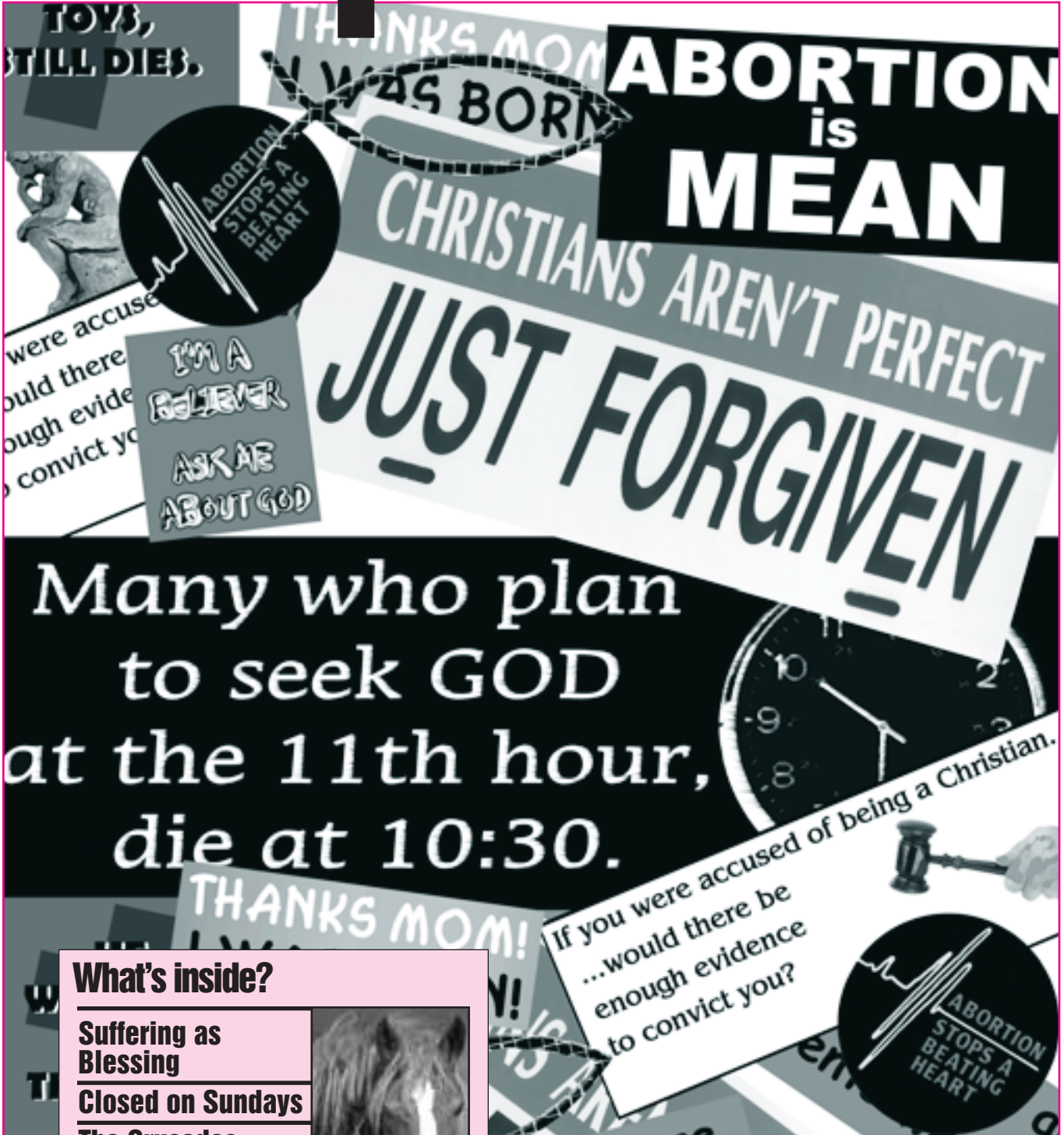


REFORMED

Perspective

A MAGAZINE
FOR THE
CHRISTIAN
FAMILY



What's inside?

Suffering as Blessing

Closed on Sundays

The Crusades



Editorial

by Jon Dykstra



The unknown commandment – #3

“You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain.”

It takes just a quick flip through the TV channels to find someone using God’s name in vain. CLICK! There’s Phoebe, from *Friends*, using it as a synonym for “okay!” CLICK! A few channels further finds the title character from *Frasier* using God’s name instead of the word “no.” CLICK! On the sports channel a commentator emphatically misuses it, deciding that “Wow!” just doesn’t suffice. Yes, it’s easy to find people using God’s name in vain, but it’s hard to figure out why they do it.

It just doesn’t make sense. While TV writers and producers regularly offend viewers, they rarely do so without reason. In a show like *Sex in the City*, for example, the producers show a steady diet of sex and sleaze, which is sure to offend Christians. But even as Christians are turning off the program, countless others are tuning in *for* the sex and sleaze. So TV producers are willing to offend, as long as it gets them more viewers than it loses them.

That’s why it’s hard to understand why anyone swears on TV. Using God’s name in vain is sure to offend some viewers, but it’s doubtful anyone out there really watches a show *for* the swearing. So why do they do it?

The same question could be asked in a number of other settings as well. Why is God’s name misused in newspapers, at the office, and in casual conversations? Why does one member of my basketball team insist on calling out God’s name every time he misses a shot? In many of these same settings – TV, the newspaper, casual conversations – the dialogue will be remarkably free from crudities. The f-word and others are strictly off limits, but God’s name is still open to abuse. Why?

Ignorance isn’t bliss

I’m convinced the answer is ignorance. God’s name is abused because Christians don’t object, and because we don’t object, TV scriptwriters, newspaper columnists and even our friends don’t realize that

using God’s name in vain is offensive. They’re totally clueless. How clueless? When I finally screwed up the courage to ask a member of my basketball team to stop swearing he was quite willing to oblige. The next time he missed a shot, instead of stringing God’s name together with the word d—n, as was his usual habit, he restricted himself to just misusing God’s name. He knew d—n was a swear, so he stopped using it, but he continuing using God’s name in vain because no one had ever told him it was offensive. He was completely unaware.

Not everyone is quite this clueless, but it is surprising how many are. It is even more surprising how willing people are to accommodate a request not to swear. When my basketball team’s manager called an impromptu meeting about swearing everyone agreed to try and curtail it. (One player noted that a similar request had been made when he played college ball. Interestingly enough, on that team it wasn’t a Christian who had made the request, but a Mormon.) They even had a bunch of questions about which words were more and less offensive. Many of them still swear now but it’s a habit they seem to be trying to break. And all we had to do was ask.

How do you ask?

The toughest part is the asking. How do you bring it up without sounding judgmental, or harsh, or holier than thou?

The manager on my basketball team took the straightforward approach. He announced that since there were a number of Christians on the team, we would appreciate it if people didn’t swear using God’s name. He said it, everyone agreed, and it was done with. He made it look so very simple. And it should be simple. Not easy, mind you; as simple as it looked, he was the only Christian on the team to actually get up and say what needed to be said. It still takes courage.

My aunt uses a rather different technique. When someone misuses God’s name while talking with her,

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she interrupts and asks, "Are you praying?" This generally prompts a very puzzled reply, something to the effect of, "What? Why would you think I was praying?" "Because you just mentioned God's name, and since we weren't talking about God, I assumed you must have been talking to God. Or were you just using God's name for emphasis? Maybe you don't know, but using God's name like that is very offensive to Christians, and to God Himself. Please don't do that."

A friend has written to a popular newspaper columnist who blasphemed. He alerted her to the offensive part of her column and then continued:

... many people don't know this, but the way you used God's name there would actually be a violation of the third commandment - You shall not take the Name of the Lord your God in vain.

Obviously it would be fine to use God's name if you actually were addressing Him, but in this instance you used it more like an expletive, or as a way to emphasize your point. I know that columnists don't seek to offend without purpose (sometimes they do so with purpose, but that is part of the job) so I thought I would make you aware of this, and ask you to please be careful about it in the future. Thank-you.

The columnist never replied, but to this date hasn't abused God's name either.

Conclusion

Not everyone is going to honor a request to stop swearing. Some will swear just to tick us off. But our friends and neighbors will care. Employees will listen, if only to cozy up to the boss. Waiters will want nice tips. TV scriptwriters want us to watch their shows. All these people have reasons to listen to what we like and don't like. We don't like it when they use God's name in vain, so let's let them know.



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Humility

**He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low no pride.
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.**

Bunyan



by Christine Farenhorst

Humbleness, humility, if you will, is a wondrous characteristic. It is also one which is not found frequently. But it is a characteristic which is the essence of Christianity. Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, came to be a Servant, a suffering and humble Servant, One Who “. . . did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a Servant, being made in human likeness” (Phil 2:7).

Aidan, who lived circa 651, was an Irish Celtic monk who worked at the missionary center of Lindisfarne. This was an island off the coast of Scotland and near the English mainland. He brought fellow workers to the island and founded a school for English boys to train them for the church. Efforts to evangelize the community were supported by his friend, King Oswald of Northumbria, who had studied in Ireland. Aidan is said to have been deeply concerned for the poor and to have devoted much attention to ransoming and educating slaves for the priesthood.

