mathematical truths cannot be proven by science. Science presupposes logic and math so that to try to prove them by science would be arguing in a circle.

"Metaphysical truths like, there are other minds than my own, or that the external world is real, or that the past was not created five minutes ago with the appearance of age are rational beliefs that cannot be scientifically proven.

"Ethical beliefs about statements of value are not accessible by the scientific method. You can't show by science that the Nazi scientists in the camps did anything evil as opposed to the scientists in Western democracies.

"Aesthetic judgments cannot be accessed by the scientific method because the beautiful, like the good, cannot be scientifically proven.

"And, most remarkably, would be science itself. Science cannot be justified by the scientific method, since it is permeated with unprovable assumptions."

JUST ONE ISSUE?

"If you're pro-life, you realize abortion is murder. How can you say 'it's one of many issues' and vote for a pro-choice candidate? What policy of theirs could be so good that it's worth allowing millions of babies to be killed?"

– Seamus Coughlin

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, SHEEP ARE NOT SO DUMB (IF YOU PUT ASIDE THEIR CLUMSINESS AND KNACK FOR GETTING INTO TROUBLE). SHEEP CAN REMEMBER UP TO 50 HUMAN FACES FOR SEVERAL YEARS!

A SHEPHERD WILL USE HIS STAFF FOR MANY DIFFERENT USES BUT ONE SPECIAL USE IS TO HELP BRING A NEWBORN LAMB TO THEIR MAMA WITHOUT HAVING THE SHEPHERD'S SCENT ON THE NEW LAMB WHICH COULD CAUSE THE MAMA TO REJECT IT.



SHEEP MILK IS VERY RICH, TASTY AND HIGHER IN VITAMINS A, B, E, CALCIUM, PHOSPHOROUS, POTASSIUM AND MAGNESIUM THAN COW'S MILK!

THE AVERAGE LIFESPAN OF A SHEEP IS 10 YEARS. THE LONGEST AGE RECORDED IS 25 YEARS AND 11 MONTHS. THE SHEEP'S NAME WAS METHUSELINA. IT FELL OFF A CLIFF.

SHEEP HAVE AN INTRICATE SOCIAL HEIRARCHY. PHEW! FANCY WORDS RIGHT THERE! IT MEANS THAT EVERY FLOCK HAS A DOMINANT LEADER (FEMALE AND MALE) AND THE REST OF THE FLOCK ESTABLISH A PARTICULAR ORDER FOR WHO GETS TO MAKE DECISIONS LIKE WHO GETS TO EAT FIRST.

SHEEP HAVE RECTANGULAR PUPILS AND CAN SEE BEHIND THEMSELVES WITHOUT MOVING THEIR HEADS BUT ALSO HAVE TERRIBLE DEPTH PERCEPTION AND CAN HAVE TROUBLE SEEING WHAT'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM.

SHEEP WERE ONE OF THE FIRST TYPES OF ANIMALS TO BE DOMESTICATED. DOMESTICATED MEANS THEY TAKE THE ANIMALS OUT OF THE WILD AND PROVIDE AND CARE FOR THEM AND THEIR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

SHEEP ARE CAPABLE OF EXPERIENCING A WIDE RANGE OF EMOTIONS, JUST LIKE WE DO! SHEEP HAVE THE ABILITY TO FEEL AFRAID, ANGRY, BORED, SAD, AND HAPPY - EVEN PESSIMISTIC OR OPTIMISTIC!

come and EXPLORE!



LET'S DRAW!



1ST



MILKWEED = POISONOUS
REMOVE FROM FIELD
{SCRIBBLE IT OUT!}

WEEB

I'm so lonely :- Would you please draw some sheep to keep me company on these pages?
Thanks

~300°
OF VISION!



WOOL NEVER STOPS GROWING!



SOME SPECIES OF SHEEP CAN PRODUCE UP TO 30 POUNDS OF WOOL PER YEAR.

FLIES MAKE IT THEIR BIZZNESS TO IRRITATE SHEEP.

HERBIVORES

SCIENTIFIC NAME : *Ovis Aries*

The Lord is my Shepherd

SHEEP ARE NOTORIOUS FOR GETTING THEMSELVES INTO TROUBLE. THERE'S A REASON SHEEP NEED A CAREFUL AND DILIGENT SHEPHERD TO WATCH AND CARE FOR THEM. LEFT ON THEIR OWN, SHEEP WOULD BE VULNERABLE TO ANY NUMBER OF THINGS THAT COULD HURT THEM INCLUDING PREDATORS, FLOODS, POISONOUS PLANTS, AND AGGRAVATING FLIES. NOT ONLY ARE THERE THINGS OUTSIDE OF THEMSELVES THAT CAN HURT THEM, BUT SOMETIMES SHEEP ARE JUST SO CURIOUS THAT THEY GET THEMSELVES STUCK IN BRAMBLES AND THORNS, OR EVEN WATER, AND NEED TO BE RESCUED.

IT'S REALLY NO SURPRISE THAT GOD COMPARES SHEEP TO US, HIS PEOPLE. WE STRUGGLE WITH GETTING OURSELVES INTO TROUBLE TOO, DON'T WE? WITHOUT GOD'S CARE, HIS GUIDING HAND, HIS WORD TO LEAD AND GUIDE US, ONE CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE TROUBLE WE'D GET INTO (SOMETIMES WE DON'T EVEN HAVE TO IMAGINE; SOMETIMES WE'RE THERE ALREADY).

BUT IN GOD'S TENDER CARE AND LOVE, HE HASN'T LEFT US ALONE. HE IS OUR SHEPHERD, CONSTANTLY WATCHING OVER AND CARING FOR US – NOT BECAUSE WE'VE DONE ANYTHING TO DESERVE IT, BUT BECAUSE HE LOVES US AND WANTS WHAT'S BEST FOR US. HE'S EVEN GIVEN US HIS HOLY SPIRIT TO DWELL IN OUR HEARTS TO GUIDE US AND STEER US AWAY FROM OUR CURIOSITIES THAT CAN TURN INTO TROUBLE. AND HE IS ALWAYS READY TO COME IN AND RESCUE US WHEN WE CALL OUT TO HIM FOR HELP! HOW BLESSED ARE WE, HIS ALBEIT FRUSTRATING, LITTLE SHEEP, THAT HE HAS LOVED US DESPITE OUR TROUBLES AND SINS!!

HAVE YOU THANKED YOUR SHEPHERD FOR HIS LOVE, CARE AND ATTENTION?



COME AND EXPLORE IS CREATED BY STEPHANIE VANDERPOL. THESE PAGES WERE INSPIRED BY THE BOOK "A SHEPHERD LOOKS AT PSALM 23" BY W. PHILIP KELLER AS WELL AS HER REGULAR DAY TO DAY LIFE SHEPHERDING HER CHILDREN IN SMITHERS, BC.

GET THE CRAYONS OUT AND TEST YOUR
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TEXTS THAT COMPARE US TO SHEEP: TRY TO FILL IN THE
BLANKS FROM MEMORY AND THEN USE THE BIBLE TO SEE IF
YOU'RE RIGHT (AND POSSIBLY MAKE CORRECTIONS)...

ISAIAH 53:6 (ESV)

"ALL WE LIKE SHEEP HAVE GONE _____;
WE HAVE TURNED—EVERY ONE—TO HIS OWN WAY;
AND THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM
THE _____ OF US ALL."

ISAIAH 40:11 (ESV)

"HE WILL TEND HIS _____ LIKE A SHEPHERD;
HE WILL GATHER THE LAMBS IN HIS ARMS;
HE WILL _____ THEM IN HIS BOSOM,
AND GENTLY LEAD THOSE THAT ARE WITH YOUNG."

MARK 6:34 (ESV)

"WHEN HE WENT ASHORE HE SAW A GREAT CROWD, AND HE HAD _____
ON THEM, BECAUSE THEY WERE LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A _____. AND HE
BEGAN TO _____ THEM MANY THINGS."

PSALM 100:3 (ESV)

"KNOW THAT THE _____, HE IS GOD!
IT IS HE WHO MADE US, AND WE ARE HIS;
WE ARE HIS _____, AND THE SHEEP OF HIS _____."

PSALM 78:52-53 (ESV)

"THEN HE LED OUT HIS PEOPLE LIKE _____
AND GUIDED THEM IN THE _____ LIKE A FLOCK.
HE LED THEM IN SAFETY, SO THAT THEY WERE NOT AFRAID,
BUT THE SEA OVERWHELMED THEIR _____."



WHAT MAKES A PERSON INSTANTLY *UNATTRACTIVE*?

by Sharon L. Bratcher

I asked this question on a Facebook page for secular women over 60 years of age:

“What makes a person instantly *unattractive*?”

I was intrigued by the breadth of answers, but not surprised at those at the top of the list. Within two days I received more than 150 answers. There were trends – answers could be grouped together in 12 different characteristics, so I compiled what I had and ordered them according to the number of answers that were received for each characteristic. Why undertake such a study? I did it for a couple of reasons:

1. ***A desire to share Christ*** – In this data, I was hearing from mainly non-Christians. So what types of behavior might make us immediately repugnant to them? Let’s take a look at ourselves and determine whether we are acting in loving ways in order to share Christ.
2. ***A desire for friendship*** – Many people are lonely, and some have difficulty building friendships. While it isn’t always our fault, it might be helpful to compare these unattractive traits and prayerfully analyze whether we might find room in ourselves for improvement.

