

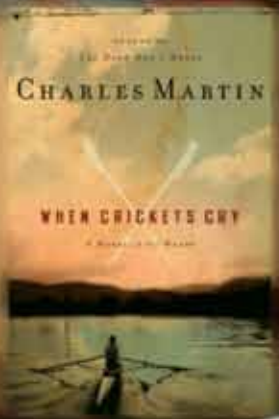
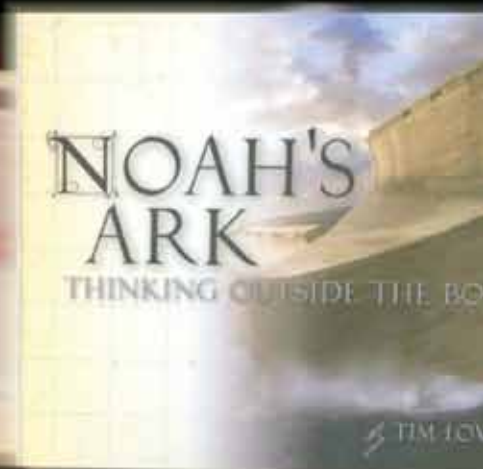
REFORMED

Perspective

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FOR THE
CHRISTIAN
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**BOOKS
ISSUE**



“Discernment labels”

Ensuring your church library is a help and never a harm

Editorial

Jon Dykstra

For the bargain rate of 25 cents I recently acquired an ancient guide on how church libraries were done in the Christian Reformed Churches years ago. *Church Library Handbook* was first published in 1954, and while some of it is now outdated – like the price list on the “Book Suggestions” page – the book’s theme is relevant today. A church library, the authors suggest, can be as influential as the church’s minister, and should be treated with the same level of respect.

Is your library complimenting, or competing with your minister?

This might strike you as an overstatement. After all, the only church libraries that some of us know consist of a couple dusty half-filled bookshelves tucked into a corner of a back room in the basement. But the comparison isn’t so outlandish when the library we’re looking at is one of the newer sort springing up in our churches, the sort that has current and classic books, fiction and non-fiction, neatly ordered on shelves that never gather dust because the books are being read and reshelved at regular intervals.

First Impressions by Debra White is a medium-sized Christian romance novel – the kind of book that might be checked out one Sunday and returned the next. It is 327 pages long with roughly 330 words per page, which works out to just over 100,000 words. In comparison, every service a minister will speak to the congregation for about 40 minutes, and each Sunday he will conduct two services. If he speaks at a good, average rate of 150 words per minute, the congregation will receive a total of about 12,000 words from the pulpit or roughly one eighth as many words as a typical Christian romance novel.

Of course the extent of a library’s, or a minister’s influence can’t be calculated with simple word totals. But this comparison does show how a library can have a potent impact on the church, for good or for ill. A minister may only preach a sermon on a topic like marriage once a year, while the church library may be filled to the brim with Christian romance fiction. If a young woman devours a book every week or so and makes a regular diet of this sort of fiction, it is easy to see how

the library could exert a stronger influence on her thinking on this topic than anything the minister might preach.

It seems then that comparing the library’s influence to the minister’s isn’t so outlandish. That’s why, if a church is going to have a library, they need to exercise a similar level of concern and care in its creation and maintenance as they might do in the calling of a minister, because a well-used library will be influential. . . for good or for ill.

Warning labels

So how to ensure that influence is of the good sort? Well, one approach being used involves the insertion of warning or “discernment labels” in each book.

It’s a given that care needs to be taken in the selection of books, but we live in a sin-stained world, so it is a given too that even the best of books will have problems. One of the more obvious examples is that it is next to impossible to find Christian fiction free of Arminianism – almost without exception, every title contains at least a flavoring of it. Many times though, it is merely a flavoring and the only real concern is that it might sneak up on readers undetected. A short summary of the book’s flaws, pasted on the inside of the cover ensures that this won’t happen.

In our library in Lynden, Washington we’ve made only a small start of this. Our discernment labels amount to short book reviews ordered under three headings: *Content*, *Cautions* and *Conclusion*. *Content* provides a short summary of the book, *Cautions* is where the warnings are noted, and under *Conclusion* readers can find to whom and for what reason the book is recommended. This is how the “discernment label” for *A Journey in Grace* reads:

A JOURNEY IN GRACE
by Richard P. Belcher

CONTENT: This is a different sort of novel – the cover describes it as a “theological novel.” Seminary student Ira Fife Pointer, is forced into a spiritual journey when he’s asked a question he’s never heard before: “Young man – are you a Calvinist?” Ira doesn’t know, but he’s definitely going to find out. The plot centers around Ira’s



quest to find out what Calvinism is, and what the Bible says about depravity, election, atonement, grace, and perseverance.

CAUTION: The author is a Reformed Baptist, who understands both baptism and the covenant in a markedly different way than we do, but these issues are only incidental in this volume.

CONCLUSION: As fiction *Journey in Grace* doesn't really measure up, but as a theological text, this "novel" approach to teaching Calvinism is nothing short of brilliant.

Of course the "Cautions" don't always need to be of a strictly theological nature. On a discernment label for the great children's DVD *The Creation Adventure Team: Six Short Days, One Big Adventure* I noted: "CAUTION: This video has been designed to appeal to the attention-deficit set, with cuts from one camera angle to the next every few seconds. Fascinating material, but so fast-paced and frenetic, I almost had a headache after watching it." And in creating a label for the 1953 film *Martin Luther* I noted

"CAUTION: Though there is nothing in the film that is graphic, some scenes are psychologically intense, so it may not be appropriate for the very young."

Another approach

While these labels are helpful, they are time-consuming. We've only just started on them and seem to be falling behind as we buy more books than we label. To make it work we'll need to recruit at least a few more book reviewers.

A better approach might be the one used by the Glanbrook Canadian Reformed Church. They've decided to go with less detailed labels, so they can get them placed in many more books. Rather than write a separate caution for every book, some general caution labels, like "This book has Arminian overtones," have been created for whole categories of books. This label is short and succinct and can be used again and again on a variety of Christian fiction titles.

Conclusion

A good library can be a great help to a church's ministry, providing resources for the study groups, and books that expand on and compliment the message being preached each Sunday. They can also provide edifying fiction for the congregation's enjoyment.

But they aren't necessary. While every church needs a minister – every church needs to hear the Word preached regularly – libraries are an option that we can choose to have or do without. That's why there is no reason to have a mediocre library, one that passes on both harmful and helpful ideas. If proper care and attention can't be spared to make your church's library a great one then it would be best to get rid of it altogether. Let's not allow the preaching to be undermined by what our library is teaching.



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“After ‘PC for Dummies’, ‘Car Repair for Dummies’ and ‘Photography for Dummies’, I think the public will be ready to buy my book. It’s called ‘Stop Calling Me A Dummy!’”

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Nota Bene

News worth noting



“iPad Revolution” revolts against pornography

by Anna Nienhuis and Jon Dykstra

Apple CEO Steve Jobs has defended his company’s decision to control all applications available on the iPad and iPhone, including requiring that all applications adhere to a “pro-family” standard that does not allow any pornographic applications or other questionable images, sounds, or text. News and gossip writer Ryan Tate entered into an email debate with Jobs on the subject, arguing that Apple’s so-called “revolution” should by definition be all about freedom for users, not limits.

Jobs countered that freedom should mean freedom from pornography, among other things such as freedom from viruses and crashes. He recognizes that parents do not always have the technological know-how to control their kids’ use of the newest technologies, and believes companies have a moral obligation to put limits on these technologies.

Some argue that Jobs is simply making excuses to allow his company to control which applications users can access in order to increase his bottom line. However, these limits and Jobs’ public reasons for them should give comfort to Christian consumers and perhaps have an impact on the decision as to which company they



Photo courtesy of Apple

buy products from, as this company has at its helm someone who speaks out about a moral responsibility in the distribution and use of new technologies.

In a recent development, Microsoft has announced that it is going to follow Apple’s lead and not allow porn or sexually suggestive content in its Windows Phone 7 Marketplace.

While “porn programs” are being kept off these phones, it is still possible for users of either phone to access porn, by finding it on the Internet (either phone can surf the web). So if parents are going to give their children this or any other Internet-enabled phone, they should consider installing a monitoring program like Covenant Eyes (www.covenanteyes.com) which can alert parents to what websites their children are visiting.

Source: www.lifesitenews.com May 18, June 9, 2010

How much is too much tax?

by Jon Dykstra

According to the May edition of the *Fraser Forum*, the average Canadian family paid roughly 42% of their income in taxes.

In Matthew 22 Jesus makes it clear that the government does have the authority to tax (vs. 15-22). We can also learn from Scripture, however, that high tax rates are harmful – socialist policies that tax citizens all or large portions of their income in order to spread the wealth are doomed to fail (Romans 3:23, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12). These high tax policies prompt two questions:

Why work hard if it’s only the government that benefits from our extra effort?

And why work at all if we are assured of our food even if we’re idle?

It’s only natural – our fallen human nature showing itself – to be lazy under such circumstances. While idleness is sinful, in socialist circumstances it is also predictable.

We know from Scripture then, that some tax is proper, and too much tax is foolish. But how much is too much? That’s less clear, but when we consider that the average Canadian family is now spending more on taxes than on shelter, food and clothing combined, it would seem we are heading in the foolish direction.

Tax bill of the average Canadian family

Total income	\$69,175
Taxes	
Income taxes	\$9,341
Sales taxes	\$4,259
Liquor, tobacco, excise	\$1,757
Auto, fuel, vehicle license	\$749
Social security, medical	\$6,074
Property taxes	\$2,834
Import duties	\$272
Profits tax	\$2,484
Natural resource taxes	\$387
Other taxes	\$710
Total taxes	\$28,878

SOURCE: “Canadian hand over 42% of their income to government” *Fraser Forum* 05/10

Gay pride takes a fall

by Anna Nienhuis

The Conservative government has taken a tentative stand this year, announcing it will not be giving any funds to Toronto's large "gay pride" festival. Last year the festival received \$400,000 from then Tourism Minister Diane Ablonczy, but Minister Tony Clement now has the job of allotting tourism funding and has decided to distribute it between a larger number of events in smaller centers. Last year's money went mainly to big events in Toronto and Montreal.

Minister Clement has made it clear that this is in no way intended as a personal statement, but rather a simple redistribution of funds, and no group or event should feel entitled to receive funding simply because they have in the past. Of course, his statement did not prevent disappointed participants and organizers for the event from calling his decision "homophobic" and "anti-gay."

Informal newspaper and online polls show significant majority opinion is on Clement's side, regardless of his reasons for making the decision to direct funding to other events.

Source: www.lifesitenews.com May 11, 2010

Cardinal: Abortion not ok in any circumstance

Columnist: I hope you die horribly

by Anna Nienhuis

Cardinal Marc Ouellet, who spoke at this year's Ottawa March for Life and is considered one of Canada's strongest lobbyists for the unborn, is under fire for his public statement that abortion should never be a legitimate option. At a Campaign Life Coalition conference in Quebec City in May, Ouellet defended

Our pro-abortion Prime Minister

by Jon Dykstra

For years rumors have persisted that our Prime Minister is pro-life. . . but secretly so. He has repeatedly denied any intention of reopening the abortion debate but still the rumors persisted, in both pro-life and pro-abortion circles. He was just biding his time, so the whippers went, until he finally had a majority government, then we would see him take swift action against abortion.

On May 21 he took a stand that should put all those rumors to rest. That's the day he publicly opposed "Roxanne's Law," a bill currently being debated in Parliament. The bill was proposed by Conservative MP Rod Bruinooge, and named in remembrance of Roxanne Fernando, a Winnipeg woman who was killed by her boyfriend in 2007 when she refused to have an abortion. The intent of Bruinooge's bill was to prevent women from being coerced into aborting their children.



In terms of anti-abortion initiatives, this was the tiniest possible step in the right direction, protecting only those unborn children who are being killed against their mother's wishes. Still, even this tiny step was a step too far for our Prime

Minister. He seized this as an opportunity to show the country his firm pro-abortion convictions. The bill sought only to preserve a woman's right to freely choose for, or against, abortion so Harper's position can't even be characterized as pro-choice – he came out against protecting women's choice.

Come election time the same old pro-life rumors will surface again. But we know better; we know Prime Minister Harper is not secretly pro-life, not even pro-choice, but publicly and vehemently pro-abortion.

the unborn even in cases of rape, saying "the child is not responsible for how he was conceived. . . we can see him as another victim."

Backlash to these comments was swift, even among other Catholic clergy. *Montreal La Presse* columnist Patrick Lagace said he hoped Ouellet would die "from a long and painful illness" for being a religious "extremist."

Such violent reactions to Ouellet's comments show how deeply the pro-choice movement has penetrated soci-

ety. However, pro-life leaders are rallying behind the Cardinal and attempting to make people understand where this belief comes from. Mary-ellen Douglas, the national organizer for Campaign Life Coalition, says, "We know the abortion hurts women, and the last thing we want is for a woman who has already been hurt by rape to be further hurt by abortion. . . we must not condone the commission of another crime as a solution to the first crime."

Source: www.lifesitenews.com May 18, 2010

Bus ads continue to cause controversy

by Anna Nienhuis

Last month we reported on a bus ad controversy in Toronto ("Toronto bus ads once again stirring up commuters" June, 2010) in which a Christian ad, tactfully tackling the issue of homosexuality, was pulled. Now a similar situation is occurring in Miami. There an ad is being recalled, after initially being allowed to run, due to anger and calls of discrimination. The ad offered a website resource to Muslims wishing to leave their faith, partly in response to occa-



sional occurrences where those trying to break from Islam have been threatened and been in danger from their families and community.

At least three of the bus companies now pulling the ad had no problem recently running pro-Islam ads proclaiming that Islam is "submission to God" and the religion of Moses, Jesus and others.

This double standard continues to crop up as we are reminded yet again that freedom of speech is not always a two-way street. Too often Christians find themselves on the muzzled end, not allowed to offend but also not allowed to express offense.

Source: www.wnd.com April 16, 2010

Double negative

Marci McDonald's mudslinging should be seen as a compliment to those she maligns. . . like ARPA Canada

by Michael Wagner

The Christians are coming! Christians now occupy important places of influence in Stephen Harper's federal government and are surreptitiously changing policies without Canadians being aware of what's going on. We've even managed to put Canada on the road to becoming a theocracy!

Or at least, that's what Marci McDonald would have Canadians believe. In her bestselling book *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada* she sets out to warn Canadians that they will lose their rights and freedoms unless this sinister Christian plot is exposed and halted.

If only. . .

It is true, as she points out, that conservative Christians have gained influence in Ottawa since 2005, largely because the Conservative Party won the federal elections of 2006 and 2008. There are some conservative Christian MPs in the Conservative Party, so when that party became the government it was inevitable that those Christians would gain influence. Also, some new Christian organizations have been formed since 2005, and they are having an impact. In this respect there is a grain of truth to McDonald's charge that conservative Christians are more influential now than a few years ago.

However, her thesis is grossly exaggerated. The federal government is not doing a thing about the two policy areas of greatest concern to conservative Christians – abortion and homosexual rights. Indeed, Prime Minister Harper has publicly emphasized on a number of occasions his complete support for a “woman's right to choose.” So, sadly, McDonald has nothing to worry about on these fronts.

ARPA to usher in the End Times?

Many conservative Christian activists are held up to scorn by McDonald as threats to Canadian democracy. You or someone you know is likely among this subversive group. The Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), you may be surprised to find out, is one of the so-called “Christian nationalist” groups that's working to help Canada usher in the end times and the return of Christ. McDonald wants to warn Canadians about a group she calls Christian nationalists, “a militant charismatic fringe with ties to Harper's Conservatives that has gained influence out of all proportion to its numerical heft.” She then notes the central characteristic of this group:

“What drives the growing Christian nationalist movement is its adherents' conviction that the end times foretold in the book of Revelation are at hand. Braced for

an impending apocalypse, they feel impelled to ensure that Canada assumes a unique, scripturally ordained role in the final days before the Second Coming – and little else.”