A little miffed

Now a story is recounted of Aidan, who was the first bishop of Lindisfarne. Aidan usually traveled on foot, going from place to place, ministering to people and preaching the Gospel. King Oswald, fond of Aidan and believing him to be a man of God, gave him a horse on which to ride. It was a fine creature, a muscular animal, beautiful and powerful to look upon and well able to carry Aidan across the rivers and rough roads of Lindisfarne especially in inclement weather. Not long after Aidan had received this steed, he met a beggar at the roadside. He was a

very poor man indeed, who, with hands outstretched, asked the bishop for alms. Aidan felt compassion for the wretch and, jumping off his newly acquired horse, freely gave it to the man. The beggar, amazed, as we can well imagine, at such a gift, thanked the bishop profusely and rode away praising God. You must note that the horse had royal trappings. That is to say, it was covered with a rich cloth, had silver bells and leather reins as well as a wonderful, leather saddle. Surely the beggar had been given a pot of gold.

When news of Aidan’s generosity reached the king, the king was surprised and just a trifle miffed. The next time Aidan dined with his monarch, Oswald asked him why he had given away such a useful and very expensive present. Aidan answered directly.

“What are you saying, your majesty! Is this child of a mare more valuable to you than a child of God?”

The king was silent. He got up from his place at the table and walked over to the hearth where a warm fire burned. The glow of the flames shone on his face as he brooded. Suddenly he turned, looked at the bishop and unbuckled his sword. This he handed to a servant. Then, without his sword, he strode over to Aidan, knelt at his feet and begged his forgiveness. It was a very humble act – an act which showed the king understood that material things are nothing but gifts from our heavenly Father to be used to honor Him.

I have never before seen. . .

After this act, the king sat down again at the supper table. He ate and drank and


spoke cheerfully to Aidan. It is true of Christians that after they deal with a difficult matter, a humiliating matter, but one which God requires them to accept and act accordingly, that they begin to feel at ease. So it was with king Oswald. But bishop Aidan began to be sad of countenance and was overcome by tears. As he wept the king was puzzled and asked what troubled him but Aidan would not speak to him of why he was weeping. At length Aidan spoke to his chaplain in his own language, a language the king and others present did not understand.

“The reason I cry,” Aidan said, “is that I know that king Oswald will not live very long; for I have never before seen a humble king.”

It was only a feeling, a foreboding which Aidan had, and one he could not prove. But history bears out the fact that Oswald, King of Northumbria died in the seventh year of his reign in the battle of Maserfield by the hand of the pagan king Penda of Mercia.

This anecdote does not prove whether or not Aidan and Oswald were true Christians. But it does underline the fact that true humility is a matter of works – of doing. Those who are truly humble desire to make themselves of no account for Christ’s sake. And is it not written that God gives grace to the humble and that He humbles us so that He may lift us up in due time? (I Peter 5:5a, 6)

SOURCES:

Dictionary of Biographical Quotation, Knopf, 1978
Who was Who in Church History, Elgin S. Moyer, Keats Publishing Inc., 1962. 

The Canadian Revolution of 1982

by Michael Wagner

When we speak of a political “revolution,” we usually think of a violent event that replaces one political system with another. Among the best known revolutions are the French Revolution of the late eighteenth century and the Russian Revolution of 1917. Canada, thankfully, has never experienced anything of this sort. Nevertheless, Canada did experience a dramatic change in its political system in 1982.

In that year, Canada’s constitution (the British North America Act, or BNA Act of 1867) was patriated from Great Britain, and the Constitution Act of 1982 was added to the constitution. The latter Act included the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It seems to me that the adoption of the Charter amounted to a political revolution.

For most people, talking about the constitution is probably rather boring. It appears to be just a dull legal document with little relevance for day-to-day life. But what if a change in the constitution initiated the uprooting of the original underlying Christian basis of our society? Wouldn’t that affect the day-to-day life of Canadian Christians? This is indeed what has been happening in Canada for a few years now. The government of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau staged a non-violent revolution in 1982, and although Trudeau himself is now dead, the implications of his revolution continue to work themselves out in our political and legal systems.

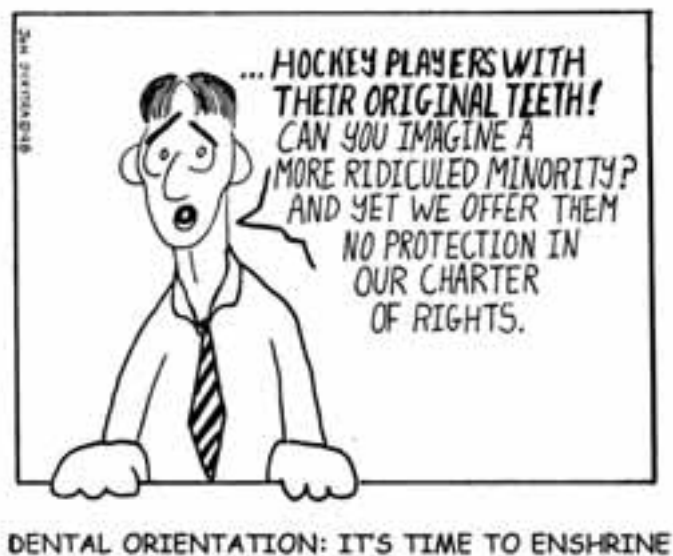
Two approaches

Historically speaking, there have been two major approaches to protecting rights and liberties in liberal democratic countries such as Canada. One is the British parliamentary model, and the other is the American separation of powers model. These models, and their relevance for Canada, are discussed in a lengthy article by Prof. Ted Morton, of the University of Calgary, entitled, *The Living Constitution* (contained in *Introductory Readings in Canadian Govern-*

ment & Politics R. M. Krause and R. H. Waggenberg, ed., second edition, 1995).

Morton summarizes the differences between the two approaches this way:

The American model is ultimately based on and organized by a single document – a written constitution. By contrast, the Westminster model is based on an unwritten constitution – a combination of historically important statutes, the common law tradition, and numerous unwritten conventions and usages. The second difference is





A Sample of Revolutionary Rulings

The New Constitution Versus the Fourth Commandment

“R. vs. Big M Drug Mart” (1985)

This decision by the Supreme Court struck down Canada’s “Lord’s Day Act.” This Act had placed some restrictions on business activity on Sundays. A business in Calgary that had been charged under the Act (for remaining open on Sundays) claimed that it violated the Charter of Rights section 2 “freedom of religion” clause. The Supreme Court agreed, and struck down the Act. Because the Lord’s Day Act was based upon Christian beliefs, and therefore entailed government enforcement of a Christian teaching (i.e., not working on the Lord’s Day), the Court said it violated the Charter’s guarantee of religious freedom for non-Christians.

The New Constitution Versus the Sixth Commandment

“R. vs. Morgentaler” (1988)

In 1969 abortion was legalized to a certain degree in Canada. A woman could have an abortion in a hospital if her request for an abortion received the approval of the hospital’s therapeutic abortion committee (TAC). To be sure, a large number of abortions were conducted under this provision, but it did nevertheless limit where abortions could take place and who could do them. Infamous baby-killer Henry Morgentaler challenged the restrictions on abortion.

that the written constitution of the Americans includes an enumeration of the fundamental rights and liberties of the individual against government, known collectively as the Bill of Rights. While individuals enjoy basically the same rights and freedoms under the British parliamentary model of democracy, they are not spelled out in any single basic document of government – that is, they are not constitutionally entrenched (p. 52).

In the American system, the courts play a much larger political role since they can be appealed to in order to enforce explicitly enumerated rights against the government. In the British system, however, there is an understanding that Parliament is the supreme political institution, and that the courts are primarily to interpret the laws that are passed by Parliament. Thus court challenges against the government are usually ineffective in the British model.



The Charter contains within it the seeds for dramatic left-wing change in Canada.



With the exception of its federal structure (i.e., separate federal and provincial governments), Canada’s constitution was based on the British model until 1982. “Accordingly, Canada until very recently followed the British approach to the protection of civil liberty: parliamentary supremacy, the rule of law, and the conventions that support them” (p. 53). While it is probably natural to think that the American approach to protecting rights would be more effective, since there is an explicit declaration of rights, this is not necessarily so. A comparison of Canadian and Ameri-

can history does not show that rights were better protected under the American system than under Canada’s British-style system. Think of the treatment of black people in the southern states, for example. So it cannot be argued that Canada needed the Charter of Rights to protect the otherwise threatened rights of citizens.

Bill vs. Charter of Rights

In 1960 the Canadian government adopted a Bill of Rights, but since it was just a simple piece of regular legislation, it had virtually no noticeable effect on Canada’s political system. The Charter of Rights is an entirely different affair than the 1960 Bill of Rights. “The adoption of a constitutionally entrenched Charter of Rights fundamentally altered the Canadian system of government by placing explicit limitations on the law-making power of both levels of government. Parliament was no longer supreme; the constitution was” (p. 54). Morton notes that the exception to this is section 33 of the Charter which allows governments to pass legislation that violates certain sections of the Charter, although only under certain conditions. This is known as the “notwithstanding clause.” However, this clause is rarely used (being widely viewed as illegitimate) and is therefore unlikely to play much of a role in Canadian politics.

It is important to note, as Morton does above, that the Charter “fundamentally



altered the Canadian system of government." This was the initial revolutionary change. The effects of the revolution primarily work themselves out through court decisions, especially decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada. The courts interpret the Charter and it is through this role that they are implementing the changes required to complete the revolution.