BEING ATTRACTIVE

Proverbs 16:21 says: “The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.” Here is a clue towards being a witness for our Lord. And Peter tells us in 1 Peter 3:15-16:

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

BEING UNATTRACTIVE

Let’s take a look at the top twelve characteristics that make a person instantly *unattractive*, in the order of the number of votes received:

1. Bad attitude
2. Potty mouth/cursing
3. Smoking
4. Body odor/poor hygiene/dirty or unkempt clothes
5. Bad breath
6. Arrogant/entitled/rude
7. Lying
8. Boasting/bragging
9. Complaining/ungrateful spirit
10. Being unkind
11. Bad manners
12. Being bossy/loud/yelling

To be honest, years ago it never occurred to me that people might dislike my loudness and yelling, or what I eventually discerned to be my bossiness.

These are the top twelve characteristics that may make us instantly *unattractive* to other people. Where might we improve? Is it possible that some of these characteristics are making us less lovely to be around? Do we come across in any of these ways to our neighbors, coworkers, fellow church members, or prospective friends? How is your attitude when life isn’t going as you would prefer?

WORKING ON IT

Think about 1 Corinthians 13:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude.


It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”

This description of real love is a tall order, but it is not beyond what we can learn through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Without love, we are a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal; we are nothing. This chapter goes on to get rid of nearly half the list immediately: arrogance (6), boasting (8), unkindness (10), and being bossy (12).

It pretty well covers bad attitudes (1), lying (7), and complaining (9) as well. Manners (11) are just a culturally agreed upon way to show respect and love for one another. For example, no one wants to watch someone’s food roll around inside his mouth, or be commanded without a please and thank-you.

In regards to potty mouth/cursing (2) and hygiene (4), we could say that these come under the law of kindness as well. If we put others first instead of ourselves, we will consider the language that we use, and not make others uncomfortable. We will “do unto others as we would have them do unto us” by not causing others to have to put up with a stench in our presence. A smoker can at least be courteous around those who are sensitive to the odor of tobacco (3). And we can make the effort to clean our teeth and mouths as well as possible (5) to consider the sensitivities of others.

CONCLUSION

None of us enjoy being around people who exhibit unattractive characteristics. Now that we know what many other people find obnoxious, we can all take a look at ourselves to see how we can become lovelier. 

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY JEFF DYKSTRA

MARCH-APRIL 2024

PUZZLE CLUES

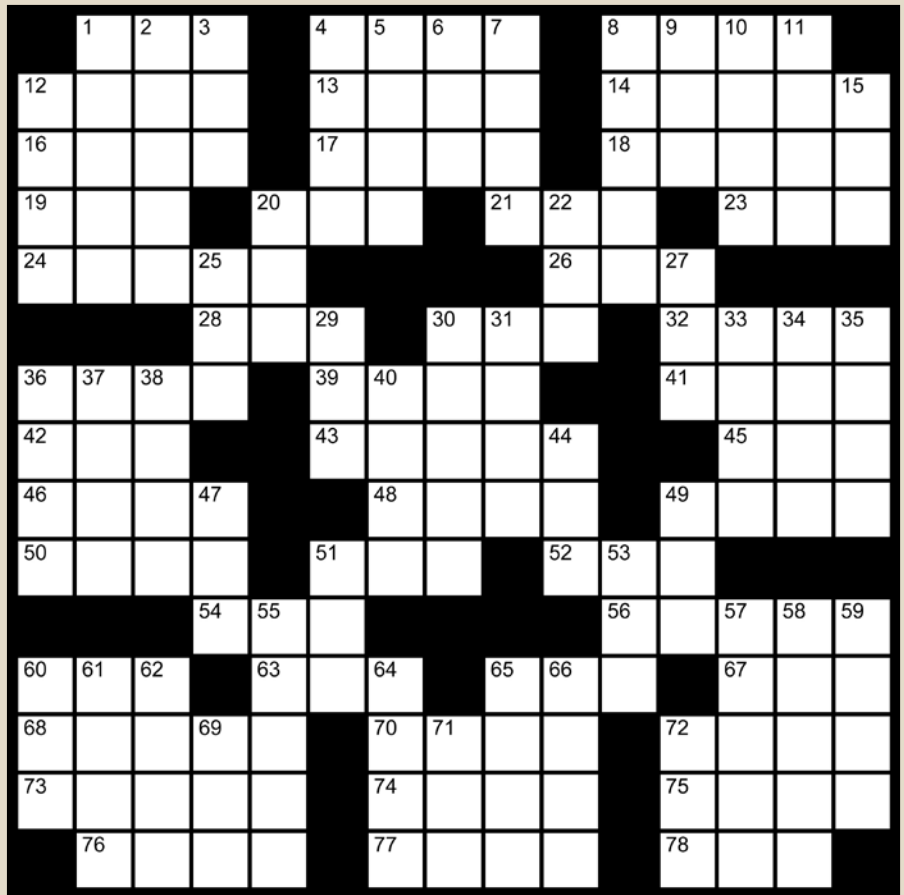
Find this issue's solution on page 2!

ACROSS

1. How Pixar made pictures (abbr.)
4. It's found in perusing the atlas?
8. It's fit to be tied.
12. "His winnowing _____ is in his hand" (Luke 3)
13. Plant-based gelatin
14. Condition of effective hinge or baking sheet
16. "Did you get a C Plus?" "No, I got _____."
17. 1948 Hitchcock movie expose of Nietzsche
18. Possible animal called *unicorn* in KJV Bible
19. Wrath (as shown in fire?)
20. "____ My Party" (1963 Leslie Gore hit song)
21. Yes vote
23. "____ to Joy" (Beethoven's Ninth Symphony)
24. "Video Killed the _____ Star" (1979 song)
26. "...his sword... cut off his _____" (Mark 14)
28. Genetic code to read forward *and* backward
30. Partially a fanatic about sports?
32. "a people not strong" (Prov. 30)
36. Billionaire profiled in 2023 *RP* issue
39. Where the milkmaid put the milk first
41. Young donkey (Matt. 21)
42. Summer in Quebec
43. How you turn a corner in plumbing
45. _____ Dolorosa – Christ's walk to the cross, also Canadian rail service
46. "Duke of _____" (1961 Gene Chandler song)
48. Source of figs in Old Testament
49. "____! Who goes there?" (sentry's cry)
50. Pad _____ - stir-fry rice noodle dish
51. What you do with the line when you obey
52. It's not constricting if made with feathers.
54. Perilous part of lion or bear (1 Sam. 17)
56. Accumulate; gather together
60. Equipment often mentioned in the gospels
63. Fish eggs, eaten as food
65. Member of lodge or CFL team
67. It can be black, white, green, or purple.
68. Expensive, flashy jewelry or accessories
70. Someone much like a dope – easily fooled
72. _____ hammer
73. Alfred Hitchcock appearing in his own movie
74. Neutralized terrorist group (abbr.)
75. "Mares eat _____ and does eat _____"
76. 69 Down plus one letter: It's a gas!
77. Sensitivity in dealing with others
78. Multiple manuscripts (abbr.)

DOWN

1. (Eventually) harmless snake (Is. 11)
2. Sinful motivation of false teachers (2 Pet. 2)
3. "I like _____" (presidential campaign slogan)
4. "A third _____ you shall burn..." (Ezek. 5)
5. They're dangerous when inflated.
6. Musical genre of TobyMac
7. Compound related to urine
8. Site of the Demilitarized Zone
9. National Institutes of Health (abbr.)
10. Spiced stew of miscellaneous ingredients
11. "He said..., ' _____ my sheep.'" (John 21)
12. "A full and _____ weight" (Deut. 21)
15. A mother whose fawn-ed of Bambi.
20. Keep your _____ the charged atom?
22. Urgent yearning for Japanese currency?
25. Abbr. to admit ignorance in a text _____
27. Defenders of the skies in Battle of Britain
29. Shift-y character in *The Last Battle*
30. It's good for your gut, or for your internet.
31. Type of plant with medicinal properties
33. Type of Chevy, or of something stellar
34. Powerful part of a dragon? (Rev. 12)
35. Many of this make one blind?
36. "prepare to _____ your God" (Amos 4)
37. Where you find Jazz and a Mormon choir
38. "Que _____, _____" (Doris Day hit song)
40. Section of a choir - almost all too common?
44. *Charlotte* made one in the E. B. White novel.
47. Kind of service that is insincere
49. Australian creation scientist Ken _____
51. Number used three times in Acts 1
53. Burial site of Rebekah's nurse (Gen. 35)
55. Third most common gas in atmosphere
57. Location of Peru?
58. "best _____ in the synagogue" (Mark 12)
59. Tools to carve "costly stones" (1 Kings 7)
60. The peacock network
61. Panache; pizzazz
62. "At this _____ Moses was born" (Acts 7)
64. Word processing menu heading
65. *Paradise Lost* or *Beowulf*, for example
66. "blind their eyes, _____ they see..." (Is. 6)
69. Of prefixes, is this a "new" *one*?
71. "Give _____ smile!" – family photo plea
72. Online business web address domain suffix



BOOKS

MORE EDUCATIONAL COMICS

ReformedPerspective.ca/books

KATIE LUTHER: THE GRAPHIC NOVEL MOTHER OF THE REFORMATION

BY SUSAN K. LEIGH
2016 / 95 PAGES



I showed this to a friend and he was unimpressed. He suggested that running a household was just something that women back then did. So, hardly amazing or all that interesting.