Keeping this in mind, she later writes that Mark Penninga founded “his own Christian nationalist lobby, the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), backed by the country's Reformed churches.” Following McDonald's logic, then, ARPA is one of the Christian nationalist groups, a charismatic fringe movement waiting for an “impending apocalypse.” That's a pretty sloppy way of characterizing ARPA. McDonald is a veteran reporter and she should have been much more careful in making distinctions between different Christian groups.

She has some rather nasty things to say about these Christian nationalists too. According to her, “Theirs is a dark and dangerous vision, one that brooks no dissent and requires the dismantling of key democratic institutions.” Remember, this refers to ARPA, as well as some other Christian organizations such as the Canada Family Action Coalition. If they get more power it sounds like Canadian democracy will be kaput.

Well done!

Of course, it's unpleasant to see one's friends and relatives (or even oneself) held up to scorn in a book. But there is a bright side. ARPA is being mentioned in McDonald's book because people have noticed its presence. When your opponents are talking about you that way it's because they're concerned that you're making an impact. Their concern is a backhanded compliment to your effectiveness. In my view, the Christians who are singled out by name (e.g., Mark Penninga) and the groups that are singled out (e.g. ARPA) should be encouraged.

I'm not just trying to put a positive spin on things. I really think that people who make a difference for the Lord in today's society are likely to receive opposition. There's a tongue-in-cheek saying that “no good deed goes unpunished,” and there's truth to that when it comes to offering a Christian witness in an increasingly anti-Christian society. Although it's unpleasant and undesirable to be disliked, remember what Jesus said in Luke 6:26, “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets” (ESV). The implication, of course, is that people will not speak well of you if you are a true prophet. McDonald's book is an example of this phenomenon.



Tithes, school fees, home loans and ethics

Being Christian at the bank

by John Voorhorst

A reader recently sent in an interesting and somewhat difficult question about home purchases, school fees and tithes. Now most people in Canada don't pay school fees, and don't tithe to their church so the question I was asked was how these "obligations" might impact the affordability of a home and whether we, as Christians, have a duty to tell the banker about these "obligations" when we apply for a mortgage.

Just to be sure that we all understand the question, let me rephrase it with a more concrete example.

Joe and Mary

Joe and Mary have 4 children, one of whom is beginning school in September. Joe earns \$4,700 per month. Joe and Mary have been renting a duplex or what is also known as a side by side. They have managed to save \$40,000 for a down payment for a home purchase and have found a house that they would like to buy. It is an older home but one that has been well maintained and appears to be well built. The house is for sale for \$260,000. They have offered \$240,000 and their conditional offer has been accepted. Now they will need to qualify for a \$200,000 mortgage.

Joe has done some research and knows that the banker will want to know what his total monthly debt payments are, or what could be called his "obligatory payments" and the banker will also want to know what the monthly costs to run his home will be. And of course he needs to be within the banks ratio in these two areas.

Debt service ratios

Now what are these bank ratios? There are two, known as the GDSR and the TDSR.

The Gross Debt Service Ratio (**GDSR**) is the percentage of gross annual income required to cover payments associated with housing (mortgage principal and interest, taxes, secondary financing, heating, and 50 per cent of condominium fees, if any). The GDSR should not exceed 32 per cent of gross annual income.

The Total Debt Service Ratio (**TDSR**) is the percentage of gross annual income required to cover payments associated with housing and all other debts and obligations, such as payments on a car loan. The TDSR should not exceed 40 per cent of gross income.

So the important thing for us to remember is that the *TDSR must be less than 40 per cent and the GDSR must be less than 32 per cent.*

If either of these two conditions is not met then Joe and Mary do not qualify for the \$200,000 mortgage they require in order for them to be able to buy the home they have found.

So let's crunch some numbers and see what sort of situation our couple is facing.

Joe earns \$4,700. A \$200,000 mortgage requires a payment of \$1,190 per month (at 5.25% amortized over 25 years). The property taxes on the home they would like to buy worked out to \$150 a month. The average heating bill was \$150 per month. So \$1,190 plus \$150 plus \$150 equals \$1,490 for housing costs. His monthly housing costs of \$1,490 divided by his income of \$4,700 gives us a GDSR ratio of 31 per cent. So, he qualifies here.

The TDSR is a different matter. According to the banks guidelines he needs to include all debts and obligations in his calculations including any car loans. Joe and Mary do not have a car loan.

But we should add the church and the school into this total, right? Church and school add an additional \$870 per month to the total. So \$1,490 plus \$870 equals \$2,360. \$2,360 divided by \$4,700 is 50 per cent.

Now here is where things become interesting. His application as it stands now will be rejected. However, does the banker consider the donation to church as an obligation or just a desire or a hope? What is our responsibility here? If we do not include the \$470 to church the total becomes \$1,490 plus \$400 or \$1,840. Divide that by \$4,700 and the ratio becomes 39 per cent. Now we qualify.

What should we do?

The ethics of this question are one part of the equation. The other is, can Joe and Mary make ends meet if they were to qualify? If the banker grants the mortgage because he does not consider the donation to the church as anything more than a hope or a wish, where might this leave Joe and Mary?

First the ethics. We might be tempted to hide the truth of the situation. Maybe we neglect to tell the banker that we consider the contribution to church as an obligation. I think we can all readily see and agree that this would put us outside of the Ninth Commandment. That's the one that deals with bearing false witness.




Joe and Mary at the bank

So it should be obvious that we would tell the banker about the obligation to church. If the banker grants the mortgage anyway because he considers the payment to the church as a donation that has no legal obligation tied to it, what should Joe and Mary do? Bankers have years of experience that suggest that when the TDSR is more than 40 per cent homeowners often get into financial difficulty. So maybe Joe and Mary should decline the mortgage and save for a few more years so that they have a bigger down payment.

Now before we go into all the argumentation about rising house prices, the effects of inflation and the fact that I may be asking the impossible here, let's just go back to a few other principles that we have learned. In an earlier article ("Budgeting Basics: Everyone needs to budget" July/August 2009, and online at ReformedPerspective.ca) I tried to make the case that we all should have a budget. We should not just have a budget but we should run our household within that budget. So, if Joe and Mary have been living within their budget and their budget has allowed them to save the \$40,000 they needed for the down-payment, then I am sure that their budget (and the records they have kept which illustrate that they actually live within the budget) can eas-

ily be used to satisfy even the most conservative banker that they can make all their obligatory payments, because Joe and Mary also have learned to live prudently and economically. Mary is an avid "coupon collector." She is known as the queen of collectors at the grocery store. She also has learned to dress her children very well, even though they are not always wearing the "name brand" items. Joe and Mary do not have cable television and they do not have a cell-phone either. They manage with one car. They enjoy reading and the entire family makes excellent use of the local library. The only two pieces of reading material that come into their home at a cost are the *Clarion* and the *Reformed Perspective*. Both Joe and Mary have the reputation of being hard workers and also of always being aware of the specials on anything they might need to be buying.

So, I would conclude by saying that yes, we must honestly tell the banker about our obligations, also our obligations to the LORD, and we should also have lived prudently, within our budget, maintain good records of our prudent living and then trust that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, and He will continue to maintain His promises to His covenant children. 

Taking letter-writing to another level

7 questions with Stanley Reitsma

by Mark Penninga

Nestled under the mature trees that line Carman Manitoba's streets sits a yellow brick 1902 home. The tall Victorian house, with Queen Anne and Eastlake detailing and stained glass windows reminds passer-by that prairie towns like Carman have a deep and rich history. I had the privilege of getting a tour of this character home when Stanley Reitsma offered *Reformed Perspective's* editor and I a place to sleep after a combined ARPA/RP presentation in a local church. I soon discovered that the home's owner was as extraordinary as the home. His passion for social and political issues has led him to write over 160 letters to the editor to newspapers and news magazines across the country, and they have been published roughly 300 times so far. It typically takes him about 6 hours to write each letter. And the letters keep coming.

After only a short visit with Reitsma I knew that his political interest and action was exemplary and worth sharing. A filing cabinet stands next to his computer, packed with more political research than one would find in a Member of Parliament's office. Added to that is a thick stack of newspaper clippings of Reitsma's letters that have been printed. And these aren't just from the *Carman Valley Leader*. His letters have appeared in newspapers and magazines across the country including the *Winnipeg Sun*, the now defunct *Western Standard*, the *Yorkton Saskatchewan News Review*, *The Carillon* of Steinbach, Manitoba, and many others.

In my daily job I try to encourage members of Reformed churches to become both politically aware and active. In an age when most people are just "too busy" to respond to the news, Reitsma's example was one I knew is worth sharing with *Reformed Perspective* readers.

Mark Penninga: *What first got you interested in political matters?*

Stanley Reitsma: When I was 9 years old in 1977 I saw on the evening news the Canary Island airplane disaster. After that I became fascinated with the news on TV. I can remember most of the Jimmy Carter administration in the U.S. despite my young age. By 1980 I wanted to read the newspaper and news magazines. I became involved in politics by joining the CHP in 1988 and the Family Coalition Party in 1990 while I lived in Guelph, Ontario where I was born.



Stan Reitsma, in front of his filing cabinet full of newspaper and magazine clippings.

MP: *Do you remember your first letter to the editor?*

SR: Yes. I wrote a letter in the spring of 1997 to the local paper, the *Carman Valley Leader*, about Reform Leader Preston Manning's speech he gave in Carman that I went to. Instead of an anti-big government speech that I expected, he delivered a family values speech about honoring and protecting the traditional family unit and traditional marriage as opposed to what the Liberals wanted or thought.

I infuriated one of his aides who accosted me angrily in the coatroom after I asked Preston a question at the mike. I left immediately after the question because I had to leave for work for the afternoon shift. That aide said, "You know full well what our position on abortion is so why did you have to ask him about it?" I pointed out to him that since the baby in the womb is the most vulnerable member of the family unit and since it is the institution of the family that Preston was seeking to protect, honoring the traditional family means

protecting the unborn baby. I found the whole speech was a sham when he stated he had to abide by his constituents' wishes in regards to whether that baby – that smallest member of the family – can be killed or not by abortion. So I wrote a letter about this mammoth contradiction.

MP: *Your letters can be quite strong and are sure to generate a reaction. What are some of the negative responses you received that stand out in your mind? Positive?*

SR: Positive responses? Many from people around town within the broader Christian community who tell me in person that they like what I write. I get some phone calls too from people who like my letters.

Negative responses? Many from the usual regular letter writers who cannot stand my letters. Particularly from the Steinbach *Carillon*. Sadly my fiercest critics are liberal Christians – the United Church crowd – and the pacifist, fan of big government Christians. Hostile secularists write against me less frequently.

I find it appalling that many of these liberal Christians write letters quoting the Bible while writing from a hard Left “CBC worldview.” They are the secular Left’s useful idiots. Their letters are typically like what Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein would write but with Bible verses added. This reminds me of the Citizens for Public Justice crowd I argued with from time to time when living in Ontario.

MP: *What are some lessons you have learned over the years about making a letter more likely to be published?*

SR: I have not figured that out. Editorial bias reigns supreme – some letters that I submit I get an email from the publisher that my letter is promoting hate, therefore it won’t be printed, and yet that exact same letter gets in other newspapers completely unedited. So go figure.

MP: *After following the news for many years, how do you keep the discouraging stories in perspective?*

SR: I see it as an opportunity to write. The more discouraging the more it motivates me to write. Nothing surprises me, the world is evil and man is fallen, what do you expect?

MP: *Many people struggle with knowing how to incorporate a Christian worldview when they respond to current events or issues. Do you have suggestions?*


SR: Too many Christians confuse the role of the State and where its sphere or authority stops. They give the State too much authority, authority that the Bible reserves for the institution of the Family and the Church. I find many Christians – even some in our circles – are too socialist or statist for what the Bible allows for. They give too much authority to the State in regards to healthcare, education and welfare, which exclusively use to belong to the institution of the Family and the Church.

MP: *If you had to recommend three websites and three books that have been most helpful for your writing, what would they be?*

SR: The three websites would be Lifesite (LifeSiteNews.com), Wintery Knight (winteryknight.wordpress.com) and Canada Free Press (www.canadafreepress.com).

The three books would be *Uncle Sam’s Plantation* by Star Parker, *How Now Shall We Live?* by Charles Colson, and although it’s getting old, another book I recommend is called *The War Against the Family* by William Gairdner.





Coram Deo International Aid (CDIA)
and
Word & Deed Ministries
announce their intention to merge

At the initiative of Coram Deo International Aid (CDIA) and with thanksgiving to the Lord, the respective boards of CDIA and Word & Deed Ministries announce our intent to merge subject to approval by the CDIA membership. Given the similarity of our mission and mandate, the overlap of our respective supporters, the need of CDIA for administrative services given her growth over the past few years and the 16 years of experience Word & Deed has to date, the intent to merge is believed to reflect both practical wisdom and an encouraging degree of unity among our supporting churches and denominations as we together, in a diaconal capacity, strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the developing world.

Our intent to merge has resulted from several meetings between ad-hoc committees representing each board over the past year and the hope is that final approval for the merger will be given by each board and their respective memberships by the end of 2010 with CDIA fully merged into Word & Deed Ministries by the end of 2011. CDIA would cease to exist as a separate charity and continue on as the Adoration Project Team overseeing Adoration Christian Centre in Haiti as part of Word & Deed Ministries. Adoration Christian Centre, will continue to be managed by our field workers, Randy & Karen Lodder and Kim Gringhuis.

Both boards wish to emphasize that the merger will not reduce the involvement of current CDIA volunteers and supporters. Both organizations have developed a culture of enthusiastic involvement and support and the success of the merger depends on this continuing under the indispensable blessing of the Lord. May we together be instruments in His hands to the salvation of sinners and the strengthening of His church both in Haiti and in the many other countries Word & Deed has the privilege of working.

Inquiries can be directed to CDIA at info@cdiacanada.com or Word & Deed at publicrelations@wordanddeed.org

CREATION Evolution & COMPROMISE

Why do we feel pressured to mesh the evolutionary and Genesis account of our origins?

by Dave Dykstra

When it comes to the origin of the world, the origin of the creatures in it, and especially, the origin of man, there are only a few prevailing viewpoints. These are all primarily philosophical, but each has a battery of “scientific evidence” of various quantities and qualities to back it up.

However, the success of each idea, and a person’s choice of theory is dependent on their worldview.

1) Six days

Creation (defined here as a six-day, young earth creation) is the belief that God created the heavens and the earth in His own power, by His Word. The book of Genesis tells us that God made all things according to their *kinds* in six days, and on the seventh He rested. This belief requires a child-like faith and acceptance that God is capable of creating all things good and in six days. It accepts as true the account in Genesis 1, and does not see the need to question it. If God can create the world in six days, and He clearly tells us He did in His Word, why do many who believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture question this fact?

2) Molecules to man

“Evolution” has many definitions and as many different uses, as confusion is one of its tenets for success. For the purpose of this article, though, it can be defined as the development of all diverse species by random chance over a very long period of time, from a few cells that spontaneously formed from non-living material after the Big Bang (also known as “macro-evolution”).

This theory has as its mechanisms mutation and natural selection. Organisms within a species compete with each other for resources (food, territory, etc) and mates. Individuals have variations that differ from others in the species, and so any individual with a variation that gives an advantage, however slight, will be more likely to survive and pass its genetic information on to the next generation (Darwin’s survival of the fittest).