The opposition loves it

The Charter of Rights was not adopted to codify and protect the existing rights and freedoms of Canadian citizens, but instead to bring about important political changes. Some left-wing scholars have noted (and celebrated) the fact that the Charter promotes "egalitarianism," i.e., the modern notion of social equality. Kathleen Mahoney, a prominent feminist law professor at the University of Calgary, points this out in an article in the 1992 Winter issue of the *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics*. She states:

It is my view that the Supreme Court of Canada, to quite a remarkable degree, has recognized the egalitarian challenge the Charter presents. In the past few years, it has launched a promising new era for equality jurisprudence quite unique in the western world. The equality theory it has developed goes far beyond that which underlies constitutional law of other

western societies including Europe and the United States (pp. 760-761). A cruder way of saying this is that Canada's Supreme Court is further to the left than any other supreme court in the West.

The Charter, then, contains within it the seeds for dramatic left-wing change in Canada. Mahoney refers to "the transformative potential in the Charter, a potential to achieve social change towards a society that responds to needs, honors difference, and rejects abstractions (p. 791)." Note again that the Charter has a "transformative potential . . . to achieve social change." You can be sure that she is referring to left-wing social change. A revolution, in other words.



Left-wing social change has effectively been institutionalized by the Charter.



The constitutional change of 1982 fundamentally altered Canada's political system. The adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was the most significant component of this change. As a result of court decisions interpreting the Charter, Canada's abortion law was struck down, homosexual rights have been greatly expanded, and other left-wing policies have been advanced as well. Canada would likely be taking a somewhat left-wing path even without the Charter, but the implementation of the Charter has greatly strengthened and accelerated this trend. Left-wing social change has effectively been institutionalized by the Charter. In this respect, the future of Canada looks bleak from a conservative Christian perspective. Canada's revolution was not a violent one, but it was a revolution none the less.

A Sample of Revolutionary Rulings

Continued from page 6

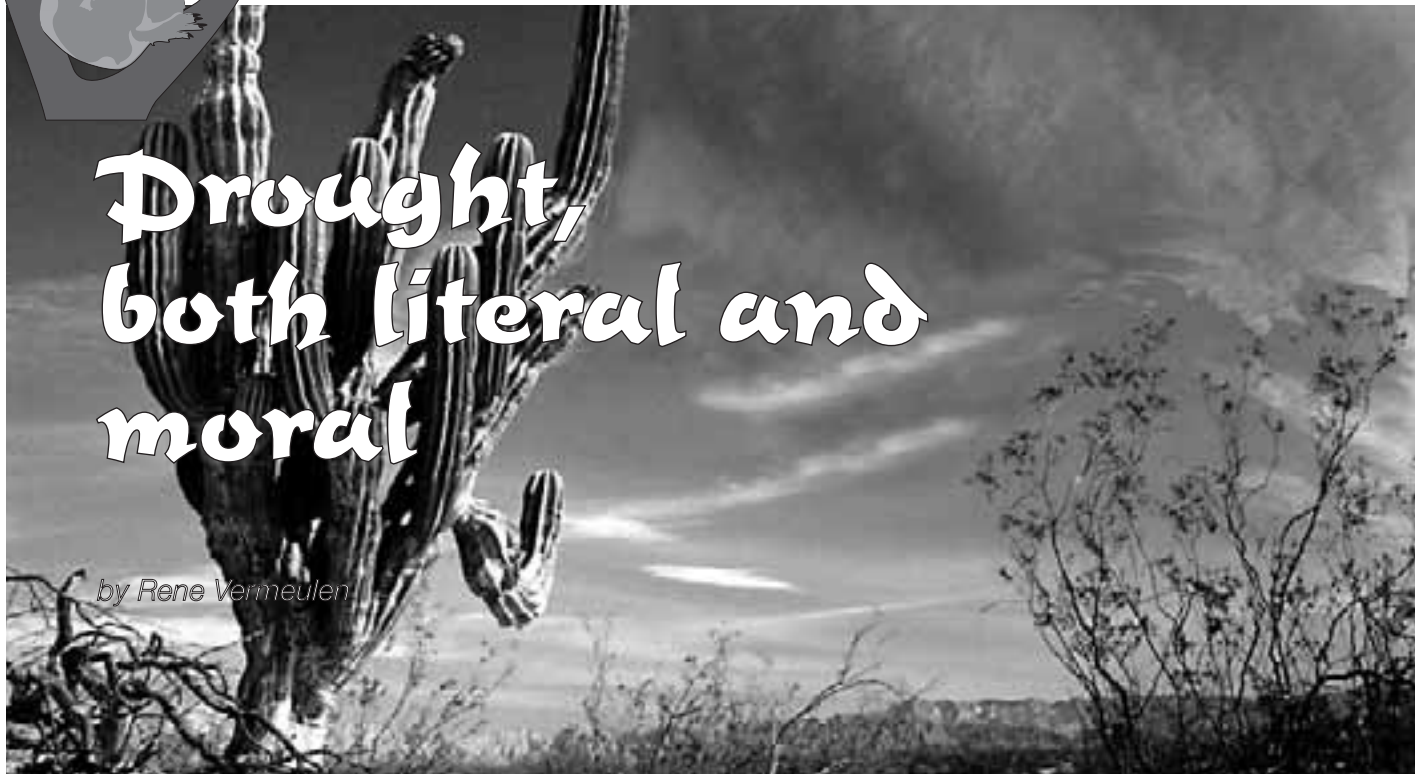
To make a long story short, he won the case, and the section of Canada's Criminal Code limiting abortion was struck down. Although some of the Supreme Court judges offered differing opinions as to why they sided with Morgentaler, the main thrust of the decision was that the procedures involving the TACs violated the section 7 Charter right to "security of the person." Canada was left with no legal restrictions on abortion whatsoever.

The New Constitution Versus the Seventh Commandment

"Vriend vs. Alberta" (1998)

Delwin Vriend worked for King's University College in Edmonton. Because Vriend was openly homosexual, and therefore in clear violation of the College's Christian code of conduct, he was fired. However, he could not appeal his dismissal to Alberta's Human Rights Commission because the province's Individual Rights Protection Act (IRPA) did not include sexual orientation as a protected category. Thus Vriend challenged the IRPA as violating the Charter's section 15 equality rights provision for not protecting sexual orientation. The Supreme Court agreed, and ruled that the failure to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination was unconstitutional. This clearly extended the scope of homosexual rights.





Drought, both literal and moral

by Rene Vermeulen

When reading the Bible, I am often struck by the importance of water to the people of Palestine, especially during the Old Testament times. Now it is true, of course, that water is important to all people. One simply cannot live without it. But living in the driest continent on earth one cannot help but be struck by the importance of water in a dry place such as Palestine. Rain is highly spoken of in Scripture and its absence is often disastrous. The same can be said for Australia.

We, my wife and I, were on our way for a visit, and I was complaining that I had nothing to write about for *Reformed Perspective*. It was then she reminded me that water has been a great topic in Western Australia for some 6 months now. A great topic but for different reasons.

Let me explain.

Too little

Earlier this year, around the months of June and July, it looked as if there would not be enough rain to provide a crop for the farmers in the wheat belt of Western Australia. Even for farmers nearer the coast, the lack of rain spelled a disastrous cropping season. Normally we receive rains during the months of May and June. Rains during the following months are not much

good because the weather is generally cold and very little will grow without some warmth in the soil.

The failure of the rains meant that many farmers who had sown crops in the expectation of rain had in fact spent a heap of money for no expected return. That, allied with some years of poor crops for various reasons, made the outlook for this year very poor indeed.



***I suspect that it might
well remain a
pipedream
rather than a pipeline.***



But then during September the winter rains came but not the cold weather – the result was that crops now looked exceptionally good and farmers went around with big smiles on their faces. They had something to look forward to.

That is, until the first two weeks of December when a series of fronts brought rain and wind which, in many southern regions of our state, destroyed crops which

only days before had been the best seen for years. It was a sad sight indeed. Who wants to be a farmer?

Too much

At the same time the Perth metropolitan area is very short of water. The catchment areas of its dams have not received enough rain to replace what was used last year. The result is that the people in Perth have been placed on very severe restrictions for this summer. Thus watering one's lawn and the plants in the garden may only take place on two days a week. If the use of water is not reduced, further restrictions may well be brought in and beautiful green lawns could be turned brown.

In other words, not only our farmers but also our capital city is experiencing what it is to be struck by drought. The gardening centers too, can expect very poor sales this summer as people refuse to plant shrubs and flowering plants. And as for the producers of roll on turf, they might as well go on holidays for the duration.

Of course not all parts of the state are afflicted. Along the south coast, where we live, there are no restrictions. In fact we have had too much water, especially during the past few weeks. And in the far north there is an abundance of water in the

tropical region of the Kimberley. Some years ago there was a proposal by the member for the Kimberley to undertake the massive task of constructing a pipeline from the Kimberley to Perth. This would drought-proof Perth and encourage all sorts of water dependent agriculture along the length of the pipeline. But such a pipeline would have to be more than 2000 kilometers long. It would be a huge and costly undertaking. I suspect that it might well remain a pipedream rather than a pipeline.

Promises and threats

While our state is faced by these massive problems there is no indication these calamities are regarded as anything other than just happenings, possibly caused by depletion of the Ozone layer and heating of the earth’s surface caused by the excess use of greenhouse gasses. That, at least, is what the papers are telling us. All the evidence seems to point this way.

God does not come into this equation. In this post-Christian era, who still believes that God exists?

Certainly our state government does not. Currently they are discussing changes in the laws dealing with family relationships. Homosexuals and lesbians have been discriminated against for so many years that it is high time to grant them equal rights – that is, equal rights to having a family, and if need be by artificial insemination with donor supplied sperm. Education curricula will have to be adjusted to ensure that these “normal” people are not discriminated against. The government is determined to push this through the parliament before the end of this year (2001).