However, Katharina was extraordinary: as a nun she risked reading Martin Luther's writings. Then she planned an escape from her convent. The first attempt was found out, and she was punished. She tried again, and got out under cover of night, hidden away with 11 other nuns in empty barrels!

As the comic makes clear, she was also remarkably capable – after marrying Luther, she managed his household which included feeding and housing dozens upon dozens. It was quite a feat to run this all, which was more restaurant and hotel than house.

But in many ways what Katharina did is what women have done through the ages: she was an able helpmeet, supporting her husband in his role, even as she took care of the children and managed the house. This is ordinary in the sense that many wives do it every day. Supportive roles don't get the same recognition that leadership positions do, but they are vital.

I hope Katie Luther will inspire my daughters and encourage them in whatever role – whether ordinary or extraordinary – God sets before them.

THE MIRACLE SEED

BY MARTIN LEMELMAN
2023 / 80 PAGES



In 70 AD, after besieging Roman forces destroyed Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple, the conquerors went on a destructive rampage through the rest of Israel, killing thousands of Jews and enslaving thousands more. And, as this graphic novel shares, they also cut down and burned groves of Judean Date Palm Trees.

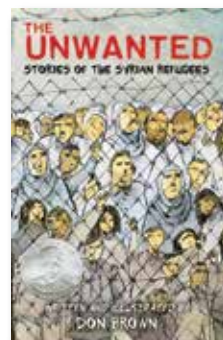
The Judean Date Palms that remained after Rome's rampage didn't fare well without people around to tend them. Even the wild varieties started dying off, and in our modern day the Judean Date Palms were only known by their accounts in history. Or, that is, until 1963, when a jar of seeds was discovered at an archeological dig. The six seeds inside were put in a drawer and forgotten about for 40 more years. Then medical researcher Dr. Sarah Salton wondered if what she'd read about the Judean Date Palm's healing powers might have been true. And that got her wondering if those six seeds could be used to revive the species!

As the title gives away, the trees did have an amazing comeback. Who would have thought it could be possible to sprout seeds thousands of years old?

The most notable caution is only that the title miracle is never ascribed to God – He is not mentioned. I'd recommend it for Grade 6 and up... and adults looking for a quick fascinating read.

THE UNWANTED: STORIES OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEES

BY DON BROWN
2018 / 104 PAGES



Since Syria descended into civil war in 2011, 5 million citizens have fled. That's what this book is about: the millions of Syrian refugees' search for safety and security.

What Don Brown doesn't get into much is the legitimate security concerns countries have about letting hundreds of thousands of refugees in. Most are Muslim, and many are undocumented, making it easy for radical elements to hide amongst them. So, countries would want to check credentials before letting a refugee in. But how can you check credentials they don't have?

At the same time, the Bible tells us that whoever is generous to the needy honors his Maker (Prov. 14:31). So, how can help be offered on this enormous scale?

While Brown is very restrained in showing the impacts of the war, there are a few panels where some blood is shown. That, and the overall topic matter, means this is one only for high school.

Brown spends his time explaining the problem and doesn't pretend to have a solution. There is no simple solution. But there is a pressing need. And there are some individual actions that can be done, like praying for God's intervention. The peace that no one seems able to bring, only He can accomplish. And we can donate to Syrian relief efforts like the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund.

SCIENCE COMICS: A QUALITY QUARTET

Comics that are hilarious and instructive? That's impressive!

So, two thumbs up for these four, but be aware that others in this "Science Comics" series often give a full-on bow to evolution. However, the quartet reviewed below are the exception, and just give us the facts and history and hilarity.

FLYING MACHINES: HOW THE WRIGHT BROTHERS SOARED

BY A. WILGUS & MOLLY BROOKS
2017 / 122 PAGES

This is the history of powered aviation as told by the Wright brothers' only sister, Katherine. She's a lively and curious narrator, interacting with not only her brothers but other early aviation innovators as well. While this is history, as part of the "Science Comics" series, it digs deep into the science of how flight works, which makes this a comic even an adult could appreciate... though it is probably aimed at Grade 4 and up.



SKYSCRAPERS: THE HEIGHTS OF ENGINEERING

BY JOHN KERSCHBAUM
2019 / 128 PAGES

This is as funny as it is educational. The narrator is a flying superhero, and while he is never named, his red cape and boots and his blue full-body long johns look familiar. He's also able to leap over tall buildings in a single bound... except that he just tripped over the tip of a new, really, really tall one. Boy, are they building them big these days!

When his sort-of sidekick Quiz Kid shows up, the two travel to and fro through time to find out how we learned to build up up and away! They get into why arches work, and how they distribute forces, the tensile and comprehension forces on stone, how concrete is made, and what technological leaps were made that'll allow us to build a mile high.

What makes this such a fun read is the comic duo: "superman" playing the straight man, and the Quiz Kid his foil. The only cautions would be a "Holy holes" utterance by Quiz Kid about how deep a foundation was.



ROCKETS: DEFYING GRAVITY

BY ANNE DROZD AND JERZY DROZD
2018 / 120 PAGES

The comedians this time are all sorts of animals – pigeons, chickens, sheep, monkeys and even bears – who were the test subjects that served as the very first astronauts. There is a *lot* of science in this one, to the point that I'm not sure I understood it all. But I enjoyed it all!

We're taken back in time, to meet Isaac Newton and get introduced to his three laws of motion. Then we're shown how those laws were in play with man's first attempts at flight, via balloons, and their animal passengers. This space-faring zoo takes us around the world, to China and Europe, to see how rockets were used for both warfare and entertainment. We repeatedly pop back to the near present, watching the space race between the USSR and USA. Then the whole thing finishes off with some of the developments being made in private rocketeering today, by Elon Musk and others.

There is so much packed into this one, that I could see teens reading it again and again. There is a "dang" or two, but no other cautions. The sheer intensity of education on offer here means this is probably best for teens and up.



BRIDGES: ENGINEERING MASTERPIECES

BY DAN ZETTWOCH
2022 / 122 PAGES

A quartet narrates this look at bridges all over the world. Each has their favorite type: Bea likes beams, Archie favors arch bridges, Trudy prefers triangles, and the youngest of them all and still a student, Spence likes suspension bridges. We are also introduced to the different loads that engineers have to consider, and the different forces they have to contend with, including compression, tension, torsion, and shear.

The quartet challenges readers to have a bridge-building contest at their school to experiment with what bridge types might be best. The only cautions? A passing mention of millions of years, and a bridge early on that, legend says, was built by the Devil to give himself a place to sunbathe. That's it.



slacker



GORDON KORMAN
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

REDISCOVERING GORDON KORMAN

by Jan Broersma

Gordon Korman famously wrote his first book, *This Can't Be Happening at Macdonald Hall!*, when he was twelve years old. By the time *I* was twelve, he'd written a dozen or so more – which was fortunate for me, because I was eagerly reading and re-reading them all.

Why did I love his novels? They were funny; they were quirky. There was also an essential good-naturedness to them that appealed to me. Although the characters got into plenty of trouble, at heart they were usually kids with integrity, showing loyalty, generosity, and kindness.

As time went on, Korman continued to write prolifically and successfully. He still wrote some of the humorous novels for kids and teens that had made him famous, but he branched into other genres as well, writing, for example, several sports series and adventure trilogies. By now I had more or less outgrown his books . . . but I still had a soft spot for this favorite author, and occasionally checked out his new releases. I found many of them less memorable than his earlier “classics”; and some of them seemed edgier, with less likeable (though more realistic) characters. I was troubled by one teen novel called *Pop* (2000) – a book Korman was particularly proud of – because of the eventual suicide

of the aging, dementia-stricken former football star, which is portrayed as a sympathetic, even noble act. Although I nostalgically looked forward to sharing my old favorite Korman novels with my own young kids, I wasn't so sure about his newer ones.

Then, within the last six or seven years, a few new Gordon Korman books caught my eye – books like *Slacker* (2016), *Restart* (2017), *The Unteachables* (2019), and more. Nephews and nieces were raving about them, and soon I was hooked too. They felt like a new era of Korman novels – like the novels I would've expected this talented author to grow up to write.

Some of Korman's recent books are more or less pure silliness, but clean and positive, with creative storylines, fun characters, and some laugh-out-loud lines. Others are surprisingly serious, dealing with topics like the realities of war and the Holocaust, as well as domestic abuse (some of these books are definitely not for younger readers).

Single parents and broken families are presented matter-of-factly, though not glamorized; many of Korman's characters are struggling with life changes such as their parents' divorce. In general, the characters feel a bit “older” than some of the kids in our communi-

OPERATION DO-OVER



GORDON KORMAN
New York Times bestselling author of *The Unteachables*

ties, as the seventh- and eighth-graders are often quite caught up in social media and sometimes in girlfriend/boyfriend relationships.

Unfortunately Korman does occasionally (though rarely) use God's name in vain. In both *Restart* and *Linked*, for example – award-winning and otherwise commendable books – there is a flip-pant use or two. To me, *Restart* marked the real beginning of Korman at his thoughtful best, as he deals with interesting questions about good and evil, human nature, character, and choices; and *Linked* addresses deep questions about the purpose of life, religion, and faith, as the main character searches for what's real and meaningful. So I regret that I can't wholeheartedly recommend these two.