This process makes a lot of sense and is observable in the natural world for many creatures as they adapt to the environments that God has placed them in. However, variations

within individuals of a species or kind – what we might call “micro-evolution” or “adaptation” – is a far cry from demonstrating a change between the created kinds, such as bacteria to worms, worms to fish and birds, or monkeys to man. This sort of “macroevolution” has never been observed.

It should come as no surprise to creationists that evolution as an idea makes some sense, and that the theory even seems to hold up under scrutiny – for the past 150 years or so it has had many of the brightest minds in science working to build it up! However, its success is not based on science or scientific evidence, but rather on philosophy. It is not a new theory and dates back to the Greek philosophers Anaximander, Democritus and Empedocles about 2500 years ago¹ (Interestingly, they also are credited with the earliest ideas of materialism). Evolutionary ideas are also found among early Chinese thinkers such as Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu), a Taoist philosopher who lived around the 4th century BC.² Man is rebelliously unwilling to submit to a higher being, God, and wants to be absolved from any responsibility. Evolution is a way to justify one’s lifestyle academically. If there is no God, one cannot be held to account, and so is free to “eat, drink, and be merry;” and live to please oneself. In the words of George Wald, a Nobel prize winning evolutionist:

“When it comes to the origin of life on this earth, there are only two possibilities: creation or spontaneous generation. There is no third way. Spontaneous generation was disproved 100 years ago, but that leads us only to one other conclusion: that of supernatural creation. We cannot accept that on philosophical grounds; therefore, we choose to believe the impossible: that life arose spontaneously by chance.”³

3) Combinations

Now we come to a third possibility. Contrary to George Wald’s dichotomy, many people do believe in some form of a compromise position. There are a range of ideas within the field, with different names, and variances in viewpoints, which I will briefly summarize here. I realize that this is not a comprehensive list, but these are most of the major categories within it.⁴

A) Theistic Evolution

The first is Theistic Evolution. It is not a new theory in its own right, but rather seeks to combine the ideas of creation and evolution. In other words, God created the heavens and the earth over a long period of time, starting with simple creatures and *guiding* the process as they evolved into all the creatures we see today. Philosophically, this is an interesting theory, as it does not seek to deny a Creator or human responsibility, but does not accept a six-day creation. Rather, it sees evolution as a proven *fact*, and uses God to explain the gaps in the mechanisms, fossil evidence, and origins of the first life forms. Other theistic evolutionists such as Francis Collins, believe that God initiated creation and put in place laws of logic, consistency, and natural processes, but then took a hands-off approach and watches as it develops by those processes. This view clearly contradicts the providence of God as we confess it in the Belgic Confession, Article 13.

B) The Day-Age Theory

The Day-Age Theory uses Genesis 1 as a chronological layout of creation, but does not accept a literal six-day timeframe. Instead, it considers each “day” as a generic time frame or *age* consisting of perhaps millions of years. The justification for this view is taken from the Genesis account, where the Hebrew word for day is interpreted as a time period. Also, the first three days are seen to be very different from our 24 hour days as the sun and moon are not created until day 4. If one accepts that these 3 days are not literal days, now they are open to interpretation, and so they could be ages. Evolutionist ideas of an old earth and their chronological dating of earth’s history can now be accepted. However, even this approach doesn’t really fit with evolution as all the birds, fish, other animals and man are created in the last 3 *solar* days.

C) The Gap Hypothesis

The Gap Hypothesis or Gap Theory claims that man was recently created (few thousand years ago) onto an old earth. The earth, as written in Genesis 1, was “formless,” having passed into a state of decay from a previous age of existence, before being renewed. This view comes from interpreting the words “the earth was formless” as “the earth *became* formless.” With this approach the days (4-6 anyway) can be seen to be literal, while still supporting an old-earth. Dinosaurs, certain other fossils, and old-earth evidences can easily be shrugged off as being from a previous creation time of the earth. Proponents of this idea might suggest that the earth is an ongoing work, having been created and re-created many times over in the past, and perhaps more in the future.

D) Progressive Creationism

Progressive creationism suggests that God used natural processes (such as mutations and natural selection) to create species, but may also on occasion use specific events (such as a flood) to guide their development. This idea can be combined with any of the others, but does not accept the unifor-

mitarian assumptions commonly promoted by evolutionists. It would accept catastrophes as having a profound effect on the world and its development, but that in general, God is relatively “hands off.” He made the world and its processes, and enjoys watching it, finding the need to tinker only on occasion.

3 motivations for compromise

Philosophically, these four compromise positions are interesting theories, as they do not seek to deny a Creator or human responsibility, but also do not accept a literal reading of the Genesis account of the six-day creation. Justification for all of these positions comes from arguments similar to the following: “It is not a question of the Bible versus science, or God’s Word versus scientific evidence, but rather sinful man’s *interpretation* of the Bible versus sinful man’s *interpretation* of the evidence in creation.” This argument attempts to level the playing field by equating both sides as man’s interpretation of one of the ways that God has revealed Himself to us. To address arguments like this, we first need to look at the *motivations* behind it.

Here it becomes extremely difficult. Faith in God is still unquestioned; human responsibility is accepted. These views generally also accept God’s *capability* for creation within any time frame. So what then do proponents of these ideas gain? After much thought, I can see three possible reasons for a compromise position.

The first is that the evidence for evolution and an old earth is perceived to be too strong to be ignored, and therefore must be included. Most people accepting a compromise position probably fall into this category. We are bombarded with “evidence” showing an old earth, and the evidence for evolution seems overwhelming. After all, how many times can radiometric dating that finds rocks of so many millions or billions of years old be (so) wrong? And fossils, well they show simple creatures first, evolving to more complex organisms, don’t they? Being unable to explain all this evidence, and feeling that if there is so much evidence, there must also be some truth, one seeks to find a way to save the remnants of their faith by compromising, rather than being seen as an uneducated religious zealot.

CALVINIST CARTOONS BY EDDIE EDDINGS



“OH WELL... SO MUCH FOR AN ALLEGORICAL HERMENEUTIC!”

The second motivation could be that the nature of the individual is to seek answers to all questions above anything else – a “true” scientist! One desires to *know* and be able to explain all scientific processes including creation. Scientists, especially, have been conditioned to question, as new knowledge is obtained by questioning and testing the questions with experiments. Genesis is an historical account but not a scientific one. *How* did God create? What is meant by the Biblical *kinds*? The processes we see today, which change the sizes of finch beaks in a single season, and provide antibiotic resistance in bacteria, could they not be the mechanisms that God used in Genesis? After all, God is consistent and unchanging, why wouldn't He continue to use what He has already used in the past?

The third motivation might be to provide a purpose and a guiding plan to a theory in crisis – a purposeless, random, atheistic evolution. By adding a designer, the old earth and evolutionary evidence can all be used, but now there is a convenient answer to explain away probability problems, the development of new information and structures as we evolved from some primordial blob in the mud into humans, the lack of missing links, and other issues that are difficult to address. This is the “perfect theory”. . . it combines every evidence that might arise from evolutionists with a faith in God that can fill in the gaps such as why we have morals, laws of logic, uniformity of natural laws, and consciences.⁵ The trouble with combining an acknowledgement of the Creator God with an evolutionary understanding of the world is that you are faced with a dilemma. When faced with problematic evidence, you have two choices. You could say, “God made it that way,” in which case one might reply: “So why can't you accept the account in Genesis 1?” Alternatively, in the face of problematic evidence you need to come up with a mechanism to explain it scientifically. Take for example the problem at the heart of evolutionary theory – that of the creation of new, functional information so that a species can evolve into a more complex life form. New structures (wings, feathers, eyes, limbs, etc.) are needed and they need to provide some survival benefit. Where does the necessary new information come from? Are mutations the mechanism again, as in atheistic evolution? But mutations haven't shown themselves to be a sufficient answer with atheistic evolution, so why would they be a good answer now?⁶

It comes down to your starting point

Are there areas that scientists, especially Christian scientists, should not question? How many of these areas exist, and what they are, is of course subject to much debate. We should however, be very cautious when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures. Genesis is an historical book. If we were to reinterpret parts of it, at what point do we stop? There is a big danger here. One person might say Genesis 1 isn't literal, but it starts being literal in Genesis 2. Another says Genesis 4, or Genesis 5, Genesis 8, or. . . Exodus? Once a literal reading of the book of Genesis is open to interpretation, individuals can now choose what parts they want to believe. Who's

to say which chapters or verses are literal? This is post-modernism at its best. You might say Genesis 2 while I might say Genesis 5; whatever makes the most sense to each of us. Now we no longer have an ultimate or absolute standard. It's “do what feels right, each to his own conscience.” And that's the problem. If we lose the Bible as our absolute, how can we know the truth about anything?

Ultimately, it comes down to a debate of presuppositions, the biases and beliefs of our starting points. Atheists believe there is no God, and as such cannot and will not accept Him as a possibility, so in their very nature, they view any evidence with this bias in mind. Likewise creationists have as their starting point a Creator, and so view any evidence through their worldview. So it is not the evidence itself, but rather our *interpretation* of it that matters. Let me give an example. Many evolutionists look at the fossils of *Archaeopteryx* (a bird-like creature) and say that it is the missing link between reptiles and birds, while a creationist might look at the very same fossil and be amazed at the diversity and uniqueness of the world God created, and see the deterioration of parts of it, or even the loss of much of it through extinctions, as the effects of sin.

The compromise positions have, I believe, a fundamental flaw on the presuppositional level. They seem to be working backwards. Rather than starting with a faith statement and using it to interpret any scientific evidence through this



If you believe an unknown number of animals cannot fit into an unknown sized Ark, check your math. There's more known about the Ark than you know!

6 FREE CREATIONIST BOOKS

Creation Ministries International has made seven of their more popular book available for free, online as a pdf downloads. They can be found at www.Creation.com/books-online. The titles include: *One Blood*, which makes a clear biblical case against racism, *Refuting Evolution 1 & 2*, and *The Creation Answer Book*.

There are two that are particularly good:

In Six Days

Editor John Ashton asked 50 PhD scientists to write a short essay on why they believed in a literal six-day creation.

Some gave scientific answers, while others focused on the Bible. Some answers are merely interesting, others are simplistic, and some are downright stunning. Together they make for an absolutely fascinating book.



Refuting Compromise

This is a refutation of several old earth and theistic evolution theories, but more specifically the “Progressive Creationism” promoted by Hugh Ross.



worldview, they allow sinful man’s interpretation of the evidence to revise their worldview. This is a worldly worldview in itself, attempting to elevate science above one’s religion, a view tracing back to modernism – *science* has all the answers. As Christians, we should have our faith, our worldview, as our starting point, and any interpretations of scientific evidence must fit under that umbrella. God did create the heavens and the earth, so our worldview should be fundamentally different from secular worldviews. We have no need to fear that any scientific “evidence” will arise to change our worldview, as God has revealed His Truth to us in His Word. If it is the Truth, we certainly should not worry about anything “science” comes up with. How often in the past has science claimed to have the answer, only to find a better answer later, or to find out that it was altogether wrong? Just think about man’s early ideas on gravity, genetics, and the solar system. More often than not, any evidence can be explained in a dif-

ferent way already, or even if not, our knowledge of a sinful world and the limitations of man’s understanding should allow us to accept that we don’t have all the answers yet. . . *but God does, and that is all that matters!*

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

1 Corinthians 13:9,12 (NIV)

In due time, we too will know, but until then we must *believe* with a child-like faith. A faith that changes with every wind of doctrine or every wind of scientific evidence is not really a faith at all. For myself, I prefer to trust that God has the answers and that it will all be made clear at the end of time. Our task is to trust in God and praise Him for His greatness, also in His acts of creation.

“O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me; your right hand will hold me fast. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you. Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

– Excerpts from Psalm 139 (NIV)

Endnotes

¹ *History of Evolution*, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, April 2010

² *History of evolutionary thought*, Wikipedia, April 2010.

³ George Wald, winner of the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize in Science, in Lindsay, Dennis, “The Dinosaur Dilemma,” *Christ for the Nations*, Vol. 35, No. 8, November 1982, pp. 4-5, 14.

⁴ Wikipedia, articles on *theistic evolution*, *old earth creationism*, *day-age theory*, *gap theory*, *progressive creationism*, April 2010.

⁵ From the book *The ultimate proof for creation, resolving the origins debate*, chapter 3, Dr. Jason Lisle, Master Books, May 2009.

⁶ This topic is the subject for a later article. Much material on the subject also exists, for example *Darwin’s Black Box* by Michael Behe, *Icons of Evolution* by Jonathan Wells, *Evolution: a Theory in Crisis* by Michael Denton, and websites such as AnswersInGenesis.org.

Dave Dykstra has been teaching senior Biology and Science courses at Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton Ontario for the past 9 years.



MARVELOUS MUSIC:

3 CDs FEATURING CANADIAN REFORMED ARTISTS

PRAISE HIM WITH STRINGED INSTRUMENTS

arranged by Kent Dykstra

reviewed by Jane deGlint

Kent Dykstra is an energetic, creative, action-oriented type of person. One could easily picture him bouncing on an organ bench while engulfing an entire cathedral with massive sounds. Would he be able to bring a relatively small group of strings to such heights of sound? How convincing and invigorating would it be to listen to a string interpretation of the Genevan Psalms?

A strange surprise. Kent's renditions of the psalms were moving in an unexpected way. There was a soft purity, a gentle sincerity, and a convincing subtleness. The sound was French-like. One could imagine a living room with persecuted Huguenots encouraging each other with the singing of Psalms. At the same time the sound was reminiscent of congregational Psalm singing as it took place for centuries in small Reformed churches. And yet, there was also a clear strain of British-sounding pastoral music.

Suddenly the picture became clear. With his music for strings Kent makes the connection between the Genevan tunes and the powerful spirit of Shepherd David. We encounter dancing women (Psalm 81) and skipping lambs (Psalm 114). Accompanied by the sound of the lyre we listen to the stories of a Rider on a white horse leading his army into battle (Psalm 2).

Kent and his musicians have given us a CD that can put the inspired words of the psalms in our hearts and on our lips. Glory to God.

To hear samples, or purchase it, go to www.pretaenterprises.com.



WITH SONGS OF PRAISE

with Frank Ezinga

reviewed by Peter de Boer

This CD of Singing of Genevan Psalms with Frank Ezinga provides Biblical texts in rhyme combined with Genevan melodies from the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The selections include preludes by various composers: Denis Bedard (an organist and composer in Vancouver, BC), Jaap Zwart, Jan Zwart, Cornelis de Wolf and Frank Ezinga. As this recording seeks to promote Genevan Psalms, a tribute to John Calvin's 500th birthday is a fitting inclusion.

The listener will be struck by the reverent, yet joyous atmosphere portrayed by the music and singing offered in this presentation. The selections are varied as some are sung by the Fraser Valley Young Adults choir *Laudate!* and others are done as congregational singing. Frank Ezinga plays organ for the preludes and for accompaniment while Ken Linde and his trumpet are added to the ensemble from time to time when the music lends itself to the clarion call of this clear and robust instrument.

In particular the excellent enunciation of the text is easily understood, especially by those familiar with the Psalms. Happily the CD case also contains a very informative booklet where the text of all the Psalms performed can be read.

This CD is highly recommended to every Christian home. It provides the opportunity to praise God with the words He Himself has taught us. You can hear samples, and purchase it, at www.frankezinga.com.



ROMANCE

reviewed by Peter de Boer

It has been said that more heads are wiser than one. The same is true with respect to instruments. Some time ago a young Canadian violinist befriended a famous Dutch musician who had a talented organist among his acquaintances. In due time the trio came together in both Canada and the Netherlands to successfully perform together. Although all three were raised in Reformed churches surrounded by music on Genevan tunes by old Dutch masters, they also found a mutual interest in exciting, vibrant classical music.