The opposition has been widespread: letters to the editor, protest marches, and church leaders protesting publicly. But the government is adamant that it will proceed. On the other hand the Christian view is ridiculed as the idea of narrow-minded bigots. It is not to be listened to. God does not exist, and if He did He would be more

generous than these bigots. It is terrible to see this happening.

All this took me back to the book of Deuteronomy. The book in which the covenant Lord lays down His final rules for the people entering Palestine – entering the promised land.

Now I realize that Western Australia is not the promised land – that we await the new heaven and earth in which righteousness will dwell. It is for that reason that we cannot put an equal sign behind something one reads in his Bible. And yet . . . God’s promises are not null and void. As I read in Deuteronomy 11:13-17:

“And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be

filled. Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you.”

Well in our country, in our state, people and governments take no notice of God’s Word. Rather they often ridicule it and those who defend the rights of the King of kings. Is that the reason why things have gone so horribly wrong? God cannot be trifled with.

It is to be feared that West Australians will ignore all those letters in the press against the way the state is going. They will call those letter writers old fashioned or bigoted. They will go their own merry way and suffer the consequences and blame it all on climate changes.

But there is a God in heaven who laughs.



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The Crusades

Comparing Christianity at its worst to Islam

by Dick Wunnink

"It is by persuasion, and not by force and compulsion that the Kingdom comes to men, and what protects the church in the last analysis is never the power of the State but only the Holy Spirit as He accompanies the pure preaching of the Word and regenerates the hearts of men."

Dr.H.J. Stob's *The Liberty of Man*

How well do we know the differences between Christianity and Islam, the world's fastest growing religion? In the aftermath of infamous terrorists attacks against New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Muslims placed ads in newspapers, wrote letters to editors, and opened Mosques to the public. They all fervently claimed that the horrendous crimes committed by Arab Muslim terrorists don't represent the true nature of Islam. They ask, "How can these terrorists be true Muslims since Islam orders peace and a true Muslim can only be a symbol of peace and human rights?" American and Canadian Muslims may well be among the first to condemn terrorist attacks and to speak of terrorism as anti-Islamic. But at the same time some major Muslim organizations don't protest the campaign to drive the Israelis into the sea, or the persecution of Christians in Muslim dominated countries. The relationship between Christians and Muslims in Islam-dominated countries continues to be of virtual persecution of Christians. "Never in living memory has the situation for Christian minorities in the Islamic world been so precarious," warns Patrick Sookhded, the director of the Wilshire, England-based Barnabas Fund.

Comments made by an influential leader thought to be in the Islamic mainstream were not reassuring either. Said Sheik Muhammad Gemeaha, leader of Manhattan's Cultural Center, "The Jews were behind these ugly acts (of Sept. 11), while we, the Arabs were innocent." He also claimed that Jewish doctors were poisoning Muslim children in American hospitals and that Zionists, working in the nation's traffic control towers aided the suicide hijackings.

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He also claimed that Jewish doctors were poisoning Muslim children in American hospitals.

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Political leaders have accepted the Muslims' arguments at face value. When war against Muslim terrorists was declared, the public was told over and over again that it was not a war against Islam as a religion. For example, after the September 11 at-

tacks, the White House used the word Crusade to describe its war against Muslim terrorists. But soon afterwards it was code named "Infinite Justice." The title and the word Crusade were deemed offensive to Muslims, so they were changed and apologized for. Even evangelical Christians apologize for the word Crusade. Some say there are Muslims who may never come to Jesus Christ simply because of the self-righteous vigor that fuelled the violence and murder during the Crusades. Others claim that the memories of the Crusades continue to live on in the Muslim mind. In their view, the association between Christianity and naked power, sometimes cruelly used, has been to the lasting detriment of the Christian cause. One writer even declared that the Crusades have done more damage to Christianity in the twentieth century than they did in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

On July 15, 1999, the nine-hundredth anniversary of the fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders, a party of Christians paraded round the city walls. Their intent was to publicize a personal apology for the Crusades to Muslims. They wanted to make a conciliatory gesture, on the one hand, and on the other hand express contrition for wars which they believed were departures

Armies from Europe were determined to reconquer the former Christian territories.



from the Spirit of Christ and His gospel. Although well intended, I believe their apology was pointless.

Muhammad and Jesus

Why the Crusades? I am convinced that their roots are in Islam itself. In Islam there is no separation between the church and political power. In his *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, ‘Abd Al-Raj,am ‘Az-zam, the first Secretary-General of the Arab League (1945-1952), notes that Islam, unlike any other great religion, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity, subscribes to a political and social order that is to be carefully established and observed in the here and now as a road to the after-world. “The Kingdom of God in heaven,” he states, “is achieved through piety and through a system of social and political order, namely, a Kingdom of God on earth.” In an Islamic dominated state, therefore, the political head is the religious head, the representative of Allah.

The place of Muhammad (c.570-632), the founder of Islam, is entirely different from that of Jesus in Christianity. Muhammad is no ideal figure. He did not claim to be sinless. On the contrary, he confessed that he was one. “So know (O Muhammad) that there is no God save Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy sin” (Surah 47:19). He preached violence. He was a skillful diplomat, statesman and general. Through jihad, or holy war, his followers were called on to fight on behalf of Islam. His aim was to build an Islamic society, either through peaceful means or through war. Most of the Arabs were not convinced professors of Islam. No, they accepted it because if they didn’t Muhammad would make war on them and conquer them and capture their goods. “The wandering Arabs say: We believe. Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Ye believe not, but rather say ‘we submit,’ for the faith hath not yet entered into your hearts”(Surah 49:14). Before his death Muhammad succeeded in uniting a large number of the Arabs of his immediate region under the crescent of Islam. Though

sometimes spoken of as a mediator, Muhammad is neither God nor Savior. He was a mortal man like others. From its very outset, Islam was a military faith, propagated by warlike Arab armies.



But history tells a different story. War is inherent in Islam.



Muhammad robbed in the name of Allah. He occupied lands in the name of Islam. During his lifetime, Muslims became a political as well as a religious community, with the Prophet as sovereign – dispensing justice, commanding armies, collecting taxes, and waging war. Yet in the eyes of the true Muslims, Muhammad is more than a man. They revere him as the final Messenger of God and the “Seal of the Prophets.” He is the object of faith and of obedience. Muslims believe that the greatest example of such life of obedience and surrender is to be seen in the life of Muhammad. It is on his life that they seek to model their own, just as a Christians try to model their life on the example of Jesus Christ. But Muhammad is dead and buried. His bones are still in the grave in Medina. According to Islam, he waits for the great Day of Judgment. Muhammad is dead. Jesus is alive. Christians serve the risen Savior!

G.R. Cragg, an Anglican expert on Islam, suggests that the key difference between Muhammad and Jesus is highlighted by asking the question: “How should the prophet succeed when the people refuse to hear him?” By the means of the sword and subjection or by the cross and the resurrection?

In the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, God made Himself known. In the person of Jesus Christ I see the very nature of God. How different from Muhammad! Jesus never confessed sins. He never asked for forgiveness. He showed no awareness of moral failure. He believed Himself to be sinless. Jesus died for our sin, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, thereby becoming our intercessor. For three centuries Christianity spread by preaching the Gospel, showing kindness and love, living exemplary lives, and giving encouragement and hope to the poor. It grew as the religion of the oppressed. War was seen as a contradiction to the Gospel. And throughout the centuries Christians have always been more or less aware of this. In the time of emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180) the anti-Christian pamphleteer Celsus was the first known person to realize that although the Christian community was non-political, quietist, and pacifist, it had it in its power to transform the social and political order of the Roman empire.

Holy War

The enormous importance of war in the spread of Islam is denied today in intellectual circles that admire Islam and claim it is a peaceful and democratic religion. But history tells a different story. War is inherent in Islam. War meant to convert infidels is considered a sacred duty. A war of this kind is a jihad, a holy war. The French scholar Jacques Ellul observes:

“Let us make no mistake, the word jihad has two complementary senses. It may denote a spiritual war that is moral and inward. Muslims have to wage this war within themselves in the fight against demons and evil forces, in the effort to achieve better obedience to God’s will, in the struggle for perfect submission. But at the same time and in a wholly consistent way the jihad is also the war against external demons. To spread the faith, it is necessary to destroy false religions. This war, then, is always a religious war, a holy war.”

In other words, the idea of a holy war is not of Christian origin. Muhammad freely used the sword. His military expeditions against Meccan caravans, the elimination of the Jews in Medina, and the willingness to use force to convert Arab tribes are matters of historic record. And hardly had the Islamic faith taken hold in Arabia when an immediate military conquest began. From

632 to 651, in twenty years after the death of the prophet, there were lightning wars of conquests. In 634 Muslim armies captured Damascus, then all of Syria and Palestine. Egypt was invaded in 642. Seventy years afterwards it began to invade Spain. By 700 the whole of once Christian North Africa was in Muslim hands. There Christianity completely disappeared.

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The great fault of the Crusaders was that in their fervent desire to recover Christian lands conquered by Muslim invaders, they imitated Islam.