Here, though, are a few others I can.

SLACKER

2016 / 240 PAGES

Cameron Boxer is all about video gaming. When his parents get concerned that he's missing out on real life, he starts a fake school group, the Positive Action Group, to appease the adults in his life. Unexpectedly, the "PAG" takes off, dragging the unenthusiastic gamer along – and, of course, surprising him by showing how much more satisfying a purposeful, other-centered life can be.

One of the strengths of this (very funny) book is how Korman gets into the heads of his characters, and especially of the underachieving adolescent Boxer, whose life choices (i.e., gaming above all) make perfect sense to him, and who is honestly miffed when real-life concerns "disturb his lifestyle." By the end, thankfully, Boxer is able to reflect that PAG "started as a hoax, but . . . ended up the realest thing about me."

OPERATION DO-OVER

2022 / 320 PAGES

Twelve-year-old Mason made one big mistake – he betrayed his lifelong best friend over a girl they both liked. Five years later, through a mysterious time warp, he finds himself back in time, to just before the fateful incident occurred

– with a unique chance for a "do-over." He takes the chance, with the benefit of hindsight and some extra maturity, to change several things in his life this time around: try out for a team, stand up to a bully, treat a classmate better, and even keep his beloved dog from a premature death. (Interestingly, he realizes he's not able to prevent his parents' divorce, though he tries.)

As in *Restart*, Korman leaves his readers with some hopeful and encouraging ideas: our "fate" isn't predetermined, and we can make choices that change our trajectory and lead to a more positive future.

THE FORT

2022 / 256 PAGES

This novel, Korman's milestone 100th book, is a serious (and a moving) one, and although the characters are eighth-graders, the topics are pretty weighty for middle-school readers. A group of friends discover a Cold-War-era bunker in the woods, and it becomes their secret hide-out. All of them are dealing with difficult issues – OCD, family breakdown, the challenge of fitting in, family members with drug addictions – and one of them, unknown to everyone else, has a violent stepfather at home. For him, the fort becomes his literal escape, and the novel largely revolves around his story.

Korman writes the different chapters, powerfully, from the points of view of the different characters. Despite the serious subject matter, we see friends showing loyalty and self-sacrifice, and are again left with the idea that positive change is possible.

CONCLUSION

Although Korman has said he's "not a message kind of guy," he is interested in the power of stories to help readers explore ideas and see things from different perspectives. And even if he's not pushing a particular agenda, books do inevitably communicate something of the worldview of a writer. In the case of Korman's books, there are a lot of hopeful takeaways for young readers: people

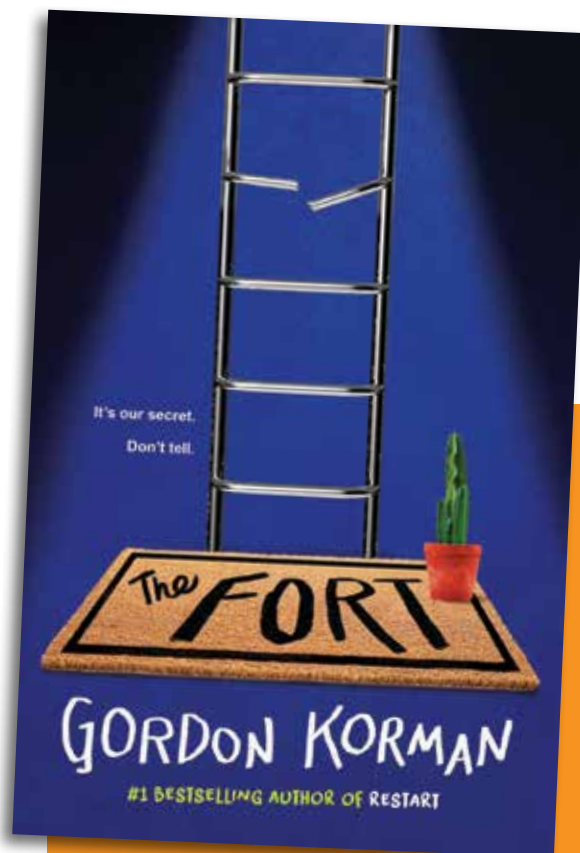
can change, and we can make choices to change our futures for the better. Understanding and empathy can triumph over bullying and racism. Our lives can and should be about something bigger than ourselves, and grappling with what that means is a worthwhile pursuit.

Positive messages, and true . . . but so incomplete.

Now my oldest son is nearly twelve. (And yes, he's been enjoying many of my old favorite Gordon Korman books.) As he and his siblings and peers grow up and confront the big questions of life, I'm grateful that we have more complete answers, and real hope, to offer – far beyond anything they'll find in a Korman novel. At the same time, books like Korman's have their place – as thought-provoking reads, or sometimes just as well-written stories that bring joy and make us laugh.

And I know that I, and my kids, are looking forward to seeing where Gordon Korman takes us in the books to come.

RP





SCOUT MAKES A COMEBACK IN AUDIO

Entrepreneurial spirit meets Christian family values with new tech startup Whillo.com

by Mark Penninga

Reformed Perspective's last issue featured a back cover ad that caught my eye. It introduced Whillo.com, a new audio streaming service featuring books like *Scout* and *Wambu* that were read to me by my father when I was a boy, and which I have since read to my own children.

But weren't these books rather "niche"

to the Dutch Reformed community? Who would have turned them into audiobooks? Would the quality be any good?

Streaming music and audiobooks continues to grow in popularity, also among Reformed households in Canada. But this was the first time I had seen a specifically Christian streaming service, let alone one that would feature classic Dutch

Reformed books that many in the newest generation likely have not heard of, like Anne de Vries' *Journey Through the Night* series.

I have my own entrepreneurial itch, so I set up a Zoom meeting with Whillo's founder and owner Layne van Rhijn to learn more about this new service and the vision behind it.

FROM DRONES TO AUDIOBOOKS

Layne and his family live in Diamond City, Alberta, just outside of Lethbridge, and are members of a local Netherlands Reformed congregation. He works full-time as a paramedic firefighter. One of the perks of the job is that he gets regular blocks of time off. With an entrepreneurial spirit and a propensity to get things done, he has turned this time “off” into a number of vibrant business ventures.

It started with his interest in, and growing collection of drones. He started an online drone store out of his garage, expanded into a store, and then eventually sold that company to an investor. This was followed by a new venture, focused on the used market for commercial drones. “So I built an app for drone traders, like an *Auto Trader* for selling used drones,” shared Layne. That has grown to become a marketplace for used drones throughout North America and quickly led to many more opportunities. “So then we started doing apps and different websites for clients.” Over time, he grew a portfolio of companies which provide income streams and he continues to grow and scale them.

In 2021 Layne and his wife Melinda created Whillo,

“to scratch an itch....We have three young kids ourselves, and are always

The van Rhijn family



looking for good audio content for them. And we found ourselves proof-listening a lot.”

A librarian at their local Christian school then expressed interest in putting good books online in audio form. So Layne put together a proposal of what it would take, with them providing the tech help and the librarian (also an aunt) helping with the narrating. As Layne explains:

“Initially, we were going to keep it small and kind of internal, and then it started growing on its own. So then we actually did a proper app and have grown it from there.”

GROWING AN AUDIO LIBRARY

Whillo was more difficult to get off the ground than Layne expected.

“You can’t just use any book, right? You have to use something either in the public domain or set up licensing agreements. So we were initially quite limited in what we could do.”

They began to grow their collection with licensing agreements, and they also started hiring professional narrators from across the world.

A skim through the catalog of Whillo’s website reveals over 200 audiobooks, many of which are for children and largely unknown beyond Dutch Reformed immigrants and their children. Layne noted that “we’ve significantly expanded our teen/adult selection over the past months and the more recent books we’ve added are well known across Christian circles.”

I downloaded the app on my phone to give it a try, as our family was about to embark on another 12-hour road trip. This allowed our family of eight to listen to two books for about four or five hours total. I was pleasantly surprised by the listening experience. I guess I expected an amateur reader, or someone with a Dutch accent, but was treated to a professional and dynamic reading, comparable to what I get with a mainstream resource like Audible.