Together, Peter Wildeman (piano), Joost van Belzen (organ) and Lawrence Jansen (violin) conspired to produce a CD with a variety of classical pieces. On it they play music that is sure to energize the Reformed listener. The combination of instruments allows them to provide the sound and vigor of a full orchestra, but also reflective sounds for quiet contemplation and romance.

The CD is named after "Romance" by L. van Beethoven and contains sixteen pieces in total. You will be suitably entertained by listening to "Rule Britannia" by Mulder, "Stars and Stripes" by J.P. Sousa, "Vivace" by Mozart, Allegro by F. Haydn and many more. When you have come to the end of this CD you will be energized to take up whatever task is next on your schedule. Highly recommended!



To order contact tamara@darvonda.com

TWO BY TWO: O'Connor versus Cook

Two of the greatest Christian writers. . . with great flaws

by Jeff Dykstra

One of my fondest memories of my otherwise secular university education is the inclusion of two Flannery O'Connor stories in one of my literature courses. O'Connor's writing clearly showed the Christianity of its author, not by imposing a conversion on one of the characters by the end of the story, but by contrasting faith with the hopelessness of the secular worldview and by demonstrating the depravity of even the seemingly righteous characters. Her writing forced me to think about just how deep my own faith was, and is.

A few of the short stories of Hugh Cook (in his collection *Cracked Wheat*) hit me at a much different time in my life, when I was teaching English in a Christian school, yet had much the same impact – leaving me slightly breathless in the recognition of evil and grace co-existing in God's covenant people, and in myself.

Thus, when I decided to reread these authors a little more widely – all 31 of O'Connor's short stories in the anthology *Flannery O'Connor: The Complete Stories* and all ten stories in *Cracked Wheat* – I looked forward to writing an admiring article. However, I found that each author's writing also includes elements that do not necessarily easily fit with a thoroughly Christian – in other words, a Reformed – view of the world.

With that in mind, let's look in detail at the strongest and the weakest stories by each writer.

Two, too good to miss

A Good Man is Hard to Find

The first O'Connor story that wowed me is also one of her funniest, in a grimly ironic way: "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." The main character is a grandmother who "didn't want to go to Florida," a stubborn but apparently insignificant decision that will, nonetheless, cost her everything.

As readers we immediately don't like her much. Though her son has a wife and three kids of his own, she still calls him Bailey Boy, and tries to force her views on the family road trip decisions. As they're driving she bullies Bailey into taking a detour to see an old plantation in Georgia, and causes the family to have a car accident when

"a horrible thought came to her. . . . The thought was so embarrassing that... she turned red in the face and her eyes dilated and her feet jumped up upsetting her valise in the corner. . ."

Ironically, the horrible thought she had "was that the house she had remembered so vividly was not in Georgia but in Tennessee," so that the detour was not necessary even from the grandmother's selfish point of view.

What makes it even worse is that the car accident leaves the family at the mercy of the people in the next car to come along the deserted road – the Misfit and his gang.

Perhaps this story's title has already made you think of the despair of the Teacher, speaking in Ecclesiastes 7:28: "...I was still searching but not finding – I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all." If so, the grandmother's vanity and selfishness confirms the last phrase of the passage, while the Misfit demonstrates that there is only one upright man among a thousand – and it's not him.



Misfit's henchmen quickly take Bailey and his wife and kids off into the woods, leaving the Misfit with the grandmother who tries to appeal to the Misfit's so-called better nature – the side of us that we all want to believe in, and that secular humanists do believe in. Of course, we as Calvinists, and O'Connor as a Catholic, recognize that we have no better nature, and the Misfit, even as he rejects Jesus, has enough sense to realize that just knowing about Jesus is not good enough. The grandmother's mere knowledge of Jesus does not comfort her as she hears the pistol shots from the wood, and she even seemingly doubts His power to raise the dead, but she dies demonstrating Christ-like love both for her Bailey Boy and the Misfit himself. We are reminded that the only "Good Man" is God Himself, as Jesus reminded the young rich man (Mark 10:18), and we are left pondering whether our love for His goodness is more than an insurance policy, or whether we, as the Misfit says thoughtfully of the grandmother, "would [only] of been. . . good. . . if it had been somebody there to shoot [us] every minute of [our] life." Why wait until death's door to depend on Christ's goodness?

The White Rabbit

Cook has a similar story pointing to how unlikable even covenant children can be, while still living in dependence on Christ's goodness. The main character of "The White Rabbit" is an elderly grandfather who brought his family over to the New World from the Netherlands in the early 1950s. The story is told through the eyes of his grandson, who cannot understand why his "Opa" is so cantankerous – complaining, for instance, about the bureaucracy back in the Netherlands:

"...it's a good thing we left when we did, Jaap," he said to the boy's father. "Three civil servants for every decent working man. And for everything you need their permission. . . . Next thing you know we would need their permission to paint the toilet seat. And if they didn't like the color of my piss after I eat beets, a *stommeling* of a civil servant we would have knocking on our door!"

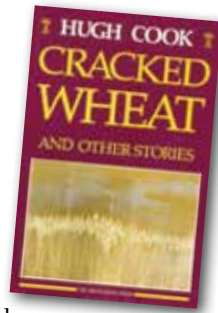
What has a more direct effect on the boy is his grandfather's anger – "his face. . . red with blood" – at the boy's inability to eat the rabbit that he saw his grandfather butchering, "stripp[ing] the whole pelt off the rabbit just as a person strips off soiled garments," with a "sound. . . like the ripping of cloth."

The boy learns from his father that Opa, a butcher by trade and used to dealing with blood, had to deal with death on a much more personal level when many in his family, including his wife, were killed by German bombing during the War, "[b]ut with that understanding came revulsion, for his grandfather's world seemed at that moment to be made of blood." The boy's revulsion increases when he encounters carcasses hanging in his grandfather's butcher shop and desperately hopes that he himself will not be taking over from his grandfather later: "He felt only a desire, still chaotic, for a cleaner world than that of his grandfather, a world of order and light and no blood."

When we learn that the boy's Opa has fallen ill and is dying, all the mentions of blood in the story point us to the blood of Christ that give the grandfather his only comfort in life and death. As the boy's Opa lies on his deathbed, he sings the song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32), a reaction of joy and acceptance of God's will in the coming of the Messiah, which in one rhymed version begins as follows:

O Lord and Master Thou
Dost let Thy servant now
Depart in exultation;
Thy promise is fulfilled,
For now have I beheld
Thy wonderful salvation. (Hymn 18)

The story ends with the boy's awestruck reaction to his furtive glimpse of his dying grandfather, with "the pounding of the blood at his temples. . . . He felt he had seen a terrible beauty. And all he heard, over and over again, was the sound of the ripping of cloth."



As Christians, we are reminded of the tearing of the temple veil at the death of Christ, and know that the grandfather's soiled garments – of his sinful nature – are being finally and utterly stripped away, just as his earthly tent is being destroyed (2 Corinthians 5:1).

This story reminds us of what C.S. Lewis once said, that we must remember that every human being will become either – in Christ – someone whose majesty would overpower us if we were to see it in full now, or – without Christ – a monstrous horror that we could not bear to look upon. We need to recognize that the humblest true believer, even when still afflicted, and afflicting others, with his or her sinful nature, will more and more reflect the "terrible beauty" of God's glory. This should cause us to be patient even with the cranky and the impatient.

Clearly, these two stories represent the best of Christian writers' insight into our sinful nature.

However, not all of these two writers' work is similarly admirable.

Two that miss the mark

Much of Flannery O'Connor's work has two flaws that make it distinctly disappointing for Reformed readers.

First, almost all of her stories feature frequent profanity – one example occurs even in the story discussed above. Often the profanity is meant to be understood ironically, to show the characters speaking truth about Christ even when using His name carelessly. Perhaps O'Connor had in mind the ideas in Romans 1:19-20, that even unbelievers have a clear knowledge of God. Her characters reveal their knowledge by referring to God over and over, without always meaning to do so. The problem is O'Connor doesn't always seem to see that such knowledge, without faith in Christ, is worthless (and even dangerous to its possessors, since it only increases their judgment). In fact, such knowledge – this "natural light" – on its own only leaves men "without excuse" (Rom. 1:20b).

Thus the second major problem with O'Connor's writing is her trust in "natural light" – the inborn knowledge of God. Her Roman Catholicism is consistent with this view, but Reformed Christians recognize that merely knowing God, without faith in Christ, leaves us "dead in our transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

Parker's Back

It is O'Connor's second-last story, "Parker's Back," that most clearly shows her exaltation of Catholicism, particularly implying the beauty of natural light – and that attacks a Reformed understanding of the second commandment.

The main character of the story, O. E. Parker, is a thoroughly profane irreligious young man who has covered almost his entire body with tattoos, many of them done simply to annoy his wife. When he decides to annoy her even further by getting one last huge religious tattoo on his back – where he won't even be able to see it – his distracted thinking about this tattoo causes him to crash his employer's tractor.



Having in all likelihood lost his job, Parker rushes to the city to get his tattoo – “a haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes.” The stern image of the tattoo impacts this unbelieving man powerfully, causing his heart “to cut off” and then “slowly to beat again as if it were being brought to life again by a subtle power.” This is where O’Connor’s Catholicism shows itself most strongly. O’Connor is portraying here a kind of conversion brought about by the “dumb images” that the Heidelberg Catechism condemns in its explanation of the second commandment. Parker thinks of crossing himself, a typical (stereotypical?) Catholic gesture; he is converted without the Word, and by the power of an image of Christ; and he suffers persecution at the hands of a seemingly fanatical Protestant – his wife:

“Idolatry!” Sarah Ruth screamed. ‘Idolatry! Enflaming yourself with idols under every green tree. . .’ and she grabbed up the broom and began to thrash him across the shoulders. . . until. . . large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ.”

From O’Connor’s point of view, Sarah Ruth, in attacking Parker’s tattoo, is attacking both his fledgling faith and Christ himself. O’Connor’s story makes our horror of idolatry seem foolish and Pharasaical. While we might question Sarah Ruth’s wisdom and compassion in dealing with Parker’s tattoo, as Reformed Christians we would recognize that showing Christ’s image to the world does not involve tattooing a physical – and imagined – image of Him on ourselves (which is indeed a form of idolatry), but rather

Why So Serious? Reasons to read weighty books

by Jeff Dykstra

Why read “literature” at all? Why not just read books with exciting action and happy endings, or watch movies or TV shows with plenty of explosions and romance? If culture is just entertainment, why not *enjoy* it, instead of having to work at it? Those are the kinds of questions that come to mind when we see an article that deals with obscure and often difficult authors.

To answer these questions let’s look at some Biblical passages that begin to show why thoughtful fiction is valuable.

Stories that reach us

In Matthew 7:1-5 Jesus warns us to avoid hypocritical judgement of others, telling us instead to pay more attention to “the plank in your own eye” – I need to know “how great *my* sin and misery are” (Lord’s Day 1, emphasis mine).

Now one way that Jesus promoted His people’s understanding of their own sinfulness and salvation was through stories – parable after parable. We may often wonder why those Pharisees just didn’t get it, but the problem is that we often do exactly what Jesus warns us against. We self-righteously apply God’s Word to others, rather than ourselves, just as the Pharisees did.

So what do we need when we refuse to see the truth about ourselves that is revealed by the double-edged sword of God’s living and active Word? Perhaps we need someone to tell us a story about someone else, just as Nathan told a story to David after David’s dual sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. Nathan’s story got David into a lather of pious rage and judgement against the cruel rich man who stole his poor neighbour’s lamb. That’s when Nathan sprang the trap:

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! . . .” Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? . . .’” Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” (2 Samuel 12:5, 7-9, 13; emphasis mine)

David is brought to repentance when he sees that he is no better than the fictional character he condemns. Good literature promotes that same humbling self-awareness.

An addition, not a substitution

So, you might be thinking, why not just read the Bible? You might have asked a similar question of David after the sins that made Nathan’s visit necessary. David knew the law, and even suffered due to his conscience-stricken knowledge of the sinfulness of what he had done. He still needed to be confronted with his sin and condemn it himself, first indirectly – through a story – and then directly – through an accusation – before he could be forgiven:

Great literature can also confront even sinners like us with our sin by illustrating a situation that takes Biblical truth and applies it to a concrete situation that reminds us – sometimes only gradually – of our own.

Inspiring, but not inspired

At the same time, even great literature does not come to us from the mouth of a prophet, and particularly not from the mouth of the great Prophet Jesus Christ. In other words, great literature may be inspiring, but it is not inspired.

For this reason, while literature can promote valuable self-evaluation, literature itself also needs to be critically evaluated. So Christians can gain self-understanding from serious fiction, but also need to guard against false understanding of human nature and God’s world by imperfect and merely human authors – even Christian ones.

For more on this topic I highly recommend Mary DeMuth’s article “Why Should Christ-Followers Read Fiction?” at www.WhyFiction.notlong.com.

showing the Christ-like love and humility commanded in Philippians 2.

Pisces

Hugh Cook's story "Pisces," while full of biblical allusions, is more influenced by Cook's own political sympathies.

The main character is Baars, a biologist on vacation on the shore of Lake Erie. He is a Christian, but also, seemingly, an idolater of science.

Baars' immediate problem is that he has forgotten to reserve a motel room for himself, his twin boys, and his very pregnant wife. As a result, the family is forced to rent a cottage from a beer-swilling retired auto worker named Cragg.

Cragg couldn't care less about either the environment or how science could help the environment – Baars' fixation – while his neighbor Thelma has rather heated views on the issue. She believes we are ruthlessly exploiting the environment because, as she says, man has "reduced reality to being nothing more than physical, giving us license to plunder." Cook expects us to be sympathetic to her point of view, even though it comes from her distinctly New Age perspective – she believes "nature is spiritual" and female, even accusing science and industry of "environmental rape." And she knows that Baars' astrological symbol is Pisces.

A major theme in the story is man's cruelty to nature. For instance, during a fishing trip with Baars, Cragg throws back a small fish he has caught *after* cutting it open to retrieve his hook, as "blood dripped through his fingers." Cragg, as Pilate did at Christ's trial, "washed his hands of the blood."

Soon after Baars falls overboard trying to reel in a fish. In his mishap, he experiences some of the same panic as a hooked fish might (remember, he is a *Pisces* – Latin for "fish") and learns of the pain inflicted upon nature:

"Suddenly the hook broke free. The line flew through the air with a snap, and the hook struck Baars on the bare chest. Hands flying to the stinging pain, he lost his balance. . . and lurched backwards out of the boat. . . he felt a sense of utter darkness and he was sure he was lost. Then, as he struggled to right himself in the water, he heard a moan as of a woman giving birth, and at that moment was revealed to him the groan of the creation in its bondage to decay."

After Cragg pulls him back into the boat, "Baars shouted, ". . . I actually heard the voice!" – but of course Cragg has no idea what Baars is talking about.

There is more in this story than just a focus on caring for the earth. For instance, by the end of the story Baars feels a sense of isolation from his pregnant wife and twin boys, and a lack of fulfillment in his job. In a sense, the false god of science – around which Baars has wrongly built his life – is properly shown to have let him down. However, the central issue of the story is the idea that man is destroying his world.

It is not a problem that Cook wants to promote greater respect for creation; after all, rulers are supposed to care for their subjects (see Psalm 82). Instead, there are two

problems. The first is that he is seriously misusing Romans 1:18-23 to support his point. Below is the passage in full, with the parts Cooks pulls out of it in italics:

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that *the creation* itself will be liberated from *its bondage to decay* and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been *groaning as in the pains of childbirth* right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

The fuller passage here shows that it is not man who subjects the creation to decay by despoiling the environment, but God Himself. Certainly God's action is a response to man's sin (see the curse of Genesis 3:17-19), but not specifically to man's treatment of the environment. As well, the "groaning as in the pains of childbirth" are not groans of despair, but of hope in the midst of the pain of the curse. Christ's redemptive activity is bringing us to rebirth as sons (and daughters) of God, and leading the creation to the day when it will share with us freedom from the curse of sin – "the glorious freedom of the children of God." We do not need liberation from materialism and consumerism as such, but from the sinful rebellion that causes us to make these philosophies our idols.