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As I have shown, war is not a foreign concept in Islam. The idea of a holy war is a direct product of the Muslim jihad. It is inscribed in its teaching. It is coherent with Muhammad’s conviction that the world is destined to become Muslim by Arab conquests. And if the latter is a holy war, then obviously the fight against Muslims to defend or save Christianity has also to be a holy war. The Crusades, then, are

an imitation of Islam’s jihad. Between 1096 and 1291 – over nearly two hundred years – armies from Europe were determined to reconquer the former Christian territories which had been lost to Islam. But one of the leading causes of the Crusades was the destruction of the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem and also the Holy Sepulchre on the orders of Caliph al Hakim of Egypt (996-1021), known as “the mad Caliph.” It was especially the desire to recover the “holy places” for pilgrimages to the Holy Land that gave impetus to the Crusades. And those who joined the Crusades were guaranteed salvation. They did not have to undergo the penance of heavy temporal punishment, which the Roman Catholic Church laid on penitent sinners. As in Islam the one who dies in a jihad goes straight to Paradise, the same belief was applied to the one who takes part in a Crusade.

Conclusion

I didn’t write this article to make excuses for the perversion of Christian conduct during the Crusades. I am not trying to shift the blame on the Muslims or white-wash a dark period in the history of the Church. And I can’t think of any contemporary Christian scholar who would defend what the Crusaders did. The great fault of the Crusaders was that in their fervent desire to recover Christian lands conquered by Muslim invaders, they imitated Islam. The tragedy was that the Church had forgotten the Gospel of free grace. They trusted indulgences, work-righteousness and papal dispensations rather than trusting in Christ alone. They were convinced that they could enter paradise by fighting “a holy war” against unbelievers, the conquerors of the Holy Land, the destroyers of Christendom’s holy places. The Crusades were wrong. But the September 11th terrorist attack is a stark reminder that Muslim extremists, fighting their jihad, still believe that terrorizing Western civilization, persecuting Christians and other “infidels,” and dying for their cause means instant paradise.



Is the Muslim crescent truly a sign of peace?





Tidbits relevant, and not so, to Christian life

by Jon Dykstra

Parental priorities

Spousal relationships took a back seat to families some time in the last decade, or as one husband put it, “I used to take my wife out to romantic dinners, but then I started thinking, why not bring the kids too, and make this a family thing.” Parents are now so busy driving their kids to and from piano lessons, attending their children’s sports events, or cooking their kids’ favorite meals, they have no time to develop the spousal relationship. Obviously there is nothing wrong with family dinners, piano lessons, or attending hockey games but as a *Reader’s Digest* article points out, families are built on the relationship parents have with one another. The parents are the foundation of the family. And if their relationship suffers for the sake of the children, the children will end up paying for it in the end anyway. So take your wife out to dinner this weekend . . . and get a babysitter!

SOURCE: *Reader’s Digest* “Don’t let the kids hijack your marriage” Dec. 2001

When God opens a door

When Christians are confronted with unexpected opportunities, they often attribute them to God. “God has opened a door for me,” they might say. Some go a step further and regard these opportunities as a clear sign from God telling them what they should do, or what direction their life should take. After all, if God has opened a door for them, shouldn’t they walk through it?

But while God does indeed open doors for his children, it is interesting to note that we can turn down these God-given opportunities. A look through scripture reveals at least two examples of the apostle

Paul being presented with an opportunity from God, which he declines. In 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, for example, Paul came to Troas where he says, “a door was opened for me in the Lord.” But Paul doesn’t stay there; instead he goes to Macedonia.

An even more interesting example of God opening doors occurs in Acts 16:26-28. Here God literally opens a door, as Paul’s cell door opens during the night allowing him to go free. But does Paul walk through the door? No. Instead he stays behind to help the jailor become a Christian.

God may open doors, but we still have to decide whether or not to take these opportunities.

SOURCE: Greg Koukl’s *Decision Making and Will of God*



The Reformation in the comics?

Though many have heard of the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*, few know that one of the main characters, the little boy Calvin, was named after Reformer John Calvin. A more obscure and less certain Reformation link appears in the comic *Asterix and Obelix*. After Reformer Martin Luther posted his 95 theses in 1517, a man named Johann Eck wrote a rebuttal, which he called the *Obelisks*. Luther responded to Eck’s work with a rebuttal of his own. Luther called his response . . . the *Astericks*! It might also be worth noting that in the comic the char-

acter Obelix has a little pet dog named Dogmatix. Is it all a big coincidence? You be the judge.




Mixed up music?

Can a song’s music contradict the lyrics? For years critics have leveled this charge against Christian rock, insisting that two incompatible messages are being mixed in this medium. While the lyrics may point to God in a humble and meek manner, the aggressive beat, critics say, dashes aside all notions of humility and meekness. Or in other words, the lyrics say one thing while the music says another, so the song is mixed up.

But if songs can be mixed up, is this limited to just Christian rock? What about other forms of Christian music? Psalm 81 in the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, for example, is often played in a slow and solemn manner. This slow and solemn music is certainly appropriate for expressions of Christian sentiment, but the lyrics to Psalm 81 urge us to “sing a psalm of joy” and “shout with holy fervour.” In such a case, the lyrics say one thing, while the music seems to say another.

Quip of the month

If at first you don’t succeed . . . then skydiving is really not your thing. 



by Peter Veenendaal

Very seldom do I pay any attention to the Business section in the daily newspaper. After all, my job is to deal with social and political issues and help fellow Christians deal with the issues that arise from the various levels of government. Business sections generally focus on stock markets, mutual funds, business appointments, and business success stories. Although they can be interesting, that is not usually the type of article I look at as a promoter and coordinator of political action groups.

Yet as I flipped through the business pages, one early December day, trying to get to the next section of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, a bold red headline caught my eye. You may have expected that, with the rush on for Christmas shoppers to find those perfect last minute gifts, all ads would be promoting extended shopping hours. You know – “Instead of closing at 6 p.m., our stores will now be open till midnight!” And “Don’t worry about the weekends – we will be open seven days a week.” You would expect that every businessman would be trying to find every possible way to accommodate every potential customer who may still have a few dollars to spend before that big day.

A great Advance

If that is what you expected, then this time you were wrong! This bold headline, accompanied by a picture of the store manager, declared that the store was **CLOSED ON SUNDAYS**. An explanation was given, “We believe that by giving our staff Sundays to spend with their family and friends, they will be rested and better able to provide the level of service you have come to expect from Advance. **We hope you understand the reasons for our decision and will continue to favour us when shopping for electronics.**”

.....
Has the business been hurt, being open fewer hours in a week?

It was refreshing, in our materialistic and profit-oriented society, to find someone who had come to a conclusion that God, in His wisdom, already gave us by example during the first week of the world.

As He rested on the seventh day, so He commanded all of us to stop our regular labors for one day a week and be rested physically and spiritually, so that we would be able to go about our daily work in His service during the other days of the week.

I phoned the store manager and congratulated him on his decision and asked what the response from the public had been. He had received about 120 phone calls and letters, mostly supportive of the decision made by his company. Has the business been hurt, being open fewer hours in a week? Mr. Rob Olinyk said that, yes, it did hurt for the first few weeks but, because customers appreciate the service and product provided by *Advance*, they now gladly come to do their shopping for electronics products on the other days of the week.

Obedied for practicality’s sake

Was the decision made because of a Biblical command to “not do any work” on the Sabbath? Olinyk said it was not directly related to that but many of his employees attend church and that others appreciated having their Sundays to spend with family and friends. That was not

exactly the answer I had hoped to hear but it certainly does not conflict with J. Douma's explanation of the fourth commandment (*The Ten Commandments*, P&R Publishing) when he writes that "the Israelite was allowed to catch his breath, together with his employees. . ." as well as ". . .the Sabbath was to be a day filled with praising the Lord."

Why do I relate this incident to you? Surely not to hold up this manager as a model Christian who was basing his decisions on his belief in the wisdom of Scripture! He himself admitted that was not the case. My purpose is to encourage you to react not only negatively to things we can't support but to also react with words of encouragement and congratulations when decisions are made which allow Christians to live their faith without hindrance.

Change is possible

Sometimes we think that the decisions of past years, such as those made with respect to closing or opening on the Lord's Day, are written in stone and cannot be reversed. Do not give up on these matters. Encourage business people such as Olinyk who have to make these (often difficult) decisions and give them your business.

I asked Mr. Olinyk if he knew of any trend among businesses in the electronics field to follow his example but he was not aware that this was happening. However, we do not know how our efforts in promoting Biblical principles in business, or social and political issues will be blessed in the future. Let us pray and work so that we will not be found guilty of allowing an increasing secularization of our society by our lack of action!

Peter is the National Coordinator of the RCPRC and will help with the formation of associations to promote social/political awareness and involvement in local communities. He can be contacted at 1-204-745-6238 or rcprc@mb.sympatico.ca



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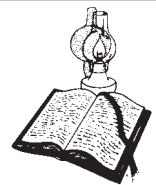
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HOMEFRONT

Wilderness Food

by Jane deGlint

Charlene was angry. Everyone in her psychology class had been so incredibly narrow-minded and soft-hearted. Though she had reasoned passionately, she had not been able to convince anyone, not even the professor. It was frustrating. Not that it was difficult to see her point of view. She made sense. Moreover, she was quite capable of articulating her thoughts. It was that these people were hopelessly stuck in the patterns of society. What shake-up would be needed to help them see the light?

With forceful strides she crossed the corridors of the stately McGregor building. Still filled with frustration she pushed the door to the library open. Quickly and efficiently she selected some books and sat down at a table. She was determined to find proof for her case.

"Angry, are we?"