But I also quickly learned that my children didn’t share the same interest that I had in most of the books available on Whillo. And looking at the music selection, it was apparent that it would be a hard sell for me to have my family listen to the entirely classical and choral genre. In recent decades, a lot has changed when it comes to the music being listened to in many Reformed homes, including in my own.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

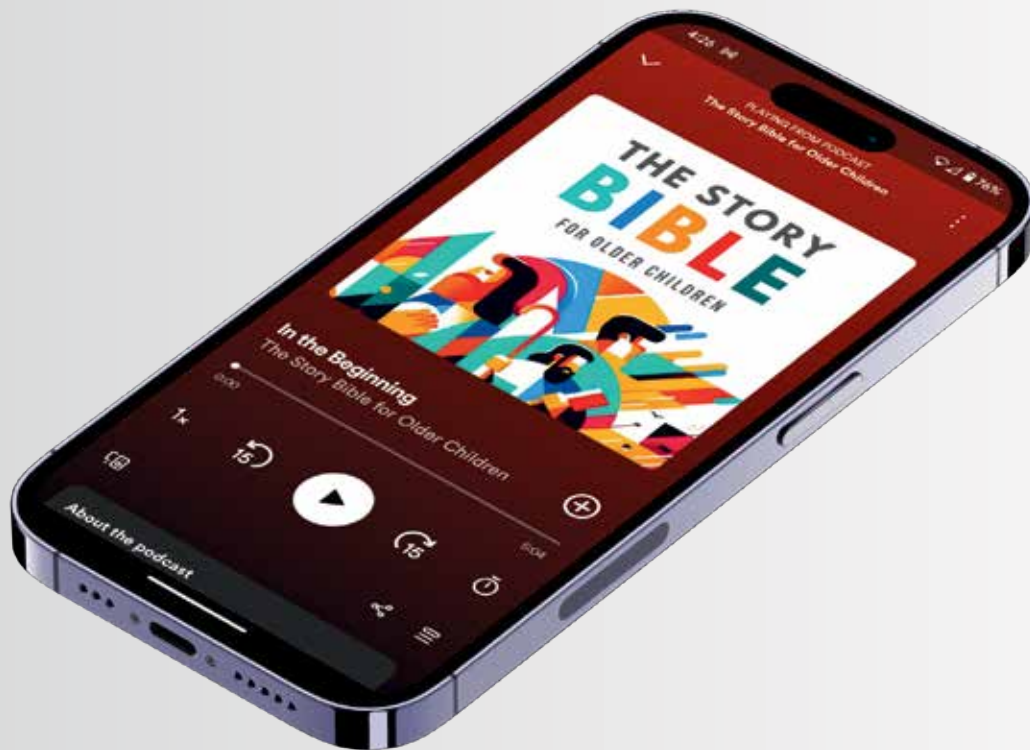
But Whillo has found a receptive audience not just with some conservative Reformed families, but among conservative families from other Christian traditions as well, including the Mennonites and Hutterites, and have noticed a large uptick in traffic from various homeschool groups. Layne’s expectation is that it will keep growing in content and reach. For example, it can become a place where choirs and musicians can get their content out to those who will appreciate it.

He acknowledged that choosing content is incredibly difficult as there is no shortage of differing opinions of what is appropriate or good.

Another challenge is the sheer cost, as some of his larger titles require between \$2,000-\$5,000 each to produce, and then half of the proceeds from subscribers go to royalties. But the enterprise has recently crossed the line where it is being profitable, and is also beginning to attract larger publishers like Youth With a Mission (YWAM). Over 33,000 hours have already been streamed since last January, when Whillo began tracking, with about seventy percent of the listeners coming from Canada.

“It’s been the hardest business, by far, that I’ve ever tackled. And I didn’t expect that at all. Every part of it has been hard but also very rewarding.” Layne cited examples where he receives emails or message from families who tell them how much they appreciate it and listen to it. “It keeps us going.” ^{RP}

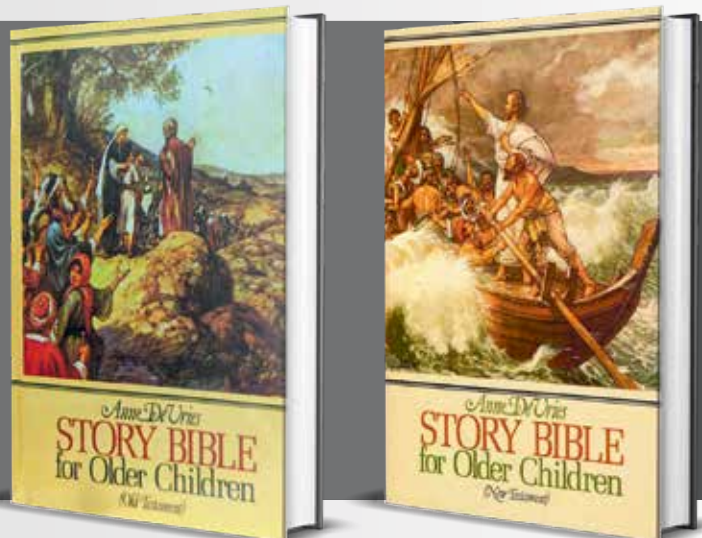
You can check out Whillo’s selection at Whillo.com. Pictures are courtesy of Layne van Rhijn.



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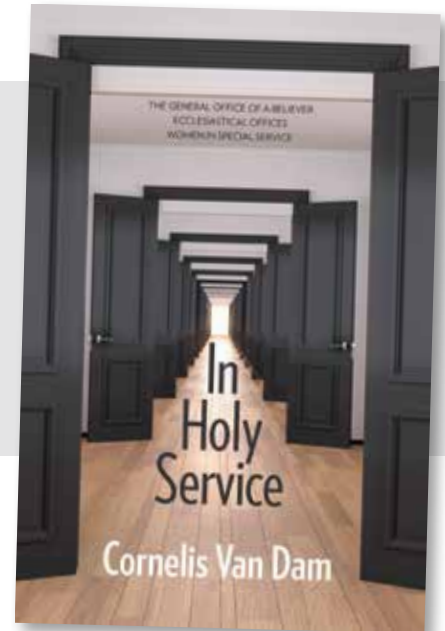
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In Holy Service

BY CORNELIS VAN DAM
2023 / 255 PAGES

reviewed by Jim Witteveen



The question of personal identity has become a hot-button issue in recent years. The ideology of gender has encouraged the notion that our identity is self-selected; we can choose to be whatever we want to be, regardless of biological realities. Even the existence of a single human nature that unites all of humanity has been called into question.

The era in which we live has been profoundly impacted by this radically new understanding of anthropology, of what it means to be a human being. As this ideology continues to advance, the Christian Church is called to continue to declare an ancient and unchanging message, and Christians are called and called again to find their identity in Christ, and in their office and calling as people who are united to Christ.

This is the theme that unites the writings of Dr. Cornelis Van Dam that have been published under the title *In Holy Service*.

THREE MAIN POINTS

The majority of the material included in this collection had been previously published in *Clarion*, *Diakonia*, and elsewhere, between 2008 and 2021, and it has been revised and collated under the headings of:

- The General Office of a Believer
- The Ecclesiastical Offices
- Women in Special Service

The book concludes with an epilogue, “Retrospect and Prospect,” which looks back to the early history of the Christian

Church, while looking forward to the future.

RECOMMENDED

There is much to recommend in this book. Dr. Van Dam’s writing style is simple, clear, and straightforward. He presents his thoughts in a way that is understandable, and his arguments are cogent and easy to follow. He ably defends Biblical principles about the unique callings and responsibilities of men and women, and provides solid Biblical evidence for his conclusions. His insights into the history of the ecclesiastical offices are helpful and perceptive, and his discussions of specific issues, such as the continuing importance of catechetical preaching, the necessity of training to prepare men to take on the office of elder, and the question of women’s participation in the election of office-bearers, are well-argued and firmly rooted in Scripture.

These individual chapters could serve well as a starting-point for group studies at church, and the material included serves as a healthy antidote to the spirit of the age in which we live, and the constant pressure being exerted upon the Church to adapt and change with the times.

CRITIQUES


The character of *In Holy Service* as a collection of previously-published works does mean that it lacks the unity of a book written “from scratch.” Some of the chapters are very brief, while others are lengthy, and one wishes, for example,

that a subject like Chapter 11’s “The Office of the Church in Relation to the Civil Government” would have received a fuller treatment than it does.

Dr. Van Dam’s epilogue, which compares the situation of the early Church with that of our day, is excellent. He emphasizes that Christianity must be counter-cultural, and that we must count the cost to follow Jesus Christ. This is an important reminder, and a necessary one. However, I believe that Dr. Van Dam’s conclusions about the Christian’s relationship with the civil authorities as taught in Romans 13 and his related discussion of the Church’s response to COVID-19 in Chapter 11 do not accord with the strong and forceful message with which he concludes the book. This is an issue that demands a fuller treatment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe that *In Holy Service* is a helpful resource that can serve God’s people as a useful guide to Biblical principles of individual and ecclesiastical life that must be reappropriated, taught, and defended from generation to generation.

It is available at [ProvidenceBooksPress.com](https://www.providencebookspress.com). 

Rev. Jim Witteveen is the author of “How In the World Did We Get Here?” and host of the Dan1132.com podcast.

You can use your RSS aggregator to craft your own daily digital newspaper, personalized to your own tastes and interests.

by Mark Coolen

Use RSS to get your news delivered!

Are you tired of repeatedly visiting your favorite blog only to find out that there haven't been any new posts? Are you tired of sifting through everything on YouTube to find what you want to see? Are you tired of going to one place for podcasts, another for videos, and another for news? And are you tired of having your email inbox filled up with all the updates for your newsletter subscriptions?

Then RSS may be for you.

WHAT IS RSS?

RSS stands for “Really Simple Syndication” and has been a part of the Internet for more than 30 years. It is the technology behind podcasts and most blogs, news sites, and other web pages that update content regularly.

All these sites provide an RSS “feed” – it’s often hidden, but still there in the background – that lists when a new post or video or podcast is added to that site. This RSS feed is really just a specially formatted document with information about each update on a site, with the date, title, author, etc., and even the partial or complete content of the post.

This RSS document would be strange for you to read, but an RSS reader or *aggregator* is a piece of software that can read it easily enough. Once you set up your aggregator it can quickly

check all the RSS feeds from your favorite sites and collect all the newest material into a single list for you to peruse, organized by the date on which items were posted, and including the associated images and content.