However, idolatry is not confined to materialists, which leads us to the second problem with the story. Much of Cook's case for a greater concern for creation is given through the mouth of Thelma, in New Age rhetoric, in the kind of pagan language that environmentalists often use now, but this language is just as idolatrous as Baars' overconfidence in science.

Environmentalists spiritualize nature to the point where it replaces God as their idol, and they demonize man as a cancer on the planet (after all, he is attacking their god) and science as nothing more than a way to destroy nature. Christians should not be falling into either trap – neither idolizing nor demonizing science.

Actually, neither nature nor science has a voice in itself to listen to or hear. Instead, we need to hear the voice of God through His Word (and through creation: see Psalm 19) to learn the proper use of science in carrying out the creation mandate, and discerning the wisdom and foolishness of individual scientists in using the talents God has given them.

Conclusion

The same is true for literature. Literature does not speak to us in some general way, but good authors can give us valuable insight into ourselves, or being fallible human beings like ourselves, they can misunderstand the world and our place in it. Let God's Word be our guide in all these areas.



A half dozen of THE VERY BEST BOOKS

Don't let the pigeon drive the bus!

by Mo Willems

Hyperion Books, 2003
40 pages; Hardcover; \$14 Can.
Children

reviewed by Jon Dykstra

Pigeon desperately wants to drive the bus. But the bus driver, who has to leave for a little while, tells readers before he goes, "Remember, *don't let the pigeon drive the bus!*"

The pigeon isn't going to make it that easy though – for the rest of the book he asks, begs, pleads, whines and sulks about wanting to drive the bus. The drawings are pretty simple cartoons, but the artist lets us see all pigeon's emotions in his body language. Pigeon uses every excuse you've ever heard a child use:

"I never get to do anything!"

"What's the big deal?"

"I'll be your best friend!"

"No fair!"

"I bet your mom would let me."

That, of course, is the point of the book, that no matter how inventive a child's questioning – his whining – might become, no is still going to be no.

That's an important lesson for any child to learn, and this is a fun way for them to learn it. Parents will enjoy reading the book out loud, mimicking the pigeon's angst and frustration, and kids will enjoy just how silly the pigeon acts. And it will only take a little prodding from mom or dad to have junior realize that sometimes he acts silly too, just like pigeon.

I'd recommend getting the hardcover version of this book because I think your children will ask you to read it again and again. And that's not too bad, because it is a fast read; there are only about 175 words in the whole book, which means this review is actually just a little bit longer than the book!

Jon Dykstra and his siblings blog about really good reads at www.ReallyGoodReads.com



Love that dog: A novel

by Sharon Creech

Joanna Colter Books, 2001
86 pages; Paperback; \$7.50 CDN
Children/Teen

reviewed by Jon Dykstra

A review of a read-aloud book, to be read aloud.

As I started reading the very first page of this book, I thought it was dumb. I've never been a fan of poetry, particularly if it was the type of poetry that didn't even rhyme. And that's what was in this book.

But I kept reading and found out, on that very first page, that the author agreed with me! The book is by Jack, a boy in elementary school, who doesn't like poems either. Each day he writes a journal entry, for his teacher Miss Stretchberry, and there on the very first page, in his first entry, he tells her his thoughts on the poem they have just read in school. He writes:

*If that is a poem
about the red wheelbarrow
and the white chickens
then any words
can be a poem.
You've just got to
make
short
lines.*



It was a book of poetry, by a boy poet, who didn't like poetry!

So I kept reading, and I started learning. Jack's teacher showed his class poems. Some did rhyme, some were by famous writers, and one wasn't very good at all. But I started learning, along with Jack, that poetry doesn't always have to rhyme, or even have a set rhythm. Sometimes it can just be a different sort of way to express your thoughts, to lay them out, so people understand them better. Poetry can be easier than teachers sometimes make it. And it can be powerful. And it can make you cry.

I started reading this book, about a boy learning about poetry, and making poems, and expressing beautiful thoughts about his beautiful dog, and by the time I got to the end of it I realized it wasn't dumb at all.

Love that book.

Noah's Ark: Thinking Outside the Box

by Tim Lovett

Master Books, 2008
80 pages; Hardcover; \$17 Can.
Preteen/Teen

reviewed by John Veldkamp

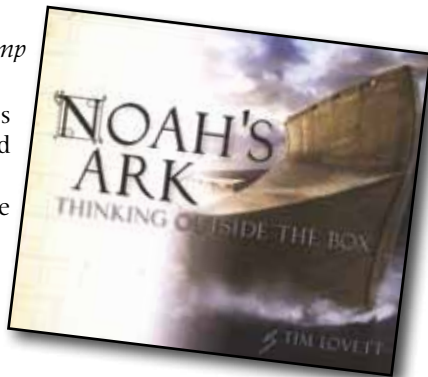
What image comes to mind when you read the story of Noah's ark? For most of us we think of an oversized canoe with a house on it – invariably with a pair of giraffes looking over the roof of the house. Tim Lovett's goal is to help Christians overcome this storybook image and understand that it is reasonable to believe the biblical account of Noah's ark. This is important because, as the author asserts, "if people don't accept the ark and the Flood as true, then it must be okay to take artistic license with other parts of God's Word."

Tim Lovett is an engineer who extensively researched both wooden ships and shipbuilding principles to better understand how an ark could be built and whether it could be possible for such a vessel to survive a worldwide flood. He does not claim to have discovered the long lost blueprints that Noah used. He simply provides a plausible explanation that supports the biblical record and ultimately encourages Christians to maintain their belief in the infallibility of God's Word.

The book is not a scientific textbook – it is an entertaining discussion of how Noah could have constructed an ark, and makes generous use of pictures and graphs. Although some parts of the book may be too technical for children under 13, my 11-year-old quite enjoyed reading it. This would make a good coffee table book that could generate interesting discussions with both family and friends.

My favorite part of the book was the discussion of the proportions of the ark prescribed by God. Lovett's research reveals that God's design shows a "careful balance of the conflicting demands of stability, comfort (seakindliness), and strength." Of course, God knew this all along but when I learned this I gained a further appreciation for the wisdom, grace and mercy of our loving Father.

I would highly recommend this book. It would make a great addition to any home library. It will challenge your perceptions about what the ark looked like and it will encourage and strengthen your faith.



Hostage Lands

by Douglas Bond

P&R Publishing, 2006
235 pages; Paperback; \$12 Can
Preteen /Teen

reviewed by Ike Van Dyke

"When am I ever going to use this?" It's a question that comes up frequently in classrooms around the world. And it's a question Neil Perkins, a British lad, is asking about his Latin class. But while some students have to wait years to put the lessons they learn to practical use, Neil only has to wait until later that same day.

On his way home from school he takes a nasty spill off of his ATV, creating a small crater where the machine lands. It's in this crater that he discovers the leather-wrapped tablets that are the focus of the majority of this book. These tablets are covered in Latin, so Neil, with the help of his underappreciated Latin teacher, starts translating them. He soon finds out they comprise a story told by a Roman centurion who lived two thousand years ago!

Douglas Bond's *Hostage Lands* is really two stories in one. The first is a short story about a boy named Neil who doesn't like Latin, and doesn't talk much with his dad. This accounts for only 6 of the book's 37 chapters, serving mostly as an introduction and conclusion to the larger story about Roman Centurion Marcus Aurelius Rusticus. The Centurion's story starts with his account of what he suspects will be a suicide mission into the lands north of Hadrian's Wall, the territory of the savage Celts. Rusticus only manages to escape death with the help of a friendly Celt, Calum, who he soon discovers is a very different sort of man, for Calum is a Christian.

I don't want to give too much away about this book but would like to strongly recommend it. This is Douglas Bond's very best book so far. Christian fiction is too often celebrated for the great message contained in the book, even when the artistry, the actual writing is poor. Bond's book has a strong message – in it the Christian worldview is contrasted with worldviews that elevate power, the State or maybe honor to be supreme. However it is also a wonderfully written, thoroughly engaging story.

I would think this is primarily a boy's book, in the ten to early teens range, though a father may want to pick this one as a read aloud book because he'll probably enjoy it too.



Beyond the Summerland

by L.B. Graham

P&R Publishing, 2004
593 pages; Paperback; \$13 Can.
Teen /Young Adult

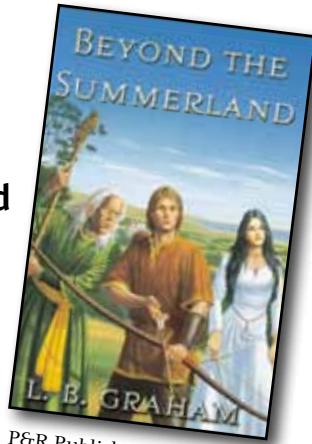
reviewed by Kelsey Berends

In *Beyond the Summerland* L.B. Graham weaves a world of magic and mystery that is sure to keep the reader interested. It is so much more than just a fairytale about swords and dragons, romance and battles. Yes, the book is an exciting read, with lots of adventure and heroics, but its characters also have depth to them and the plot is one of many layers. It causes the reader to pause once in a while and think things over. I loved it so much that as soon as I finished it I bought the remaining four books in the series. It was a refreshing read, something different and exciting, a book that I couldn't put down.

There are many proofs that Graham, chairman of the Bible department at Westminster Christian Academy, was writing with a Christian perspective. Even a quick skim of this book will reveal dozens of allusions to the Scriptures. For example, there are the 12 Titans, leaders of Kirthanin that are under the Allfather, a reference to the twelve apostles. There are also the three comings of Malek, three being a number used often in the Bible such as in reference to the three major temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness and the three denials of Peter. In many ways, in fact, this series, *The Binding of the Blade*, is based on the redemption of sinful man.

These books are about the ongoing struggle between Malek, the equivalent of Satan, and the Allfather, or God. In the beginning chapter there is the fall of man. Andunin, a leader of men, one of the Novaana, succumbs to temptation and takes up a blade forged by Malek. The main goal of the characters in this series is to overthrow Malek and to finally be free of the blade. Twice Malek has risen up and twice, through the power of the Allfather, he has been kept at bay, but his third coming, foretold by the prophets, is nearing. *Beyond the Summerland* follows the story of Joraieim, a young Novaana, and a group of other Novaana as they travel to, and stay in the Summerland and must face the beginning of Malek's third war for control of Kirthanin.

One of the main reasons that I like this book so much is the way that Graham puts all the events together. There is rarely a dull moment. Some books either put too much action into a book, relying on that to make it interesting, or they have too long of a gap between events and bore the reader to tears. *Beyond the Summerland* balances adventure with normal life, fighting and bravery with friendship



P&R Publishing is currently making *Beyond the Summerland* available free as an e-book download on the front page of their website www.prpbooks.com.

development and romance. There is importance to every chapter and even the slower sections of the book are not tiresome or hard to get through. There is drama and action but they are not overplayed, resulting in a good read.

This first book in the series is an exciting opening of the story. I would suggest having the other books close at hand after finishing it since the ending leaves the reader with many questions. The writing is fun and entertaining, as well as thought provoking, and there is very little, if anything, that I would change about it.

When Crickets Cry

by Charles Martin

Thomas Nelson, 2006
352 pages; Paperback; \$19 Can.
Young Adult/Adult

reviewed by Stephanie Bareman

He is unkempt, a recluse, and heartsick.

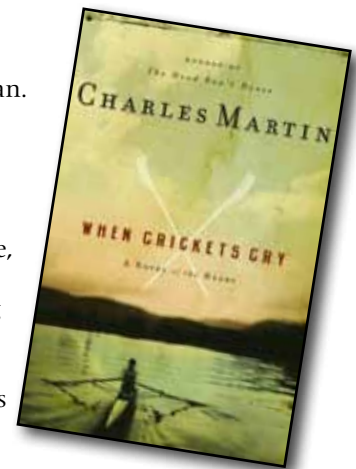
She is a pale thin young girl with a very sick heart.

The pair first meets on the sidewalk when he makes one of his rare trips into town. The girl, Annie, is a bright spot in this small Georgia town, doing brisk business selling lemonade. The townspeople respond readily to this cheerful vender and buy her 50-cent lemonade – but it's the water jug at her feet filled with twenty-dollar bills dropped in by generous patrons that intrigues the man. It turns out that Annie is raising money for her own heart transplant. In spite of her critical need, she's full of hope for the future.

Life's circumstances have robbed the man of hope. Reece looks like someone whose been hanging Sheetrock, yet he was once a highly skilled surgeon of national acclaim. Since the death of his wife he has been living the life of a recluse, forsaking his ability to bind up broken hearts. Meeting Annie will change both of their lives forever.

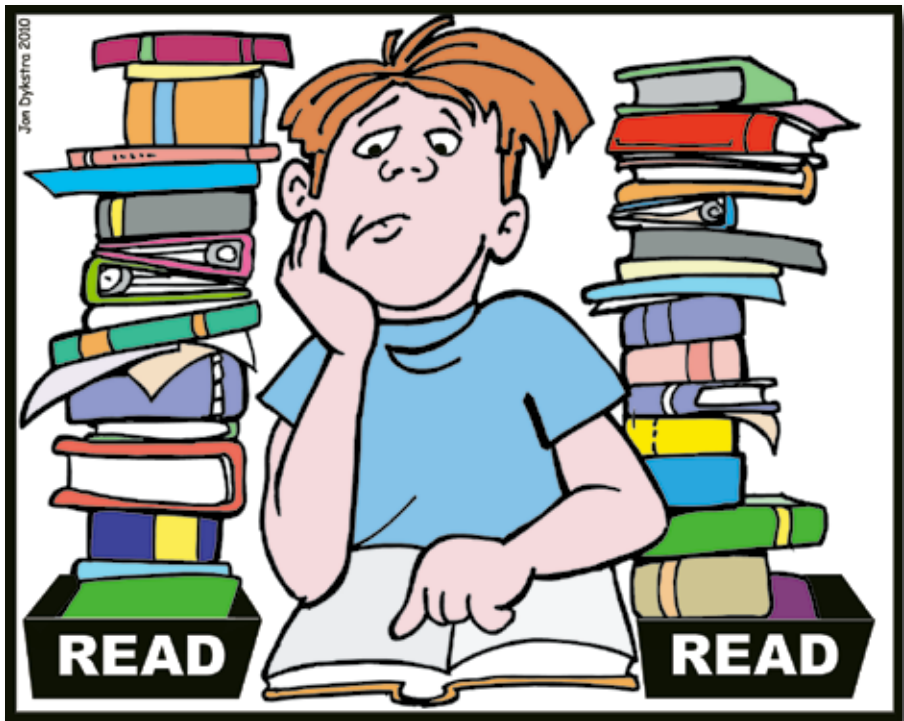
If you haven't yet read any of the books of Charles Martin, you are in for a treat. Published in 2006, *When Crickets Cry* is his third book and since that time he has published four more. With picturesque language he weaves a tale that is filled with notable characters whose life struggles you won't soon forget.

In *When Crickets Cry*, Martin tells the story in two parts. In quick sketches we learn of Reece's early years and his falling in love with his childhood friend Emma. We hear how his desire to restore Emma's failing heart drives his hunger to learn all he can about the art of healing



the heart, the wellspring of life. Interspersed with the reminiscing sections, we watch him meet and come to know Annie. Throughout, you also get to know the blind brother-in-law who sees so much, the former monk who interlaces running the local tavern with spreading the gospel, the aunt burdened with worries too heavy to carry alone, and a young man who is looking for meaning in all the wrong places.