The male voice had been relaxed, detached almost. Yet its calmness aggravated Charlene's fierceness. With a jolt she straightened from her reading posture, her fiery eyes scanning the room. Who was implicitly questioning her anger? Who was interfering in her life? Who was trying to calm her down? Who was so relaxed and laid-back? She was through with people who lacked initiative and backbone.

Her dark, piercing glance was caught by the deep blue, soft eyes of the young man across the table.

"Sid, you? What are you doing here?"

"Keeping an eye on you."

"Not at all funny."

"Why are you so uptight?"

"I am not uptight. You are insisting. I am frustrated with my psychology class."

"I did not know they made you professor already."

"Stop being annoying. I was not able to convince my professor that post-secondary education should be the privi-

lege of those who perform to high academic standards and who pass rigid screening on intellectual performance. Also, all those who by these criteria qualify for advanced studies and research, should receive adequate remuneration for their educational efforts."

"Hum."

"What, hum?"

"Interesting."

"Get out of here."

"I will."

Immediately Sid stood up, collected his books and left. Charlene tried to concentrate again. To no avail. Sid's distant calmness had achieved what the argument in class had failed to accomplish. It had disturbed her conviction. Not wanting to admit even the possibility of a defeat, she was more angry and frustrated than before. She decided to continue with her assignments at home.

It was not difficult to pick out her car on the university parking lot. Her red, new, trendy sports model stood out amidst the dull rows of previously owned vehicles. In a sense the car was like its owner. Charlene stood out in many ways as well. She was intelligent, wealthy, good-looking, well-dressed.

But happy she was not. Anger and resentment had taken hold of her soul. Always disapproving and disagreeing, she did not have the skills to cultivate friendships.

For that reason she was surprised to detect in herself a sudden desire to go to Sid. Initially she rejected the thought out of hand, but the urge to talk to him was stronger than her pride. As she parked behind his old Toyota in the narrow driveway, she considered backing out. Too late. There appeared Sid around the back. "Well, well. Look who's there. Come in."

Sid was not surprised. Sid never seemed surprised or excited or thrown-off. Without asking any questions he lead the way through the dark basement and pushed open the door to his room. As Charlene walked in past his inviting arm, she did not only have to get used to the light. Sid's room had such unexpected warmth and charm, that she needed a moment to acclimatize. The sun rays of the late afternoon brought out the bright tones of a Chagall reproduction. Its startling biblical symbolism kept her spellbound, till her eyes wandered off and took in the



Her red, new, trendy sports model stood out amidst the dull rows of previously owned vehicles.

other landmarks of the room: a small abstract sculpture; a tall, antique, carved wooden cupboard; an assembly of African violet plants in various growing stages; and numerous odd-sized sheets of papers with Bible texts or pithy sayings written on them in characteristic calligraphy.

.....

"He who gathered much had nothing left; he who gathered little had no shortage."

.....

If Sid would have asked Charlene why she came, she would not have known the answer. But he did not ask. Intuitively he steered the conversation to the sources of her being. Without realizing it, she submitted herself to his gently nudging. With unhidden pride she told him about the competitive atmosphere in her parental home. Only those who achieved both financially and academically were considered worthy.

Sid listened quietly, occasionally asking for some details. After he stopped his prodding, the conversation dwindled. Charlene stood up. Before she left Sid grabbed a notepad and scribbled something down. "Read this at home." Not surprised anymore at anything that Sid said or did, she took the note. Later that night she unfolded it. In characteristic calligraphy it was written, "He who gathered much had nothing left; he who gathered little had no shortage." She shrugged her shoulders in ignorance.

Life did not become easier for Charlene. Her relationships at the university became cooler. Whereas at first she was appreciated for her brightness and drive, she became known for her sharp criticism, her personal attacks and her cold intolerance. She still received very high

marks. Not only her relational, but also her physical health started to decline. She developed stomach aches of undefinable causes. This did not increase her esteem for the medical profession, and left her even angrier.

One morning she woke up with intolerable stomach discomfort. Bent over from the sharp, shooting pains she stumbled to her car. Could she drive to the hospital herself? Suddenly there was Sid. "I guess my Toyota will have to suffice." He took her to the emergency department, waited till she was efficiently and compassionately looked after by the medical staff, and took her home to his basement room.

In the afternoon she woke up from a deep sleep. She felt strangely comfortable, experiencing the beginnings of surrender and peace. Sid knew the time was right.

"Did you read my note?"

"I did not understand why you gave it to me."

"You know your Bible, Charlene. You know the story of the Israelites in the desert. They were barely rescued through the Red Sea, or they complained about lack of food. Out of His faithfulness the Lord sent His grumbling people manna. Strange, white stuff. Moses explained to them that this was bread from the Lord Himself. They were allowed to take a certain measurement each. As they went out to gather their share, some greedily shoved their pots full, whereas others picked it up carefully. But when it was all measured, he that had gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack."

"Sid, I still do not understand. Honestly. I am trying."

"Charlene, you have received lots. You have it all. You have the looks, the money and the smarts. You should, for sure, experience plenty. But because you did not manage well, you experience a loss. You are not content. You resist."

"I can see that I gathered much. But how does it all apply to me? I cannot help that I gathered much."

"No, but you can help how you use it. You use it all for yourself. You demand it for yourself, and you look down on others who have less. For that reason you actually end up with nothing."

"Are you content?"

"Most of the time."

"What is the difference?"

"I have learned to be more giving. Paul quotes these words from Exodus in one of his letters to the Corinthians, when he discusses financial donations. He first compares the way we deal with our gifts to the way the Lord Jesus dealt with His riches. Though as Son of God Jesus was rich, for our sake He became poor, so that by His poverty we might become rich. Our gifts only benefit us, when we manage as stewards of our Lord. We were not given to have, but to serve. And then Paul quotes the words on your note."

.....

"Sid, I still do not understand. Honestly. I am trying."

.....

"Our gifts are food for our travels in the desert. . . ."

"Very well said. There is even another dimension. Jesus calls Himself the bread that came from heaven. As we have life in Jesus, we must show others that we belong to Him. We do that by cheerfully sharing our gifts."

"Sid, I did not know you were such a theologian. But, really, thank you for your sustenance on my road through the wilderness."

As it was written, "He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack." (2 Corinthians 8:15. Also Exodus 16:18 and John 6)



The case for Bumper Sticker and T-shirt Christianity

Getting our message heard

by Astride Wenigerova-Noga

We found the hand printed note tucked beneath the windshield wiper, as we returned to our car in the mall parking lot. “May you not be judged as severely as you judge others,” it said. The note, printed by some shaky hand, was a reaction to our Mazda’s bumper sticker: “A nation that kills its own children is a nation without hope – Pope John Paul II.”

Whoever left the note definitely “heard” our message. Signs of the affect it had on them were present. Without writing paper on hand, the person tore off a piece of some box to pass on their reaction to us. Shaky printing suggested that the writer was emotional and wanted to say as fast as possible what they had to say, and wrote it on the palm of their hand only, not bothering to look for a firmer support. (Or, I wondered, could this be the shaky hand of an older person? But no, the elderly don’t print, they use hand-writing. Only the new generation never learned how to write, so they print). Furthermore, the writer, unable to attack the message, attacked the messenger – another sign of emotionalism. They must also have had some rudimentary knowledge of God and of his Word since they called for some higher judgment on us. Yes, the writer was definitely not left unmoved by our bumper sticker’s message. They heard it well.

The same sticker got us a handshake in front of our cleaner’s shop. A man in his 30’s commended us for the sticker, and made some comments on the prevailing apathy of western Christians to the ongoing slaughter of the innocent.

A bouncing gelatin wall

I believe in bumper stickers, in stickers and in T-shirt messages. I know they work. And they work because they catch people before they are ready, in the moments when their hearts and minds are open and ready like a freshly plowed field to receive a seed. That seed, once planted, sends out a tiny root and eventually can give life to something good.

Let me explain myself. Human minds and hearts are wonderfully able to hear what they want to hear, and to be deaf to what they don’t want to hear. For example, I was at one time convinced my son did not hear very well. But when I dragged him in for a hearing test it turned out he had perfect hearing. But also selective hearing. I’m sure you experience this yourself many times every day. When our spouses, teachers, preachers, parents, children or the media communicate something to us it takes us only 30 seconds to figure out if the coming address is going to be uncomfortable to us, or request something from us, or be hurtful to us. And if we sense such a message, instantly our de-

fenses come up and we erect a powerful wall. This wall will not let anything from the outside penetrate us. Everything we don’t want to deal with just bounces off. It is a bouncing gelatin wall! With our defenses up, we hear selectively and pick up only the weakest points of the address to eventually use for a counterattack. But we are deaf to the main points, the facts of the address because of our mighty bouncing “gelatin wall.”

I remember the communist indoctrination lessons I had to learn growing up behind the Iron Curtain. I remember clearly that when my beloved history professor started to praise the achievements of the communist ideology and tear down everything that was built before it, something always happened to me. I erected my own “bouncing wall.” I too, did not hear.

This wall allowed me to distance myself from the responsibility I had to stand up and say, “Comrade teacher, this is a lie! You know how bloody and unjust communism is!” The wall let me pretend I did not hear, so I did not have to comment.

But in truth I knew that speaking would get me in trouble and perhaps put my father back in prison, so I did not act. After all, when I once approached this professor privately to talk about some great historical lie, he commanded me not to listen to my father, but to believe instead the communist history books.

Before the wall goes up

This mental “bouncing wall” is real, and everyone has one. Through this wall, we are not heard.