WHY USE AN RSS AGGREGATOR?

Why would you want to consider using an RSS aggregator/reader? There are all sorts of reasons:

1. So you can get updates for all your favorite Internet content in one place instead of having to go to your email inbox and all your favorite websites and apps to access their newest content.
2. So you don't have to give out your email address to all kinds of websites to get updates on their content.
3. So you don't need to use social media to access most of what you're interested in.
4. So you can often get updates on exactly the part of the website that you're interested in instead of everything that gets posted. You can, for example, get just Reformed Perspective's news feed, or choose just its book review feed, instead of getting everything.

Another important consideration is that your RSS feed can't be controlled or filtered by social media companies or the government (unless they start completely blocking access to websites).

Finally, you might want to make use of the RSS feed just because it is built into so many websites, and it's there for you to access and use. Some aggregator software may charge for their service or include ads, but if you don't want to pay for it, just use a free service, because the RSS feed itself is there already, freely available.

SOME RP EXAMPLES

Almost all blog sites, including ReformedPerspective.ca, include RSS feeds. For Wordpress sites like RP's, it is as simple as adding "/feed" to the end of certain web addresses. So if you wanted to get everything from RP, you would tell your RSS aggregator/reader to follow:

<https://reformedperspective.ca/feed/>

Blog sites will often have separate feeds for the various categories and tags, so some options for RP include categories like:

- News:
<https://reformedperspective.ca/category/news/feed/>
- Book reviews:
<https://reformedperspective.ca/category/book-reviews/feed/>

You can get even more specific by using one of our tags to get just the new posts on those topics:

- Pro-life:
<https://reformedperspective.ca/tag/pro-life/feed/>
- Christian film:
<https://reformedperspective.ca/tag/christian-film/feed/>

AROUND THE WEB

It'll work the same all over the Internet too, with sites like:

- **Web comics:** Once again, since this is a lot like a blog, it will likely have an RSS feed.
- **Podcasts:** These all use RSS, which is how Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, etc. know when there's a new episode. Our Manna podcast's feed is here:
<https://feed.podbean.com/RP-Manna/feed.xml>
- **News:** Many news organizations also have RSS feeds. The True North Centre's main feed, for example, is at
<https://tnc.news/feed/>
- **YouTube:** YouTube makes it a little difficult to get to the feed nowadays, but most aggregators can find it for you if you paste in the channel URL. The feed URL for Pierre Polievre's channel, for instance, is
<https://www.youtube.com/@PierrePolievre>

HOW TO GET STARTED

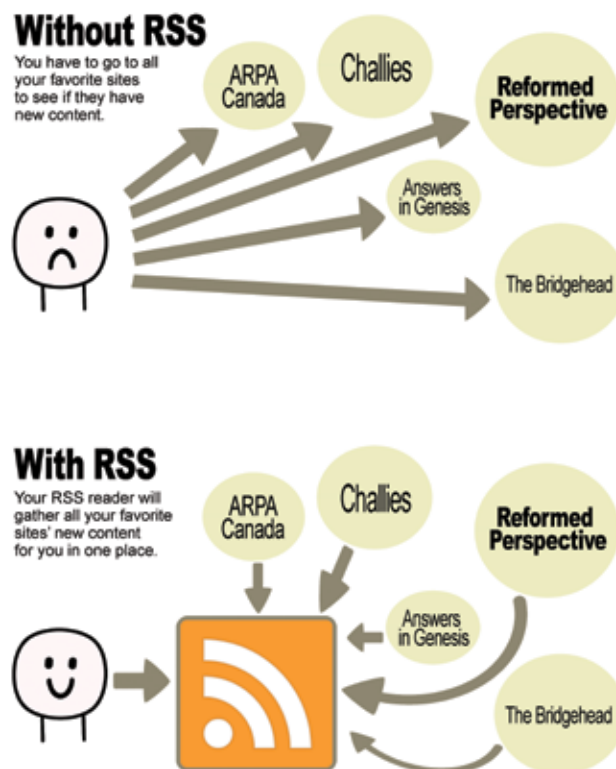
RSS aggregators can show you your content in various ways that might remind you of some email programs, grouping things by topic folders, or by date.

The easiest way to get started with RSS is to use a service like **Feedly.com** or **Inoreader.com**. These popular services include a website, mobile apps, and even web browser extensions that make it easy to gather and consume your updates. Because they are popular, it's also easy to find YouTube instructional videos if you need more help.

Most of the services have free and paid service tiers, and as you might suspect, the free ones usually include ads. However, they do a lot of the work for you, so they're really the best option if you're just starting out with news aggregators.

Feedly offers a free tier that allows users to group as many as 100 feeds into three separate folders of their own creation. So, maybe you want all news articles in one, the YouTube video channels you follow in another, and podcasts in the third. If you want to include more than 100 feeds, then you'll need to upgrade to their paid tiers.

There are lots of other services out there including more complicated versions – like **TheOldReader.com**, and even do-it-yourself options like **FreshRSS.com** and the built-in aggregator in the Vivaldi web browser (available at **Vivaldi.com**) – but these might be better suited to someone particularly techy who likes figuring things out for themselves. RP



CHRISTIAN ED IS FOR ADULTS, TOO

Our faith belongs in all areas of our lives, including our work and growth as professionals. That's why Dordt University is launching a Master of Business Administration (MBA) program in the fall of 2024.

There is a need for more Christian leaders in business—Christian leaders who will make decisions that glorify God. Dordt's MBA will train business leaders in the areas of leadership, marketing, accounting, finance, communication, and data analytics in ways that integrate biblical truth.

What's more, Dordt's MBA program will help students apply what they learn in the classroom to their daily professional work. For example, in the Organization Theory class, students must apply biblical passages about wisdom to contemporary organizations, articulating specific ways they can apply those biblical concepts to their current role. When

learning is done through a biblical worldview with the intent of glorifying God in our workday, we make an even bigger impact for God's kingdom.

Not interested in business? Dordt offers additional master's programs in social work, public administration, education, and special education.

Christian education is for adults, too: at Dordt University, you can study and grow through the lens of a Reformed, Christian worldview.

Joe Bakker

DEAN FOR ONLINE, GRADUATE,
AND PARTNER PROGRAMS



"There are very few community practice programs in Canada and none with a focus on nonprofit administration. Dordt's Master of Social Work program is exactly what I wanted to pursue, and it has provided me with such a breadth of knowledge and resources to help build me in this career and set me up for success."

Danica Buys

M.S.W. STUDENT, YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATOR,
WELLAND, ONTARIO



"I wanted to pursue a Master of Education to gain a deeper understanding of the *why* behind how we do things in education. I felt my B.Ed. lacked depth and critical thinking and also wanted to examine educational issues from a faith-formed perspective. I was grateful for the close communication and mentorship I experienced from my professors. They pushed me to critically examine my beliefs and practices in education through a biblical lens."

Jessica DeWit

M.ED. GRADUATE ('23),
TEACHER AND DIVISION LEADER,
EDMONTON, ALBERTA



"My favourite part about Dordt's Master of Public Administration program is the broad range of course requirements. I was able to study topics that I was already very interested in, but also pushed to think about other topics that I would not naturally consider. In either case, it was a blessing to be able to apply what I was learning directly to the work I am doing, all from a distinctly Christian perspective. "

Daniel Zekveld

M.P.A. GRADUATE ('23),
POLICY ANALYST,
GLOUCESTER, ONTARIO



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"But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me." Matthew 14:16b-18

Presentation Tour

This April, Brother Jaap, a missionary to the people of China and Asia hopes to visit North America to share some of his experiences on the mission field. This will be a wonderful opportunity to hear about the needs of a country that contains so many souls.

Events Near You

April 6, Chilliwack, BC
 April 8, Chilliwack, BC
 April 10, Diamond City, AB
 April 12, Mt. Elgin, ON
 April 13, Hamilton, ON
 April 15, Vineland, ON
 April 16, Kalamazoo, MI
 April 17, Grand Rapids, MI

Please check our website for exact times and locations.