In contrast to today's culture which embraces hopelessness, Martin writes stories that are filled with hope. Along the way he interweaves truths about God as the source of hope and love. Broken characters become a little less broken and with skillful strokes Martin tells a beautiful tale of restoration that leaves the reader buoyed and encouraged.



The student's IN and OUT box

Five Lines FREE

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A dark new trend in teen fiction

The protagonists may still be heroic but now they're also demonic

by Margaret VanAssen

When our son mentioned that his friends were being read an interesting series of books and that he would like to read it too, I went on the library system to check the availability of "Percy Jackson and the Olympians" by Rick Riordan. My immediate reaction to the first book's brief synopsis was "Yikes! Not another one of these!"

The "these" I was thinking of were the growing number of teen and tween books that portray evil as good – heroes of these stories are the undead, the demonic, pagan gods, witches and werewolves. Percy Jackson is the latest series of such books, about a troubled 12-year-old boy who discovers that he is the son of a mortal woman and the Greek god Poseidon so therefore he is a demi-god. What follows are Percy's adventures in a modernized tale of the Greek gods.

The trend in books and movies for the young certainly seems to focus on supernatural themes. The majority of books for children stacked on the book tables at Costco deal with magic, monsters, gods and vampires. More and more of the new books coming into libraries cover these same topics. Amazon's bestseller list for teens and tweens includes the following books (besides all the books in the *Percy Jackson* and *Twilight* series):

The Book Thief – the narrator is Death

Vampire Academy Books – Another vampire series!

Linger – about werewolves

The Graveyard Book – boy is raised by ghosts in a graveyard.

This is but the tip of the iceberg and comics too are part of this dark trend - many of the "graphic books" so popular with boys are loaded with gruesome images.

Why are all the heroes demonic?

Until recently, my husband and I were frustrated and concerned about this trend, but have come to realize that it is much more serious and that we are in a spiritual battle for our children's minds and souls.

I don't presume to know about every book, movie, computer game, LEGO set, etc., but one only has to open their eyes to see that we are living in a culture of death, a culture that is focusing more and more on the paranormal, the

fantastical, the ugly and the ghoulish. The Bible calls all of these things an abomination before the Lord but it seems if we couch these vile themes in stories of the lives of regular people – regular boys who love adventure and excitement and regular girls who love a good love story – then it is not so bad, so noticeable or so unjustifiable.

However, we must understand that the wily old serpent is still constantly trying to deceive God's people and we are as gullible as Adam and Eve were. No matter how wonderful and exciting a story, we must examine it in the light of God's Word. How does it stand up against Philippians 4:8-9? Is it true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous or of good report? How many of the above mentioned books could stand up to that scrutiny? We must push aside what seems outwardly beautiful and expose what is ugly underneath.

So instead of delighting in a tale about a boy with god-like powers in a world ruled by the so-called gods of Ancient Greece (who he makes sacrifices to) we should have pity for those poor, pathetic Greeks whose minds were so darkened that they put their trust in temperamental, feuding and adulterous gods.

And instead of oohing and aahing over an obsessive girl fixated on a thousand-year-old vampire boyfriend and who yearns to live forever with him in a strange vampire eternity, we need to know that the Bible tells us there are only two ways to spend eternity – with God or without Him. It is foolish to pretend or fantasize about any other way.

Our Foe wants to be taken lightly

C.S. Lewis predicted this spiritual trend in his book *The Screwtape Letters* first published in 1942. This book was written as a series of letters from a devil, named Screwtape, to his demon nephew, named Wormwood. In these letters Screwtape advises Wormwood on the most effective ways to defeat their Enemy, who is of course God. In one letter Screwtape states that,

I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalize and mythologize their science to such an extent that what is, in effect, a belief in us (though not under that name) will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in the Enemy. The "Life Force,"

Does 25 for 30 a trend make?

the worship of sex, and some aspects of Psychoanalysis may here prove useful. If once we can produce our perfect work – the Materialist Magician, the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls “Forces” while denying the existence of “spirits” – then the end of the war will be in sight.

Parents, be under no illusions. We are in a spiritual war and our children are being targeted by a brilliant, patient and very real Foe. They are being bombarded with themes of death, spiritual darkness, blood, gore and the underworld. It is strange that we can entertain our children and young people with the same realm of darkness that our missionaries fight against.

Titillate, then talk?

As I was doing the research for this article, I was struck by what seems to be a kind of “titillate, and then talk” approach used by many Christians. It involves first letting children experience all the delights and excitements of a book or movie, and then sitting them down for a discussion of all the things they shouldn’t have liked or need to be wary of. If this is what we allow them to “eat” why would we be surprised if, despite our post-book/movie chats, they develop a taste for this sort of entertainment?

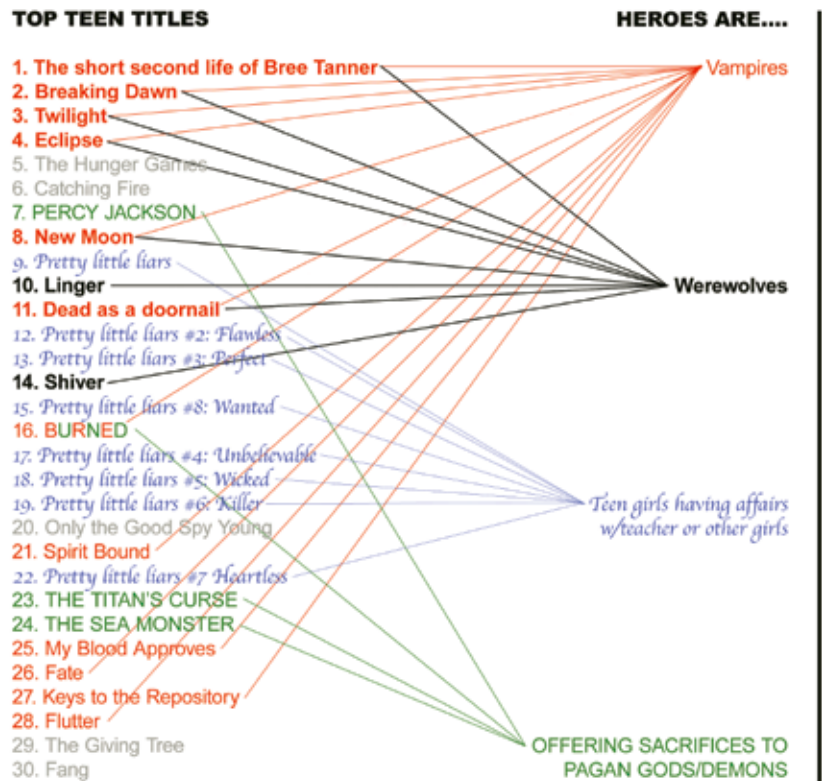
The foolishness of this approach can be readily seen when we apply it to an evil we all readily see. We would never invite our son to watch pornography and then have a cautionary chat with him about the negatives of it afterward. At that point, who cares about the negatives!

We should never forget how attractive evil can be. We don’t want to sample it – we need to flee from it!

Our obligation

Now that we know that our children are being wooed by this dark fiction, what do we do about it?

First, parents must know and monitor what their children are reading and watching, and what is being read or shown to them. This is not optional, this is an obligation. Yes, this can be time-consuming, and it is so easy to let it slide and take the path of least resistance. Reformed people have a reputation for having a lot of Bible knowledge; we must apply that knowledge and use it to evaluate our children’s,



This list was compiled from Amazon.com's "Teen literature and fiction" bestselling list, on July 9, 2010. To create it the top 30 titles were selected. Where the same title appeared on the list in multiple spots (as happened with the paperback and hardcover versions of the Twilight series books), the title was only included once on this list.

and our own, choices in reading and viewing material. How easily we become desensitized to what the world finds exciting.

Parents need to be monitors first, and then if the book passes muster, the children may read it. If the brief description on the back of the book is not enough information on which to make a decision, then do further research. Consult with reputable organizations like Focus on the Family. It is also likely that the book’s author has his own website that will reveal much of his worldview.

Conclusion

There has always been evil in fiction – some sort of battle between good and evil is the focus of just about all fiction. The difference in this new trend in teen novels is that evil has become the protagonist. We’re supposed to be excited and cheer on the vampire, witch, or werewolf.

This is a disturbing trend, but we can be thankful that we are not in this battle alone. Christ has conquered sin and Satan and sits on His throne in heaven, though the Devil continues to thrash in rage. As we read in Lord’s Day 52 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Devil is our sworn enemy and he does not cease to attack us. So it is imperative that we learn to recognize the Prince of Darkness in all his forms – both hideous and beautiful. To learn to discern we need to delve into God’s Word – it is important to know and wield this weapon. Hebrews 4 tells us that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. Let’s not surrender by laying down our sword or leaving it sheathed.



The Ripple Effect of the Word

Thoughts on reading and writing

by John Piper

I've been thinking again about the importance of reading and writing. There are several reasons I write. One of the most personally compelling is that I read. I mean, my main spiritual sustenance comes by the Holy Spirit from reading. Therefore reading is more important to me than eating. If I went blind, I would pay to have someone read to me. I would try to learn Braille. I would buy "books on tape." I would rather go without food than go without books. Therefore, writing feels very lifegiving to me, since I get so much of my own life from reading.

Combine this with what Paul says in Ephesians 3:3-4, "By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ." The early church was established by apostolic writing as well as apostolic preaching. God chose to send his living Word into the world for 30 years, and his written Word into the world for 2000+ years. Think of the assumption behind this divine decision. People in each generation would be dependent on those who read. Some people, if not all, would have to learn to read—and read well, in order to be faithful to God.

So it has been for thousands of years. Generation after generation has read the insights of its writers. This is why fresh statements of old truth are always needed. Without them people will read error. Daniel Webster once said,

If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be; if God and His Word are not known and received, the Devil and his works will gain the ascendancy; if the

*evangelical volume does not reach every hamlet, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will.*¹

Millions of people are going to read. If they don't read contemporary Christian books, they are going to read contemporary secular books. They will read. It is amazing to watch people in the airports. At any given moment there must be hundreds of thousands of people reading just in airports. One of the

things we Christians need to be committed to, besides reading, is giving away solid books to those who might read them, but would never buy them.

The ripple effect is incalculable. Consider this illustration:

A book by Richard Sibbes, one of the choicest of the Puritan writers, was read by Richard Baxter, who was greatly blessed by it. Baxter then wrote his *Call to the Unconverted* which deeply influenced Philip Doddridge, who in turn wrote *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. This brought the young William Wilberforce, subsequent English statesman and foe of slavery, to serious thoughts of eternity. Wilberforce wrote his *A Practical View of Christianity* which fired the soul of Leigh Richmond. Richmond, in turn, wrote *The Dairyman's Daughter*, a book that brought thousands to the Lord, helping Thomas Chalmers the great preacher, among others.²

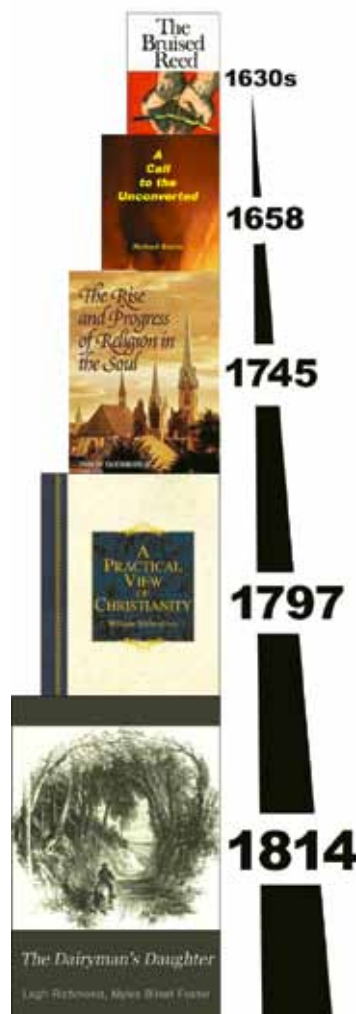
It seems to me that in a literate culture like ours, where most of us know how to read and where books are available, the Biblical mandate is: keep on reading what will open the Holy Scriptures to you more and more. And keep praying for Bible-saturated writers. There are many great old books to read. But each new generation needs its own writers to make the message fresh. Read and pray. And then obey.

Endnotes

¹ Ernest Reisinger, "Every Christian a Publisher," Free Grace Broadcaster, Issue 51, Winter, 1995, p. 17.

² "Every Christian a Publisher," p. 18. This reading is found in *A Godward Life, Book One* (Multnomah, 1997), pp. 58-59.

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*Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;*

For the Apparel Oft Proclaims the Man

– Shakespeare

by Christine Farenhorst

In days when people complain all too quickly about the hours they are required to work, about the conditions in which they work, and about their presumed low pay and lack of benefits, it does well to reflect on times past – times when jobs were more demanding and conditions were harsher.

Men in need of Gatorade

Up until the beginning of the 1800s, the nobility in England (and in other countries) often kept running footmen. These footmen were part of a nobleman's household and their job description demanded that they were able to run. Often this running was not even for a useful purpose but simply for show (although running footmen did come in awfully handy when a carriage wheel got stuck in some mud hole or, even worse, fell off). To have a liveried runner in front of one's vehicle marked the owner as having status or wealth much the same as a Mercedes Benz today adds a touch of glamour to the owner of that car.

.....
***Langham made the one hundred
and forty-eight mile trip
in less than forty-two hours. . .***
.....

It was a strain to be a running footman. Probably at a time when roads were not in a state of good repair and ruts were rampant, these men didn't need to run quite as fast as a galloping steed might run. Nevertheless, dressed in white trousers, a jockey coat and a black-feathered red cap, and carrying a pole some six or seven feet long, these men had to be in excellent physical shape. The top end of the pole which they carried had a hollow ball, in which space fitted a hard-boiled egg or a few swallows of wine. This nourishment the runner could take as refreshment along the way should chance avail itself that he could stop for a moment of rest. On an average trip the running footman would do about seven miles an hour, sometimes clipping sixty miles a day.

Not getting a reference letter

Sir Walter Scott recounts an anecdote in which interviews were being conducted by a nobleman who was looking for a new running footman. Watching several of them from his balcony, he picked out one who seemed to be light of foot and who looked extremely smart and attractive in the nobleman's livery outfit.

Calling the young man over, he said: "You will do very well for me."

The lad looked up, smiled and answered as he stood for a moment under the balcony.

"And your livery will do very well for me."

Then he ran off with the costume, much to the chagrin of the nobleman.

If a marathon is 26 miles. . .

Another anecdote, illustrating the amazing durability of some of these running footmen, recounts that the Scottish Earl of Home sent his footman from Berwickshire to Edinburgh one evening on important business. When, after a good night's rest, the Earl came downstairs the next morning, he found the footman fast asleep on the hall bench. Irritated and supposing the fellow to have slept the night away when he was supposed to be off on a running errand, he roughly shook the fellow awake.

"What are you doing here, man?"

"But sir," the man stammered sleepily, rubbing his eyes, "I've been to Edinburgh and back this night."

The distance, by the way, from Berwickshire to Edinburgh, was about thirty-five miles.

A father/son moment

In 1845 the king of Saxony's carriage, approaching the city of Dresden, was described in a newspaper article:

First, in the center of the dusty chaussée, about thirty yards ahead of the foremost horses' heads, came a tall, thin, white-haired old man; he looked six feet high, about seventy years of age, but as lithe as a deer; his legs and body were clothed in drawers or tights of white linen; his jacket was like a jockey's, the colors blue and



The Earl's footman ran through the night, covering seventy miles.

yellow, with a fringe on the facings; on his head a sort of barrette cap, slashed and ornamented with lace and embroidered, and decorated in front with two curling heron's plumes; round his waist a deep belt of leather with silk and lace fringes, tassels and quaint embroidering, which seemed to serve as a sort of pouch to the wearer. In his right hand he held, grasped by the middle, a staff about two feet long, carved and pointed with a silver head, and something like silver bells or metal drops hung around it, that jingled as he ran. Behind him, one on each side of the road, dressed and accoutered in the same style, came his two sons, handsome, tall young fellows about twenty to twenty-five years of age; and so the king passed on.