So ladies and gentleman, we must get our message to people before this wall gets up! Speed is crucial. The reality is you have no more than 30 seconds to reach people before the bouncing wall goes up. You have only 30 seconds to get to them!

Repeat this to yourself and adapt your strategies to it. Learn from the businessman who knows that advertising sells! Their 30-second commercials cost millions, but they make millions. They sell.

WHY?

Because these short commercials get TV viewers unprepared in the midst of some other story, before their bouncing wall comes up. The message sneaks in and they say, “Hey, didn’t I always like this song?” And they rush to the phone and order the CD, tape, book or video that will soon make an appearance at their next garage sale.

I know that people read bumper stickers. I read bumper stickers too. They get at us with their short messages while our walls are still down. That’s why they work, like TV ads. That’s why they get our message heard.

I don’t have the money to go on TV and say, “Dear Canadians, abortion kills people. Abortion is the cruel execution of the innocent. . .” Even if I had the millions of dollars needed to put this message on TV as an ad, the CRTC (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission) would not allow it on the air, because it is not politically correct.

And if I tried a different approach and got permission to preach against abortion in the town square, nobody would come listen to it. The invisible bouncing wall would prevent all but the committed pro-lifers from coming and listening.

In praise of red lights

But my bumper stickers?

May our Lord be praised because of the one who invented them!

My bumper sticker always catches the eyes of following drivers. They have to watch my bumper because that’s where the signal lights are. And while waiting for the green light with wandering eyes, bored by familiar scenery, they look eagerly for some distraction. My bumper sticker gives it to them – a definitely not common, nor boring, but rather clear message that sticks.

.....
***Whoever left the note
 definitely “heard” our
 message.***

They might get convicted and repent. They might get convicted and get angry. They might just process it as information and stay apathetic. Regardless, they are confronted with the truth and can never tell the Creator, “I did not know. Why did your servants, Christians, not tell me?”

So when my dearest husband complains that he, “did not get even one green light today,” I say, “Thank-you Lord, for thou hast created the yellow and red colors!” Those red lights mean that 16 people were confronted with the truth on the way to work. If we are lucky, 16 more will be confronted on the way home. Great! If we go to the city 3 times per week, we will

reach 48 drivers (and some of their passengers). In one month that will add up to 200 people. Wow! In one year 2,400 people will read the \$3 pro-life message on my bumper, a message we are not permitted to say aloud anywhere but in the street.

I gave one of my most blatant pro-life bumper stickers to my brother. Soon somebody who worked at the hospital needed to borrow my brother’s car for one week. And it came to pass that the old red car was parked in the staff parking lot, standing in a predetermined strategic parking stall just next to the exit, where every car had to slow to stop and catch the message: “Abortion – the ultimate child abuse.” There it was, a witness to all the hospital staff, and I praised the Lord for it.

I love small stickers too. I know that the message, “Abortion stops a beating heart” stuck just beneath the address on the envelope will be processed and read by 5-7 people. Its design is appealing and very interesting. With the 200-500 envelopes we mail every year I rejoice to reach large numbers of people who I would never have been able to speak to – especially members of the Canadian Postal Union, which donates lots of money for the advancement of the death culture in Canada! Now mind you, my local postal employees have read the sticker 2000 times already, but I still rejoice. After all, if Joseph Goebel’s idea – that a lie repeated often



I know that the message, “Abortion stops a beating heart” stuck just beneath the address on the envelope will be processed and read by 5-7 people.



We feel free to read what people carry on their backs as we walk behind them.

enough becomes the truth – worked in Nazi Germany, then the truth repeated 2000 times must work also.

Try sticking a small “Abortion stops a beating heart” sticker on your mailbox. I bet you that when your paper boy or girl first hears the word “abortion” in one of their condom and banana sex education classes, the first thing jumping to their mind will be the words, “. . . stops a beating heart.” He or she might even speak it out loud and start a very interesting conversation in the class, or with their parents.

Marvelous things can be done with one-liners. “Beware of Dog!” “Stop!” “Don’t drink and drive!” It is time for us to use their powers.

Backwards T-shirts

With T-shirts I have one problem – its effectiveness is best when it is backwards. I have found that any message is lost on me when it is printed on the front of a T-shirt. Our culture avoids eye contact; we do not stare, or prey on privacy. While we may read the logos on T-shirts while they are still in the store, and may love to wear some that enhance our stands or our personalities, we hardly ever read what others carry on

their bellies or across their busts. It is invasive. *C’est une faux pas.*

On the other hand, we feel free to read what people carry on their backs as we walk behind them. This does not force on us any contact or seem as invasive. So should you wish to print up some great T-shirt message, print it on the back of the shirt.



*I remember
the communist
indoctrination lessons
I had to learn
growing up.*



Just imagine that you are strolling in the fresh air and in front of you walks a person with a message on her back that you now have all the time to read: “Polluted by sin? Hardly breathing? Fresh air will not do. I might know the remedy. Feel free to ask.”

Our most beloved T-shirt was given to me by my daughter, a University of Alberta student then. It listed on the back the “Top

Ten Reasons to be Pro-life.” Aimed at university students, it read:

10. Equal rights for unborn women too.
9. All the best babes are pro-life.
8. You were a fetus once.
7. Diapers are disposable, babies aren’t.
6. Pampers stocks are up 1/8 on the TSE.
5. Nine out of ten babies do not pee on your rug.
4. Babies don’t talk back.
3. You’ll need someone to support you when you’re old and want a home in Florida.
2. Babies don’t drive up the !@# Grade Point Average.
1. 1,336 unborn babies will be killed in Canada today.

While this was not a short 30-second message, the first 30 seconds of it were so amusing for any reader, except the committed pro-abort, that people continue to read on about these cute, friendly creatures – babies. And then, when they were already sold by the cute message, they were hit with number 1!

Everywhere they look?

I understand from the latest statistics that close to 30 per cent of Canadians regularly attend some Christian church. Wouldn’t it be great if our politicians, media people and academia found out, as they traveled to work one day, that 30 per cent of the vehicles they saw had some sort of Christian or pro-life message on them? And that 30 per cent of the T-shirts they saw, as people strolled down Main Street, had some message showing off adherence to God and Christian morals? Don’t you think they would act accordingly?

Don’t you think businessmen would soon sell them in any mall? Or that the editor of the paper would not leave out the

name of Jesus Christ from my Christmas story he recently published? I bet you many things would look very different.

Priests for Life has said that now, when Christianity and the Pro-life message are almost completely pushed out of the press, TV and culture generally, *the street is our media!* They are right. The last frontier left to us is the street. Let's make the best of it.

But will we? Does it make any sense to try and figure out how best to get our message heard if there are no takers for the positions of criers and watchmen? Does it make any sense when people are not even willing to use bumper stickers?

Lame excuses

People say it does not change anything. I have a sticker for them that reads, "Did you try it?" They respond, "No, but others did." Like who? Here in Grande Prairie there are only 10 cars carrying a meaningful message. (But we have lots of cars running around with the latest "angst" bumper sticker which reads, "I am a bitch.")

Some Christians say that while the message is true, it offends people, especially those who have had an abortion. "Jesus was and is always a gentleman, so we must follow his example and not offend people. After all, how would you like it, if somebody tried to impose their set of beliefs on you?" I have a bumper sticker for these people that reads, "The truth will make you free." And I ask them how they would bring the message to the world in a better, less offensive way. "We would wait to be asked," is their reply. And so most of them are still waiting for their first customer to show up and ask.

Others don't want their employers to get mad at them. I have a sticker for them that reads, "If you are ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of you before my Father."

The most honest admit, "I don't want to get my car vandalized." I would recom-

mend to such honest people to continue their honesty and not to sing, "All to Jesus I surrender, all to him freely I give."

.....
***The message does not
 get out simply because
 there are
 no messengers.***

All these and many, many other "reasons" are perpetuated in Christian circles, so the message does not get out simply because there are no messengers. But these are not real reasons, they are just excuses for our laziness, our cowardice and our

lack of love for God and our fellow man. This is a point worth repeating – the three real reasons we do not get our message out are cowardice, laziness, and lack of love for God and our fellow man.

The moment we repent and start to proclaim our God and His morality to the world (even if only by bumper stickers), that is the moment we start to obey God, and thus become courageous. In that moment we also return to our first love for God and we love our fellow men again. *And at that moment we'll get our message heard* because there will finally be messengers to carry it, and no matter how it will be received it will be heard! I pray for that.

Ladies and gentlemen, I now rest my case.



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Not all T-shirts are created equal

Christian T-shirts and the Trivialization of God

by Ike Van Dyke

Green is not my color. I don't like it on other people either – it just doesn't look good next to the pink of most people's skin. But as ugly as I think green looks on just about everybody, I don't go around telling them that, because I know it is just my opinion, and nothing more than an opinion. Some people hate green, and it turns out, some people like green. To each their own taste.

But fashion is about more than just taste. As Christian we know there are some things we just can't wear, and some things we should, for the sake of decency, always wear. We can wear red shirts, yellow shirts, and even green shirts, but no Marilyn Manson t-shirts or peek-a-boo blouses for us! It might sound a little silly, but we've got to wear our clothes to God's glory!

Lisa Klassen has taken the idea of wearing clothes to God's glory to a new level. This ardent 16-year old Christian was recently suspended from school for wearing a sweatshirt which read, "ABORTION IS MEAN." On the back the shirt read: "You will not silence my message. You will not mock my God. You will stop killing my generation." In a school where fellow students walked around wearing shirts promoting sex, alcohol and nihilistic rock bands, only Klassen's shirt was deemed offensive. Her actions, and subsequent suspension prompted almost 50 other students to wear similar shirts. Her bold, brazen fashion statement got the whole school in an uproar. What a gutsy gal!