Bonisa.org



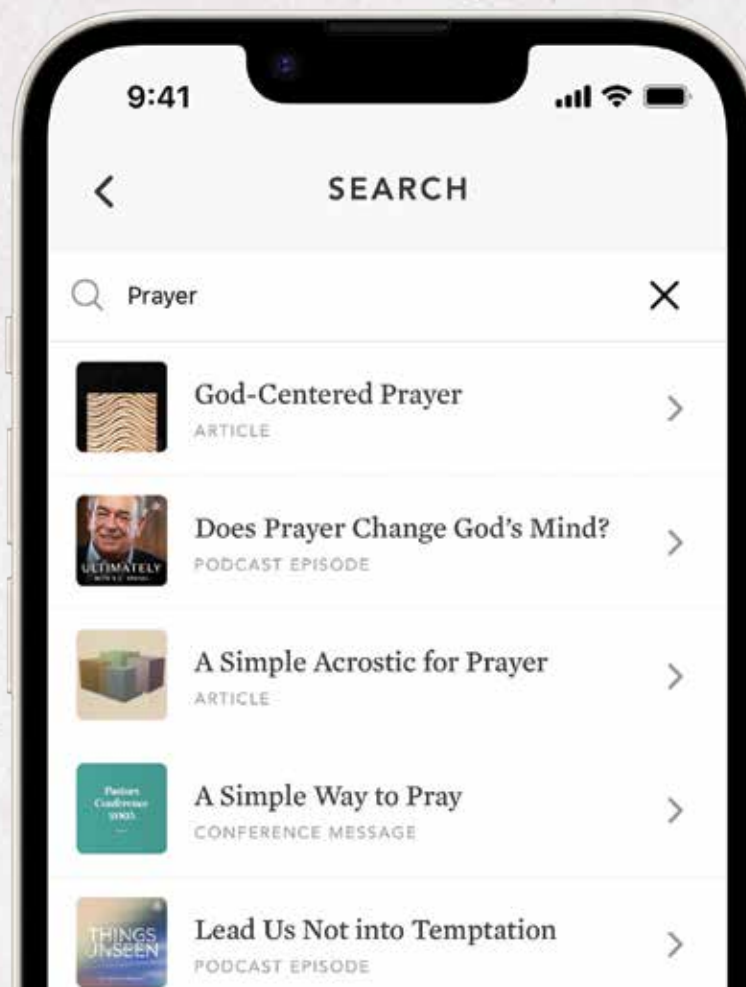
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by Christine Farenhorst

SPARROW BLESSING

Mao's "Four Pest Campaign" shows why a nation's leaders need to be humble about their expertise, and about what they attempt

Most mornings I waken to the sound of sparrows chittering and chattering.

Approximately twenty to thirty little house sparrows have a sun-up inclination to alight on one of the cedar bushes right next to my window. These sparrows used to reside in my laundry poles – winter and summer. They had their babies there and they slept there. They also poked out their gray, brown heads and white cheeks to assess me as I walked by on my way to the chicken coop every morning.

Perhaps they now resent me as I cut down one of the laundry poles last summer. Feeling guilty about cutting down the laundry pole home, I fill the bird feeder with lots of seed. I have named eight of the songsters – Sam, Pete, Al, Rudy, Rembrandt, Ollie, William and Simon – and their daily, simple notes of

joy give me pleasure and comfort.

A FATHER WHO LOVED SPARROWS

My Dad told me that when he was a little boy, he learned to sing Psalm 84, especially verse 3, with great enthusiasm. He sang the Psalm in Dutch and the translated version of verse 3 reads:

Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.

My Dad, who was a wonderful story teller, went on to relate that he thought the word *altars*, which in the Dutch language sounds a lot like *lanterns*, meant that sparrows would eventually make their homes in the lanterns lining his street. Consequently, dressed in short

pants and a blue jacket, he would stand for long periods of time underneath the street lanterns. He would crane his neck and gaze up at these lamps, hoping to see sparrows lay their babies in the lights. It never happened, but he was convinced for a long time that it would happen.

THE CHAIRMAN WHO HATED THEM

In 1893, seventeen years before my Dad's birth, Mao Zedong was born. Growing up to become the first chairman of the Communist Party of China (1935-1976), as well as being the founding father of the People's Republic of China, Mao had absolutely no respect for, or understanding of, the Psalms. Neither did he love the sparrow, that fifth-day creature which God had set in the sky to be a blessing to mankind.

In 1958, the year my family immigrated from Holland to Canada, Mao

Zedong, Marxist dictator of the world's most populous country, decreed that all the sparrows of China were to be killed. Ostensibly to help China leap forward economically and socially, he began a "Four Pests Campaign" (1958-1962) to eradicate, among other animals, the Eurasian tree sparrow.

The Chinese Chairman, an unbelieving little man who did not comprehend that the sparse hairs of his head were numbered by God, did not know what he was doing. His proud slogan was: "Man must conquer Nature." And, because of his campaign, the vast country and grand country of China, instead of leaping forward, began to leap backwards into famine and death.

Matthew 10:29-31 tells us:

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

That is to say, God's people are of more value than the sparrows; that is to say, God works all things out for His people's good. He cares for them.

Besides the tiny, chestnut-crowned sparrow, three other animals were targeted in an overall elimination crusade. These three animals were the mosquito, the rat and the fly. Mao's reasoning was: mosquitoes cause malaria; rats cause the plague; and flies are a general nuisance. Sparrows were included at the tail end of the elimination list because they ate both grain and fruit.

GOVERNMENT DIDN'T KNOW BEST

Mao enacted a law in 1959 which made it mandatory for Chinese citizens to participate in the offensive against this common little bird, the sparrow. He had no idea that this little song-bird helped plants to grow. When the sparrow ate from plants, it passed on the seeds in its droppings. Mao didn't have a clue that these small twitterers also served as food for other larger birds and mammals, nor that they helped provide necessary fertilizer with their excrement for the

plants on which they fed. Neither did the Chairman know that sparrows ate harmful insects. With the enacting of Mao's law to kill the diminutive sparrows with their kidney-shaped, black ear patches, the Chinese ecosystem and environment took a downward turn.

The Chinese people took to arms. They were forced to do so. All over the country people banged pots and pans together to prevent the little birds from settling into their nests. The little "pests" were about twelve centimeters in length and weighed less than an ounce. There were numerous posters declaring war on the birds. Young boys and men fired at the midget flyers with guns and slingshots. Yelling and screaming crowds beat trees with long, wooden poles. As soon as any little creature perched anywhere, worn out by the riots below them, they would be harassed to such a point that they would drop dead from exhaustion. Exhilarated by what they thought was a great leap forward and constantly praised by the authorities for their diligence, people collected dead birds and tied their petite brown bodies together, forming feathery ropes of destruction.

One small light in this fowl massacre was the Polish Embassy in Beijing. They refused to engage in the killing of the sparrows. A refuge for the remaining sparrows, the embassy was eventually surrounded by zealous Chinese citizens, who shouted and shrieked continuously. In the long run, the sparrows hiding in this small space also died. The Polish personnel cleared their area of dead sparrows with shovels.

INSTEAD OF SPARROWS, LOCUSTS

Psalm 102:7 reads: "I lie awake, I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop."

There were many lonely birds after Mao's feather massacre. No census of them was taken prior to their demise. But it is estimated that there were perhaps some six hundred million of them. Hundreds of millions were eliminated through Mao's campaign. The year after the murder of these birds began, insect infestation of field crops increased, the



A Chinese propaganda poster promoting Mao's "Four Pests Campaign."

locust being the main predator. The locusts multiplied and ate everything in their path. Grain production collapsed and a famine began. All the places in which sparrows no longer chirped and chipped, had no cereal output.

The Great Famine which ensued is not allowed to be spoken of in China. Rather, this desolate time is referred to as the "Three Years of Natural Disaster" or the "Three Years of Difficulties." Yang Jisheng, (1940-), Chinese journalist and author, wrote a book entitled *Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962*. First published in Chinese in 2008 (and translated into English a few years later), it chronicles the Great Famine and the Great Leap Forward. Although he was, for a time, a loyal Communist, the Tiananmen Square massacre destroyed Jisheng's faith in the Party.

MAO'S ARROGANCE KILLED TENS OF MILLIONS

The horror stories chronicled by Jisheng are brutal and graphic. He records, among many, many incidents the death of 44 of a village's 45 inhabitants and the

consequent insanity of the last remaining resident, a woman in her 60s. Jisheng wrote regarding his research:

“I didn’t think it would be so serious and so brutal and so bloody. I didn’t know that there were thousands of cases of cannibalism. I didn’t know about farmers who were beaten to death. People died in the family and they didn’t bury the person because they could still collect their food rations; they kept the bodies in bed and covered them up and the corpses were eaten by mice. People ate corpses and fought for the bodies. In Gansu they killed outsiders; people told me strangers passed through and they killed and ate them. And they ate their own children. Terrible! Too terrible!”

Devoting fifteen years to documenting this terrible famine, Jisheng catalogued a three-year catastrophe that is estimated

to have taken 36 to 55 million lives across China.

At the end of his campaign against the four designated pests, Mao Zedong ordered the vendetta against sparrows ended, replacing it with an operation against bed bugs. Eventually, the People’s Republic of China had to import 250,000 sparrows from the then Soviet Union to stop the ecological disruption. After the sparrows had settled back into the country, the locust population was brought under control once more.

Over a period of three years, it is estimated that one billion sparrows, 1.5 billion rats, 100 million kilograms of flies and 11 million kilograms of mosquitos were annihilated throughout China. Ecological and economic disaster jeopardized the very fabric of the country. Even as Nebuchadnezzar before him, Mao was deluded into thinking that he owned nature. Mao (in)famously quipped: “Make the high mountain bow its head; make

the river yield the way.” The truth is that Sinai and Jordan laughed at him and God held him in derision. Where is this mass murderer now?

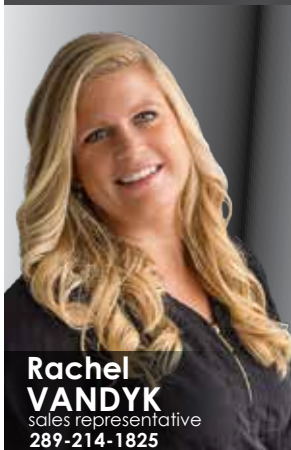
CONCLUSION

In this day and age, when so much misery and terrible economic disaster looms and threatens to undo us, we do well to remember the sparrow blessing, the blessing which Jesus gives to all who acknowledge Him:

“But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father Who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father Who is in heaven.”