What a job!! – a job which was described by some of that time as cruel and unnecessary. Others concurred with this opinion, saying that many footmen did not live long lives, often dying of consumption or fatigue, disease marking their last days.

And the dish ran away with. . .

Another anecdote relates that in the sixteen hundreds, a certain Duke of Lauderdale, about to give a large dinner party at one of his estates, discovered in the early afternoon that he was short one special plate for the dinner table. A similar plate, however, was available at his other estate, some fifteen miles away. A running footman set off immediately and was back in time for dinner, even though the fifteen miles were run over terrain that was exceedingly hilly.

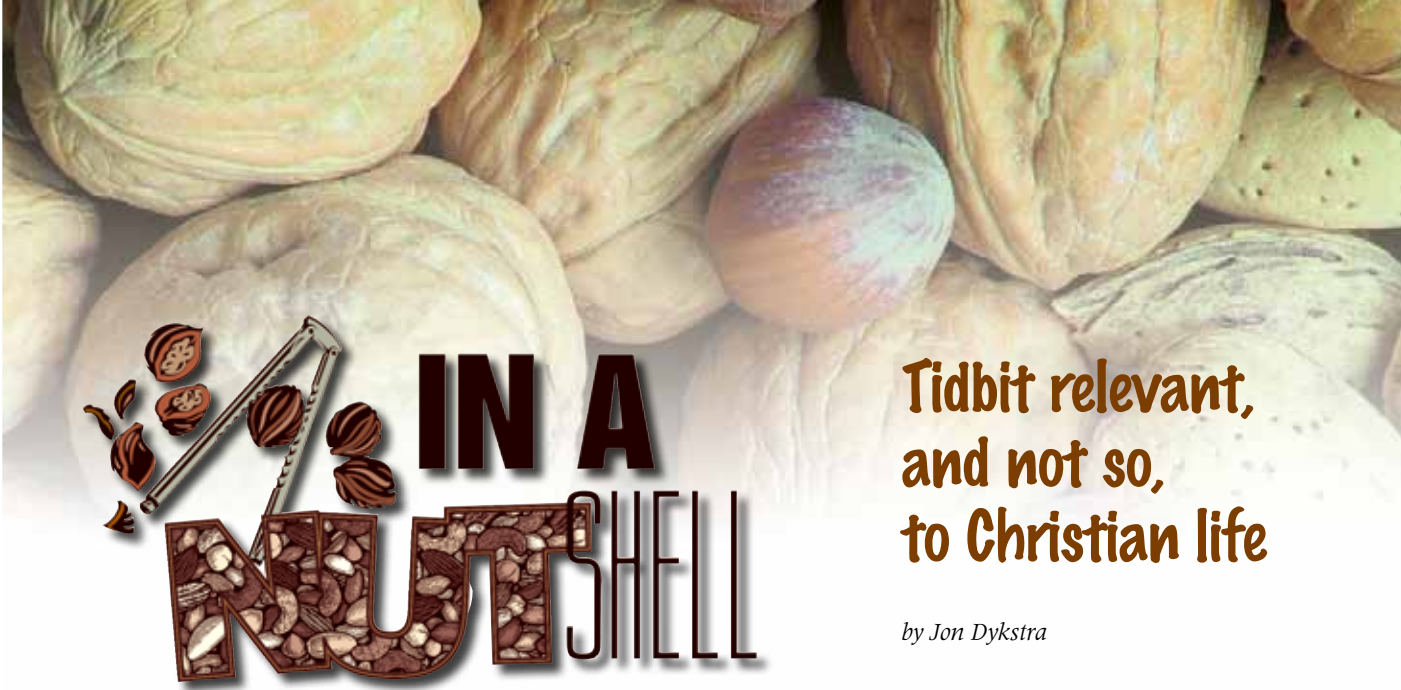
It is also recorded that a certain Irish running footman, who served a Lord Berkley in England during the late fifteen hundreds, once carried a letter from Callowdon to a Dr. Fryer, a doctor who lived in Little Britain in London. The letter contained a description of Lady Berkley's health. Langham, the running footman, returned to Callowdon in an amazingly short period of time with a glass bottle in his hand. The glass bottle held a medicine compounded by the doctor for Lady Berkley, Langham's mistress. Langham made the one hundred and forty-eight mile trip in less than forty-two hours, even though he rested one short night in the apothecary's house. Because no horse rider could have so safely guarded and kept the glass bottle of medicine, Langham was rewarded by his master, Lord Berkley, with a new suit of clothes.

Conclusion

Christians are, in a manner of speaking, all foot-runners. Even as John the Baptist ran before Christ, crying out in the wilderness of Judea that all should repent and that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, so all Christians should run before the Good News of Christ. Dressed in apparel much more striking than that of the former-day running footmen, those who love the Lord are clothed in righteousness. And all who see them pass, should see in their passing something of the beauty of Him whose livery they wear. Although Christians might tire along the weekly path if they have exercised their feet properly, although they might sleep on a bench in the foyer of a wearisome year after a particularly trying journey, they must always rise again and keep going, keep running. Their Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who has decked them out in righteousness, has also given them beautiful feet. These feet enable them to scale the Isaiah mountains in their neighborhoods, the hills in their streets and the escarpments of their places of work. Why has He done so? To bring good tidings and to bring them every day.

The hours might be long, the conditions are definitely not easy, but the pay – the pay is phenomenal – an eternity of salvation.





IN A NUTSHELL

Tidbit relevant, and not so, to Christian life

by Jon Dykstra

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Dutch down south

There are roughly 5 million Americans that can trace their roots back to Dutch immigrants and two distinct areas in the US where up to half the residents have a Dutch heritage. Many *RP* readers will be able to guess where at least one and probably both of these regions are. Most have probably visited, or are related to someone living in the first area in mid-Michigan where towns have names like Zeeland and Holland. The second hub of Dutch heritage is probably best known for Dordt College, a private Reformed institution, but this area in northwestern Iowa also shows its Dutch roots with an annual Tulip festival in Orange City (there are two Orange Cities in the United States, but while the one in Florida is named after the fruit, the one in Iowa is named after the man, William of Orange). The 2000 US census offers an interesting look at the Dutch content south of the border.



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Teaching conversational skills

In his new book *Bringing up Girls*, James Dobson offers some advice on teaching your children to be better

conversationalist. The advice is aimed at girls, but would be equally valuable for boys:

“It begins by facing your daughter about six feet away and telling her that you are going to play a game together. Then call attention to the tennis ball you are holding, which you proceed to bounce in her direction. After she catches the ball, stand there looking at each other for a moment before saying, ‘It isn’t much fun if you hold the ball, is it? Why don’t you throw it back?’ Your daughter will probably return the ball rather quickly. Stand motionless for a few seconds, and then say ‘Okay, I’m sending it back to you now.’ The child will be curious about what is going on. Tell her that talking together is a game called conversation, and it only works if the ‘ball’ is thrown back. If a person bounces a question to you and you hold it, the game ends. Neither you nor your partner has any fun. But if you throw it back, you are playing the game properly.

“Follow up by saying, ‘Suppose I ask, “Did you like the book you have been reading?”’ I have thrown the ball to you. If you simply reply, “Yes,” you have caught and held the ball. But if you say, “The book was very interesting. I like reading about animals,” you have thrown the ball back.’

“... Afterward, you can build on the concept by commenting on interchanges that occur with friends and adults. For example, you might

ask your daughter, ‘Did you hear Mrs. Smith ask you this afternoon what kind of food you liked? She was starting a conversation with you, but you said, “Hamburgers.” Do you think you threw the ball back to her?’”

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Evolution is not that sort of Science

The Creation Evolution debate is most often billed as being between Scripture and Science. But this assumes that Evolution is actually scientific. Is it really?

Evolution’s supporters certainly present it as a scientific theory, like that of the Theory of Gravity. But if we take a closer look at this comparison, it only underscores how different the Theory of Evolution is. A recent article posted to AnswersInGenesis.org titled, “12 Arguments that Evolutionists Should Avoid” makes this point:

“Take a pencil or pen. Hold it in the air. Then drop it to the floor. That’s gravity. Next, make a single-celled organism – like an amoeba – turn into a goat. Go ahead. We’ll wait... No? As you can see, there’s a fundamental difference between operational science, which can be tested through repeatable experimentation, and historical science, which cannot.”

SOURCE: www.answersingenesis.org/get-answers/features/arguments-evolutionists

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Quote of the month

“Don’t cry because it’s over. Smile because it happened.” – Dr. Seuss

Give peace a chance

The environmental religion offers contentment that it can't deliver

by James Wanliss

We all want peace. But do we want a piece of the peace environmentalism promises?

A new asceticism

Environmentalism does promise peace. Writes Robert Fowler, "People will come to appreciate that to go slower, longer, and restore a sense of peace in their lives can be a wonderful thing." He is talking about the benefits of being downwardly mobile, of embracing green asceticism. Contemplation of nature is desperately important to the environmentalist for from it he draws a sense of the transcendent. After a year-long voluntary experiment in eating only food grown a short distance from where he slept, Methodist Bill McKibben reported that he had found a measure of peace: "That good taste was satisfaction. . . . In my role as eater, I was part of something larger than myself that made sense to me – a community. I felt grounded, connected." The theme of the Roman Catholic Church's 2010 *World Day of Peace*, to be marked on January 1, is "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation."

An old idea of peace

To learn the true way of peace one is better advised to read puritan classics like *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs, or *The Art of Divine Contentment* by Thomas Watson. Both treat the subject of contentment based on Paul's words in Philippians 4:11, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." That is to say, whether I have many or few possessions, whether rich in money or poor, I can be content. Watson says, "Contentment lies within a man, in the heart; and the way to be comfortable, is not by having our barns filled, but our minds quiet."

Now some people try to find peace in the sin gluttony. They seek comfort of life in having much, or in owning the latest DVD or gadget, or in having more than others. Professing Christian greens are expert at pointing out this splinter, which they call world-ending conspicuous consumption, but fail to see the beam that pins them to the ground. We should do as they say, not as they do (Matthew 23:3). They are so married to the green earth that they are unable to rise heavenward, which is the only way for a Christian to go. Says Thomas Watson, "When a stone ascends, it is not a natural motion, but a violent; the motion of the soul heaven-ward is a violent motion."

The person who chases green peace harbors disorder in their mind because their very existence is pollution to the earth. Their flawed theory is an alternative religion that elevates earth and animals and creates an unquenchable dis-




sonance in their heart. People fear because they cannot make sense of their world and are alienated from God. They feel trapped in a fatalistic death spiral from which escape is impossible. So they turn to environmentalism, which offers meaning through action.

No peace

It is an empty lie. God's word points out the only way to peace; Jesus said to his followers (John 16:33), "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace." Any other route is hopeless, for "There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked." (Isaiah 48:22). Indeed, "the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Isaiah 57:21).

They torture themselves (and others) with their troubles. Rather than being content, they are full of envy and bitterness of soul, forever looking at what others are doing, forever resenting that others do not care as they do, forever envying. They gather a personal sense of worth and sometimes superiority from their green vision of the world. And they are not going to give that vision up easily. Greens will discover that "envy is rottenness to the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). The psychology of the green, especially the professing Christian green, guarantees a life of unhappiness, for there will always be environmental challenges because of sin and the curse (Genesis 3:19). This environmentalist resentment, anger even, is like an addiction. Like an alcoholic the more he drinks, the more he thirsts. There can only be a constant hunger for an elusive taste of true spirituality, and no rest, no lasting contentment, no peace.

Dr. James Wanliss is the author of an upcoming book on environmentalism called *Green Dragon* that will be published at the end of August. For more details, see www.resistingthegreendragon.com. 

Has Man made life?

Reality check on “Synthetic Life”

by Margaret Helder

“Craig Venter creates synthetic life form”
The Guardian (May 20)

“It’s alive! Artificial DNA controls life”
MSNBC.com (May 20)

“Scientists create a living organism”
CNN.com (May 21)

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In May you may have heard some rather big claims being made about what a scientist, a certain J. Craig Venter, had accomplished.

Now Dr. Venter has long pushed the envelope on what biotechnology can achieve. However even greater than the success of his efforts are the hyperbole and nonsensical claims which have greeted his achievements. Dr. Venter did manage to insert an artificially produced copy of genetic information from a very simple cell into the cell of a similar species from which its own genetic instructions had been removed. The inserted genetic information then successfully directed the life processes of the recipient cell. This achievement represented not the synthetic creation of life – as some were claiming – but the extension of processes already in commercial use.

The very best that Science can do

Mycoplasmas are tiny disease-causing bacteria that live only inside (unfortunate) hosts. Since their environment is so uniform, they need only an unusually small number of genes. *M. genitalium*, for example, exhibits a genome of only 500 genes made up in total of about 600,000 base pairs (like letters). However 100 genes can be deleted with no obvious

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***The bad news was that the system
did not work!***
.....

effects, so scientists think the minimum number of genes required to maintain life processes may be on the order of only 400 genes. Thus the *Mycoplasma* species, with their low number of genes, seemed like ideal organisms to use in this experiment.

In the present research, Dr. Venter synthesized the 1.1 million base pair genome of *Mycoplasma mycoides* (which infects goats). He then transferred this genome into a cell of *Mycoplasma capricolum*, (a similar species).

However the process was not straightforward. It required \$40 million and 20 people working for more than a decade to achieve the desired result.

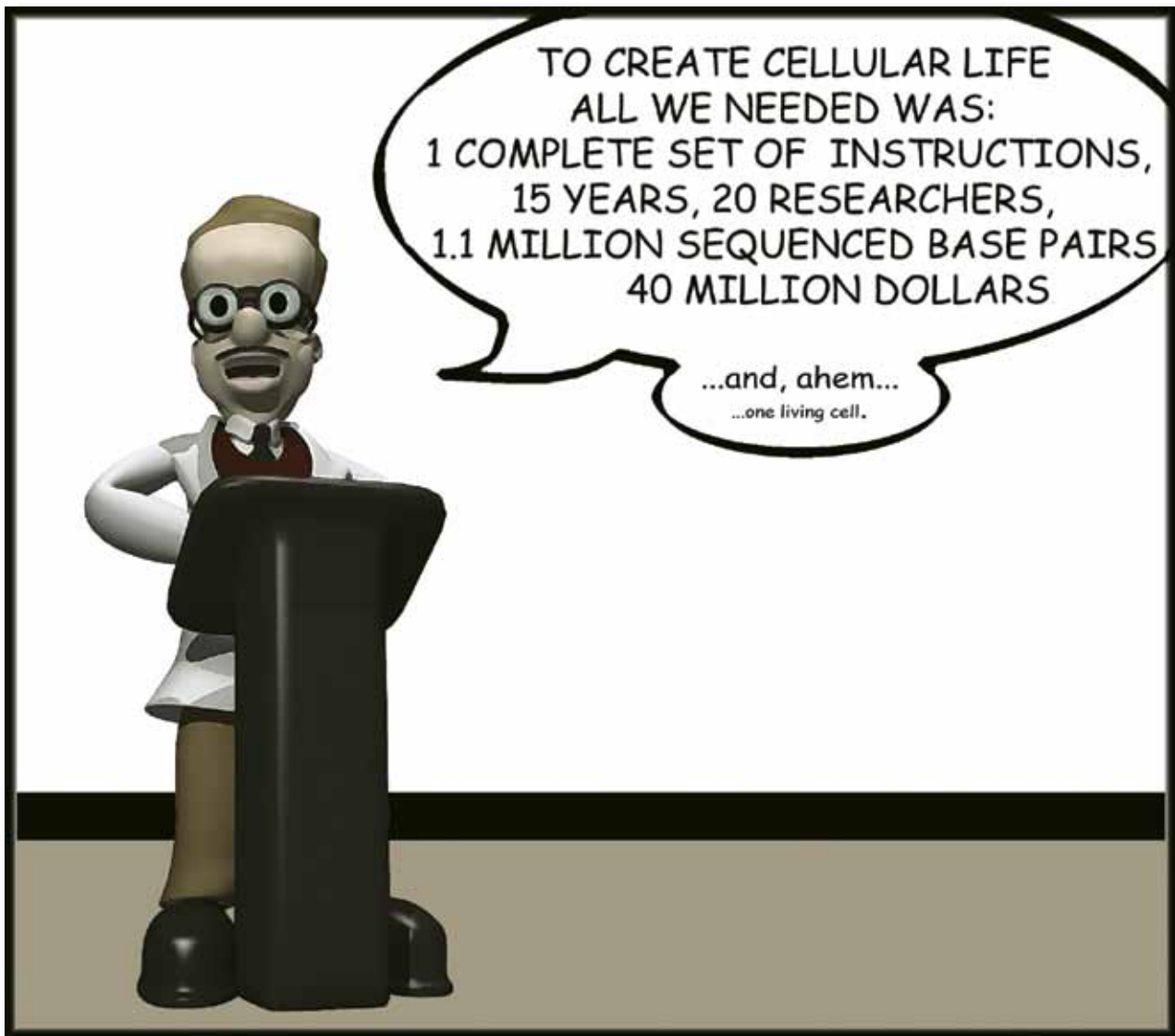
Copying Another’s design

For the first step the Venter team started with a computer record of the proper sequence of base pairs in *M. mycoides*. Then they ordered from a commercial company, 1,000 different, specially-prepared strands of DNA, each about 1,000 base pairs long. They thus had all the starting material they needed for the entire genome of the bacterium.