– Matthew 10:30-33 

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Mr. J. Kikkert, Principal
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RECENT FILMS CHRISTIANS CAN APPRECIATE

ReformedPerspective.ca/movies

MERCY RULE

FAMILY / DRAMA

2014 / 118 MINUTES

RATING: 7/10



The Millers have been in the scrap metal recycling business for generations. John Miller (Kirk Cameron) works hard during the week, and on Saturdays the family heads to the local ball field, where the young narrator, son Cody, dreams of baseball greatness.

Dad John dreams of expanding his business, but makes a terrible mistake. In applying for a government subsidy, John has to say his company handles hazardous wastes. They don't. His moment of dishonesty costs him when a local lobbyist demands the Miller scrapyard meet all sorts of new "safety" requirements that come with handling hazardous wastes. And if John can't pay for the new compliance requirements, then the city is going to come for his scrapyard. It's a repentant and chagrined John Miller who turns to his brother, his family, and his whole community for help in a fight for his business.

On the field, son Cody is learning lessons of his own about what it means to help the team succeed even at the cost of his own personal success.

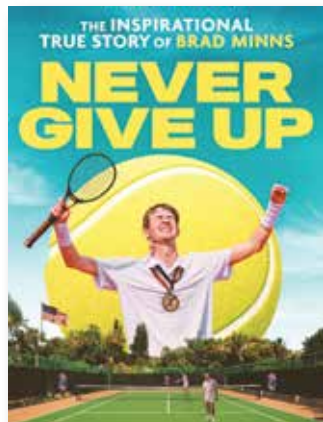
Christian viewers will enjoy the normal Christian family here, that plays and prays together. That said, *Mercy Rule* is too long, and would have warranted an 8 if only it had been 10 minutes shorter.

NEVER GIVE UP

FAMILY / SPORTS

2023 / 79 MINUTES

RATING: 6/10



Never Give Up is the true story of Brad Minns, who was left deaf at the age of three in 1968. His parents make the unusual decision then to have Minns go to a regular school instead of a deaf institution. While even his teacher isn't that welcoming, tennis becomes a refuge. Here his hearing loss doesn't make him all that different. And when Minns beats his big brother, he starts realizing he could become great.

An unlikely tennis comeback serves as the backbone to this film – Minns is down two sets, and five games to none in the third. In flashbacks, we learn about how those early life challenges gave him the perseverance to keep fighting even when he's this far down.

The one caution would be a hazing scene. After Minns wins a match at the US national deaf team tryouts and then heads to the showers, someone hides his clothes. With no other option, Minns shows up at the team meeting "wearing" nothing but a two-foot by three-foot sign. Fortunately, the signage has him more modestly covered than even the biggest pair of shorts.

I wanted to give this a 7, but some of the acting is subpar, comparable to a low-end Hallmark production. So, a 6, but a 6 that our whole family enjoyed.

SABINA: TORTURED FOR CHRIST, THE NAZI YEARS

DRAMA

2022 / 115 MINUTES

RATING: 7/10



The opening shows Nazis at the end of World War II fleeing for their lives, and a Jewish woman, Sabina, risking her life to hide them from the new regime. The Nazis don't understand why she's doing it, and even as they turn to her for help, the soldier in charge demands an explanation. So Sabina tells them the story of her life.

This is a sequel to *Tortured for Christ* about Pastor Richard Wurmbrand's courageous stand against the Soviets when they took over Romania. Like the original, this is a true story too, but the focus is on Wurmbrand's wife Sabina, beginning before they were even married. As she shares, she didn't seem pastor's wife material, any more than her husband seemed pastor material.

The whole film is told as a flashback, cutting away from Sabina's conversation with the Nazi soldiers. What she is explaining to them is why someone such as her – persecuted by soldiers just like them – is still willing to forgive. It is because she has been forgiven first by God.

It's an excellent Christian production, which might have rated an 8 with just a bit of trimming. Watch it for free with your ten and ups at RedeemTV.com.

NETFLIX'S CHRISTIAN MUSICAL?

When I heard that Alan Powell – star of the great Christian film *The Song* – had produced a Christian musical for Netflix, I really wanted to see it. *A Week Away* turned out to be awesome; however, only one of Netflix's other "Faith and Spirituality" exclusives caught my eye: a Hallmark-type romance called *Good Sam* that was better than good.

A WEEK AWAY

MUSICAL / CHRISTIAN

2021 / 97 MINUTES

RATING: 9/10

When Will Hawkins steals a cop car he's faced with heading to juvenile detention, or accepting foster mother Kristin Alway's invitation to join her and her son George at summer camp. Will doesn't think he's really "camp material" but it's better than option #1. It's at this point that viewers find out we are in a musical, with foster mom, George, and Will all breaking out quite the rendition of Steven Curtis Chapman's *The Great Adventure*.

After he arrives, Will realizes he signed up for church camp... and now it's too late to change his mind. Still, while Will is reluctant, he's not a sourpuss, and with George as his wingman, he starts to see the positive side of things. One big plus is the first girl he bumps into, Avery Farrell. She's the daughter of the camp director, and an extremely competitive participant in every event of the camp's week-long "warrior games."

One early hiccup happens when Will doesn't want Avery to know about his delinquent past so he introduces himself as George's cousin. George objects: "I don't mean to be a prude, but lying is kind of up on the top 10 'thou shalt nots...'" but gets distracted when Will promises to help him with his own camp crush, Presley Elizabeth Borsky.

While the budding romance will get the tweens and teens, what makes *A Week Away* brilliant for everyone is the musical numbers. In a genius move, producer Alan Powell features all sorts of 90s CCM songs to hook mom and dad, and then absolutely nails the choreography. Cameos add to the fun, with Steven Curtis Chapman appearing as a frantic lifeguard during a beach number featuring his song "Dive." His screen time amounts to no more than 10 seconds, but it's a fun wink for any parents who spot him.

Cautions here amount to what you'd offer for the Contemporary Christian Music featured throughout: it's Christianity-lite, with quite a bit about God's grace, and not much about sin.

This is basically a Christian *High School Musical*, except that this time we did it better. The music is popping, the cast are all lovable even when they're moping, and shucks, even the bad guy gets redeemed in the end. It isn't deep, but it is delightful, and you won't be able to help but play it loud. *A Week Away* is the best of bets for a family movie night.



GOOD SAM

DRAMA / FAMILY / ROMANCE

2019 / 89 MINUTES

RATING: 8/10

Kate Bradley is a TV reporter covering fires and other tragedies. That's left her a little cynical, and left her boss worried that she's too jaded about the dangers she's risking. So when news breaks about an anonymous Good Samaritan who left \$100,000 outside someone's door, Kate's boss decides to give her this safer assignment.

When the money keeps coming the mystery only deepens; "Good Sam" leaves a second bag of cash with a doctor who isn't in any sort of need. The third recipient, a carpenter who'd been laid up with an injury, has no connection to the first two.

This could have gotten too sugary-sweet, but when a tech programmer claims to be Good Sam, Kate quickly exposes him as a fake. And that's not the only dirt Kate uncovers.

The romance angle was less predictable than most. Kate gets two love interests, both pretty stalwart sorts... or so it seems. Kate's father is a US senator, and when she meets charming hedge fund manager Jack Hansen she initially turns him down, as she has a rule against dating anyone in her father's political circles. Eric Hayes is a firefighter Kate keeps bumping into in her day job. He is as brave as he is private... or might the right word be *secretive*? Which of these two will she end up with? That's another mystery, and viewers are left in suspense for most of the movie.


The main caution is for what the movie *doesn't* have. While the original Good Samaritan story (Luke 10:25-37)

teaches us what it means to live out the Second Greatest Commandment, this one avoids any mention of God.

This is a basically a Hallmark movie, but the better sort, and with a mystery and romance that'll keep most viewers guessing for the first three quarters of the film. The lack of problematic content make this one you can watch with ten and up.



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Most of our readers came on board in 2022 and 2023, thanks to a very gracious family foundation, which invested \$100,000 for each of those years, so that the magazine could be offered to all NAPARC-affiliated churches. But the investment was limited to two years, with the understanding that the new readers would cover their own cost moving forward.

So, this year and moving forward, we are looking to our readers, especially our newer ones, to continue to make this increased

circulation possible. In particular, we are in need of monthly donations of any amount, to help cover our own monthly costs (including \$27,000+ to print and ship a single issue).

As you may appreciate, this presents quite the challenge to us, since our budget is now almost \$500,000 and we rely primarily on donations to cover this, with just over 10 percent being covered by ad revenue.

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\$50,000. Between their support and yours, we hope to be able to keep the expanded circulation going. We have \$370/month pledged so far.

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Right now 7% of our readers help cover the costs to get this magazine into the hands of so many more. If you are one of these, we sincerely thank you. If you aren't, and if the Lord has given you the means, will you help us with continuing to publish a Reformed perspective on the social and cultural issues of our day?

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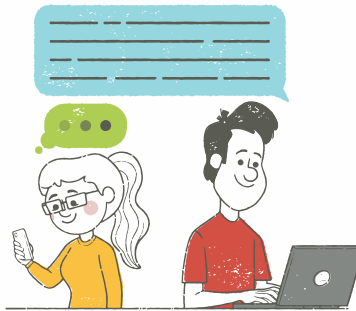
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