Life needed to “make” life

These strands obviously had to be attached in the right order and this could not be achieved without living cells. Suitable strands were inserted, by means of biotech processes, into yeast cells. Once connected together inside the yeast cells, these products were extracted and transferred into the bacterium *E. coli* for suitable multiplication. These products, now about 10,000 base pairs long, were screened to find those with the desired order of base pairs. The selected ones were then inserted back into yeast in order to obtain strands 100,000 base pairs long. Eventually a genome of 1.1 million base pairs was inserted into the related species of *M. capricolum* from which its own genome had been removed.

The bad news was that the system did not work! It took three months for the scientists to discover that one base pair out of 1.1 million had been inadvertently deleted. The missing letter was from an important gene for initiating DNA replication (copying). Once the mistake was corrected, the cells with the new genetic information worked just fine.



**How awesome then,
is the One who created life from scratch!**

So what did Dr. Venter achieve? He managed to copy information already invented by the Creator. Did Dr. V synthetically create life? Indeed he did not. He simply demonstrated how the information in the genetic material is like computer software (which is always produced by intelligence).

He did not invent this information. He merely copied it (with the help of some living yeast and bacterial cells). Then he inserted this information into a suitable living cell which

exhibits all the multiple operating systems which make life processes possible. The DNA on its own does nothing. The tolerance of the cell for mistakes in the DNA is obviously small, in some cases, when one missing letter prevents the system from operating at all. The massive use of computers demonstrates the amazing scope of the project. Man's best efforts may be able to imitate some aspects of the initial design, but they will never create life "from scratch." Craig Venter's achievement really just demonstrates the awesome majesty of the real Creator of life.





Soup

Buns

"Go and make disciples. . . ."

Acts 12-14 shows us how the Church did, and should do, their mission work

by Sharon L. Bratcher

When I was a young girl, I remember that our Baptist church gave about \$25/month to each of many missionaries. Many churches supported over a dozen missionaries and the method employed generally called for each church to decide how much to give each missionary family. However if giving was "down" there were times when a missionary might be "dropped" and would have to figure out how to bring in the necessary support to stay on the field.

Missionaries went out for four years and then came home on furlough for one. During that one year they were expected to visit all of the churches that were supporting them. This often entailed cross country traveling and sometimes more work than they had been doing out on the field; some found themselves happy when it was time to go back. They would hold missionary conferences in some churches, and preach on Sundays in others. We saw a lot of slide presentations and films and it kept us informed and interested and excited about preaching Christ to all of the world.

When my sister-in-law Debby became a missionary, they did things differently. Her home church had joined together with 4 other local churches to form a "consortium" that would fully support however many missionaries they could, rather than sending bits and pieces to a large quantity of them. When she would return on furlough, she would divide her time between these five churches, all in the same metropolitan area; she would tell about her medical missionary work and the ladies' and childrens' groups that she had taught.

Reformed approach

I thought that this was an improvement overall. Years later I discovered that a number of Reformed churches follow a pattern somewhat like this. It is the pattern which can clearly be seen in Acts chapters 12-14.

The following stages are easy to see within these passages:

- 1 – choosing the missionaries
- 2 – traveling
- 3 – tasks: preaching and teaching, establishing churches
- 4 – reporting back

Acts 13:1 names all of the elders that were in Antioch at the time. Verse 2 states that:

"while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off."

Although fasting may not be involved, even today the elders in a church must pray and determine who has the abilities and character to go to those who do not know Christ and proclaim the good news. Even today, once they have been carefully prayerfully chosen, the elders lay hands on them, commissioning them and praying over them as they head out to do this work.

A bit different today

As we read the next two chapters, we see a difference between how the work was done then and now: Paul and Barnabas traveled from place to place, preaching and teaching as they went. There was no set schedule or time frame – they just went. The Holy Spirit led them and they were provided for in various ways: sometimes working, and sometimes receiving food and lodging from those they taught. They faced danger, and were sometimes stoned and left for dead, or later on: imprisoned.

Today we organize missions in a much tidier manner, choosing an area and gathering up support from the churches and people, and then sending the missionaries to a particular locale. But it is still done with prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit. And the activities of preaching and teaching and establishing churches and appointing elders to lead the new congregations are still prayerfully performed as people who have not heard that Christ died for their sins hear this message and respond.

Last of all, Acts 14:26-28 states:

"From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch, where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they stayed there a long time with the disciples."

Our missionaries today report back so that we can pray for the work they are doing, and give to the needs in their field. With the use of computers today, in fact, missionaries can be in daily communication with their church members and families back home. Just imagine what Paul and Barnabas might have done with those resources!

The command remains

Matthew 28:18-20 tells us "Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations. . . ." The methods have differed, but the command is still there. The fields are still ripe for the harvest.

We are only limited when we fail to believe that God still brings people to Him, even today.



ENTICING ENIGMAS AND CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

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

NEW PUZZLES

Riddles for Punsters #168 – “Scientific Enlightenment”

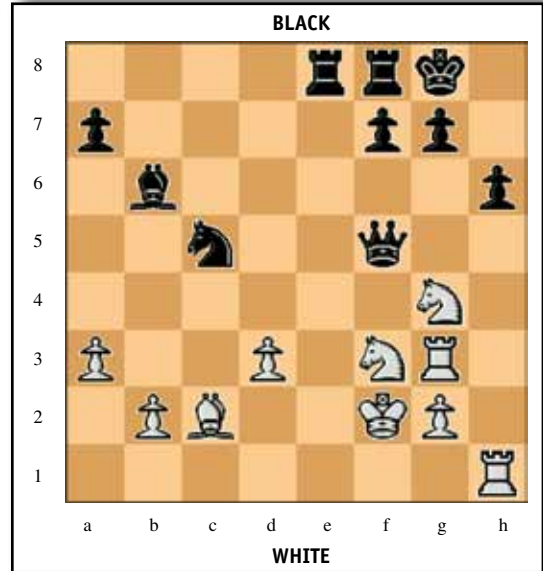
Why is Thomas Edison remembered mainly for his invention of the light bulb?
Because it was his b _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ idea.

Problem to Ponder #168 – “Car Change Calculations”

A hospital parkade has parking places for 300 vehicles. At noon one day, 90 parking spots were still empty. After that, **every five minutes** two vehicles left and five vehicles entered.

- How many parking spots were still empty one hour later?
- At what time of day did the parkade become full?
- If the parkade remained full from that time until 4 p.m., after which time **every ten minutes** six vehicles left for every one that entered, how many vehicles were still in the parkade at midnight?
- If the fee for evening parking (after 6:00 p.m.) is a flat rate of \$5.00, how much money was paid to park all the vehicles that arrived between 6:00 p.m. and midnight?
- How many \$2.50 milkshakes could have been bought with that same money?

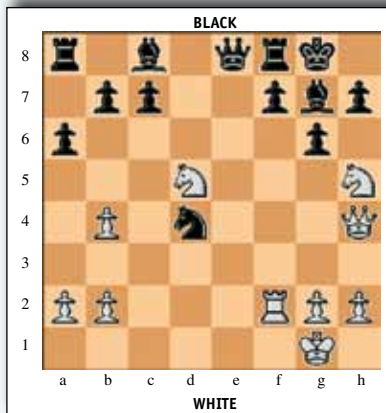
CHESS PUZZLE # 168



White to Mate in 3
Or, if it is BLACK's Move, **BLACK to Mate in 2**

SOLUTIONS TO THE (JUNE) PUZZLE PAGE

SOLUTION TO CHESS PUZZLE # 167



WHITE to Mate in 3 Descriptive Notation

1. KN-B6 ch BxN
2. Nx8 ch K-R1 (or K-N2)
3. QxP mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Nh5-f6 + Bg7xf6
2. Nd5xf6 + Kg8-h8 (or Kg8-g7)
3. Qh4xh7 ++

BLACK to Mate in 3 Descriptive Notation

1. _____ Q-K8 ch
2. R-B1 N-K7 ch
3. K-R1 QxR mate

Algebraic Notation

1. _____ Qe8-e1 +
2. Rf2-f1 Nd4-e2 +
3. Kg1-h1 Qe1xf1 ++

Answer to Riddles for Punsters #167 – “Professional Consistency”

How did the baker react when he burnt his pizza shells? He became c r u s t y.
What happened when the mechanic slipped on some oil on the garage floor? He w r e c h e d his back.
What kind of dancing school did the plumber enrol his daughter in? A school for t a p dancing.
What kind of clothing did the tailor want his son to wear to the church service? Something s u i t able.

Answer to Problem to Ponder #167 – “Looking up to Others”

Zelda, Velda and Gelda are three sisters. The tallest is 20 cm taller than the shortest who is 7 cm shorter than the third sister. The average of their heights is 149 cm. **How tall is each sister?**

Let x represent the height (in cm) of the shortest sister.
Therefore x + 7 is the height of the middle sister
and x + 20 is the height of the tallest sister.

The average of 3 heights is 149 so the sum of the 3 heights must be 3(149) = 447.

Thus, $x + x + 7 + x + 20 = 447$ so $3x + 27 = 447$ so $3x = 420$ so $x = 140$
Since $x + 7 = 147$ and $x + 20 = 160$

Therefore, the shortest sister is 140 cm tall, the next is 147 cm tall and the tallest has a height of 160 cm.

Also, who is the tallest and who is the shortest if **only one of the following statements is true?**

A. Zelda is the tallest. B. Gelda is not the shortest. C. Velda is not the tallest.
Assume that A is true so Zelda is tallest. C must be false so Velda IS the tallest. Both cannot be tallest. The assumption must be wrong.

Assume that C is true so Velda is not the tallest. A is false so Zelda is NOT the tallest. B is false so Gelda IS the shortest. Therefore NO ONE is tallest. The assumption must be wrong. iddle height. A is false so Zelda is shortest or of middle height. C is false so Velda is the tallest. Therefore Gelda must be of middle height. Therefore Zelda must be the shortest.

Thus, Velda is the tallest and Zelda is the shortest.

Crossword Puzzle

Series 17 No 7

Last Month's solution
Series 17 No 6

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11			
12					13			14			15		
16					17						18		
			19		20						21		
22	23	24				25	26	27	28		29		
30				31	32					33			
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48			49						50				
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57							58						
59			60	61		62	63			64	65	66	67
		68				69				70			
	71									72			

1	S	H	A	B	A			6	I	N	D		9	D	E	T	E	R				
14	C	A	S	E	S			15	N	G	I		16	E	T	A	P	E				
17	R	O	L	L	S			18	V	A	S		19	L	O	C	H	I				
20	U	R	A	L				21	C	A	T	S		22	O	N	I	O	N			
23	M	I	N	E				24	R	A	L		25	E	M	U		27	T	D	S	
								28	A	M	I		29	C	A	S		30				
31	R	I	B					34	P	P	D		35	T	R	E	S	36	T	L	E	
39	S	N	A	P				40	S								41	Q	U	I	T	
42	I	N	H	E				43	R	I	T		44	F	N	A		47	B	E	A	
								48	R	I	T		49	O	A	R						
50	D	B	M					53	G	E	R		54	C	R	E		55	A	T	E	S
59	R	E	A	C	H			60	R	O	S	A		63	V	A	L	I				
64	A	S	C	O	T			65	A	L	L		66	R	E	S	I	N				
67	F	O	L	I	E			68	C	E	E		69	C	R	E	T	E				
70	T	R	E	N	D			71	E	S	S		72	S	T	R	E	W				

ACROSS:

- 1. Bungling, awkward
- 6. Skilled
- 12. Flowing body of water
- 13. Expert pilot
- 14. Boat part
- 16. Resembling, seeming
- 17. Looking like tanned animal hide
- 19. Big poem
- 21. Metal-bearing rock
- 22. Audi alteram _____ (= hear the other side, Latin)
- 25. Cape, in Spanish
- 29. Knock
- 30. Original thought
- 31. Dutch specialty fish
- 34. Adverb, for short
- 35. What Churchill, Manitoba is famous for
- 38. Birds love this tallow fat
- 40. Scandinavian given name; Uwe, in German
- 41. Agents
- 43. Branch of medicine that deals with mental disorders
- 47. Able and healthy
- 49. Loud early dawn riser
- 50. Spooky
- 51. N.T. book
- 54. Golf pegs
- 55. Utter fear
- 57. Small veggie
- 58. Russian ruler
- 59. Wooden boy with honesty problem
- 64. Philippine island
- 68. Sticky stuff
- 69. Frost a cake
- 70. Make a bill into law
- 71. Perfumes
- 72. Condition of mind or temperament

Joyce

DOWN:

- 1. Interrupt request (abbr.)
- 2. Network interface unit (abbr.)
- 3. Girl's name, or extravehicular activity
- 4. Spanish money until 2002
- 5. Animal stomach tissue that can be eaten
- 6. Very soft mineral
- 7. Pass a test with flying colours
- 8. Grassy meadow
- 9. Japanese dance-drama
- 10. _____ kwan do
- 11. Mistake
- 15. Highly skilled
- 18. Time period
- 20. In my humble opinion (texting abbr.)
- 22. Polynesian arrowroot plants
- 23. Come to the expected total
- 24. French dreams
- 25. Kind of ties
- 26. French stop
- 27. Baby shirt protector
- 28. Single unit
- 32. Female given name
- 33. Needlefish
- 36. Direct for treatment
- 37. Medical prefix for breath
- 39. Norse god of war
- 42. River in Ukraine
- 44. Camp bed
- 45. Garden tool
- 46. Reg. Respiratory Therapists
- 48. Energetic
- 50. Behaving wrongly
- 52. Smallest Cdn. Province
- 53. Puts a picture up
- 56. Frees from discomfort
- 58. Foot parts
- 60. _____ Kaap, a.k.a. Eastern Cape
- 61. Corps of engineers (abbr.)
- 62. _____ et nunc (here and now, Latin)
- 63. Something to skate on
- 65. Master of applied arts
- 66. Perform
- 67. Map abbr.