This type of enthusiasm should be encouraged, admired and imitated. Lisa

Klassen is not embarrassed of her God. She proudly proclaims Him and His message.

Many other young Christians are eager to emblazon Christian messages across their shirts as well. But while their enthusiasm should be praised and encouraged, their choice of shirts can still be questioned.



We sometimes imagine God as some sort of safe Entity.



Youthful enthusiasms must sometimes be tempered with the wisdom of the old (just as the wise old people must occasionally get their butts kicked with a dose of youthful enthusiasm – do not forget your first love of Christ!). Let's proudly proclaim Christ, but let's not forget that there are standards, so not all T-shirts, even Christian T-shirts, are created equal.

God is not cute

The greatest danger I see in Christian T-shirts is the trivialization of God. We sometimes imagine God as some sort of safe Entity. We focus on His love and forget about His wrath and the justice He demands. Instead of an awesome, and yes, even frightening God (it is only through His Son that we can dare approach Him), we imagine a cute, harmless Deity. That is a horrible error to make on a personal level, to have such a flawed idea of God in our minds. But it gets worse when we wear

Christian T-shirts that proclaim this flawed idea of God to others.

Let me give you some examples. There is a whole series of T-shirts and bumper stickers that talk about hell, salvation and God in the context of popular brand names. For instance, one shirt transforms the famous, "ALWAYS COCA-COLA" slogan into "in ALL thy WAYS JESUS CHRIST." Pepsi too is transformed. Their slogan is changed from "Pepsi – nothing else will satisfy your thirst" to "Jesus – nothing else will satisfy your soul." The new words are edifying, and completely accurate, but from a distance the shirts still look like Coca-Cola and Pepsi shirts. It is only when you get nearer that the differences can be noticed, and the altered text can be read. Imagine for a moment, that a non-Christian reads one of these shirts. "Oh wait a second!" he might say, "These shirts aren't advertising cola, they're advertising salvation! Isn't that cute!" Is God's grace, in this cola context, going to be taken seriously? How could it?

There seems to be an endless variety of shirts with this brand name focus. Sneaker manufacturer Reebok's "Life's short, Play hard" slogan becomes "Reeborn – Life's short, Pray hard." The clothing chain GAP has their brand transformed into "God Answers Prayers." Even CREST toothpaste is not spared. Their "Proven cavity protection" slogan has been changed to "CHRIST – Proven Depravity Protection." These shirts are cute and funny, but ultimately invite ridicule rather than reflection.




Some of the other good ones I've seen include:

- True Love Waits For Marriage
- I Bet the Pro-Choicers Are Glad their Parents Weren't
- Abstinence Makes the Heart grow fonder
- Abortion – The Leading Cause of Death in America
- Christians aren't Perfect, Just Forgiven
- He who dies with the most, still dies
- Evolution Says Nothing times Nobody Equals Everybody
- Know Jesus, Know Peace – No Jesus, No Peace
- Lotteries: A tax on people who are bad at math.
- i souport publik edekasion

Conclusion

Though some might think I've been very negative about Christian T-shirts, one of my greatest wishes is that Christians will take up the opportunity to profess their faith, using the clothes that they wear. My point is that if we are going to do it, enthusiasm is not enough. We also have to put some thought into the thoughts we are going to emblazon across our T-shirts.

At the same time, older, more thoughtful Christians should hesitate before they criticize a younger brother or sister for wearing "cute" Christian T-shirts. There is certainly room for disagreement on this topic and it would be a shame if the younger brother or sister's enthusiasm was stifled over something inconsequential. The last thing we need is another quiet Christian. 

Better choices

Instead of getting people to laugh, let's get them to think. The best Christian T-shirts I've seen have a depth to them – they have a real weight to their message. They are often confrontational, and even offensive, just like the shirt Lisa Klassen wore. One good shirt I saw had a picture of 6 pallbearers carrying a casket. The caption below read, "Don't wait for 6 strong men to take you to church." There is an element of humor here, yes, but it is of a very somber variety.

Other shirts ignore humor altogether and go for clarity. When I attended university several students wore shirts that said "Pro-life" in big and bold letters. They weren't very thought provoking, but a lot of other students certainly found them offensive. In a hostile setting like university, standing out in the crowd is a powerful statement in itself. Another shirt read, "Stop Divorce – The basis of Marriage is Commitment, not just Romantic Love." It didn't rhyme, and there was nothing funny about it, but it contained some food for thought.

One of the most daring shirts I ever saw simply read, "Ask me about God." I want that shirt, and yet I'm not sure I would have the courage to wear it. What if people actually did ask me about God? Wouldn't that be wonderful and terrifying? Maybe that's the shirt we should all get after we do our profession of faith. Maybe that's the shirt we should all have to wear, each and every day.



One of the most daring shirts I ever saw simply read, "Ask me about God."



Pepsi, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and Coca-Cola? Not quite.

Suffering as Blessing: A Glorious Paradox

by Sarah Vandergugten

No one in this world escapes suffering. I imagine that every person who reaches the mid-teen years will have at least one story of pain or hurt to relate. Our family's was devastating. In the fall of 1968, our father entered the hospital for routine gall bladder surgery. Sixty-one days later he died of a stubborn post-operative infection. Our mother became a widow, responsible for five children between the ages ten and eighteen. (One sister was married.) Raised in our strong Calvinist tradition – my father was a pastor of a Canadian Reformed church – we had always learned that God is sovereign. God controls all things. God is good, and even terrible things will work out for our good. How could being this sad be good? How could this excruciating pain be good? Why did this have to happen to our family, our congregation?

Over time, the harshness of the pain subsided, but the questions resurface when new tragedies strike those whom I love. I have begun to learn that suffering involves the struggle to answer two main questions: Why am I suffering? and, How shall I respond to this pain in my life? It seems that the first question rarely receives an answer but that how we answer the second question is what really counts.

Job, the prototype of innocent suffering

In almost any discussion on suffering, Job is the name that quickly surfaces. Diane M. Komp, cancer specialist for children – the most poignant of innocent sufferers – writes:

Sometimes in [the] hospital rooms I find [the] parents reading the Bible.

... during this hellacious pilgrimage they find the *Book of Job*. . . Why, with all the gentle and comforting words of Scripture, do those who suffer seek out the toughest book in the Bible? Even nonbelievers turn to its pages (*Why Me? A Doctor Looks at the Book of Job* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001. p. 9).



That makes Job the man to watch. How will he react to such "unfair" treatment?



It seems that those who suffer identify with this prototype of innocent suffering, for whom the ground opened and swallowed his health, wealth, reputation and family. Job suffers without any knowledge of the divine purpose. He speaks of God attacking him savagely and unjustly. He is horrified to think that He who created him and led him with every appearance of love should have been all the while intending such cruelties against him. Along with Job, we agree that suffering calls our most basic beliefs about God into question.

But, we who read the book of Job, have an advantage over Job himself. We get to look behind the scenes, and learn that Satan came to God and was subsequently given permission to harm Job within an inch of his life. We discover that Job is indeed righteous; he is not suffering because he is evil. We learn that Satan

may have had power to bring pain and suffering into Job's life, but God remains sovereign. He draws a line and says, "This is as far as you may go with Job and no further." Imagine how different *Job* would read if Job had known what we know. But he does not. That makes Job the man to watch. How will he react to such "unfair" treatment?

God doesn't say why

Satan taunts God, wagering Him that Job will break covenant and curse Him. Job does not curse God, but does struggle with God's silence. He moves from quiet trust in God's goodness and sovereignty to an outright demand to bring his complaint directly to God's face. He gets his wish. God answers him out of a whirlwind but not in a manner that Job expected. He thunders, "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge. Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 38:2-3, NIV). From there, God proceeds to sweep Job off his feet with a series of questions that virtually ignore the thirty-five preceding chapters of debate on the problem of suffering.

Interestingly, God never reveals to Job the reason or cause of his intense anguish. Rather than using the language of a retributive justice system with which Job and his hapless friends have framed their arguments, God begins a grand discourse about creation. After each description, He either states or implies, "Job, are you powerful enough to duplicate these feats? Are you wise enough to run the world?" God apparently saw no reason for self-defense, no need to defend his own reputation with regard to Job's misery. The message looming

behind the splendid poetry comes down to this: *Until you know how to create and run a physical universe, Job, don't tell me how to run the moral universe.* What He wanted from Job was surrender, an admission of trust.

Job does respond. Earlier, his initial response to God had been, ". . . how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4); now he confesses, "My ears had heard you but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5). Job turns the focus away from himself, to his God. He realizes that God is not required to reveal his grand design. He reveals Himself. And so, Job discovers that he has been asking the wrong question. He realizes the crucial question is not, "Can I trust this God?" but "Will I trust this God?"

"Consider it pure joy. . ."

How we respond to pain and suffering then becomes the crucial issue. Scripture gives remarkable, perhaps even disturbing guidelines for this response. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4). "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

By using words like "consider it joy" and "rejoice" the apostles were not advocating a spirit of grin-and-bear-it or act-tough-like-nothing-happened. Not Paul, and not even Christ himself displayed any trace of such stoic attitude. Christians need not act happy about tragedy and pain when they feel like crying. What Scripture does is aim the spotlight at the end-result, the productive use God makes of suffering in our lives. That requires that we trust God, put our faith in God, in the midst of

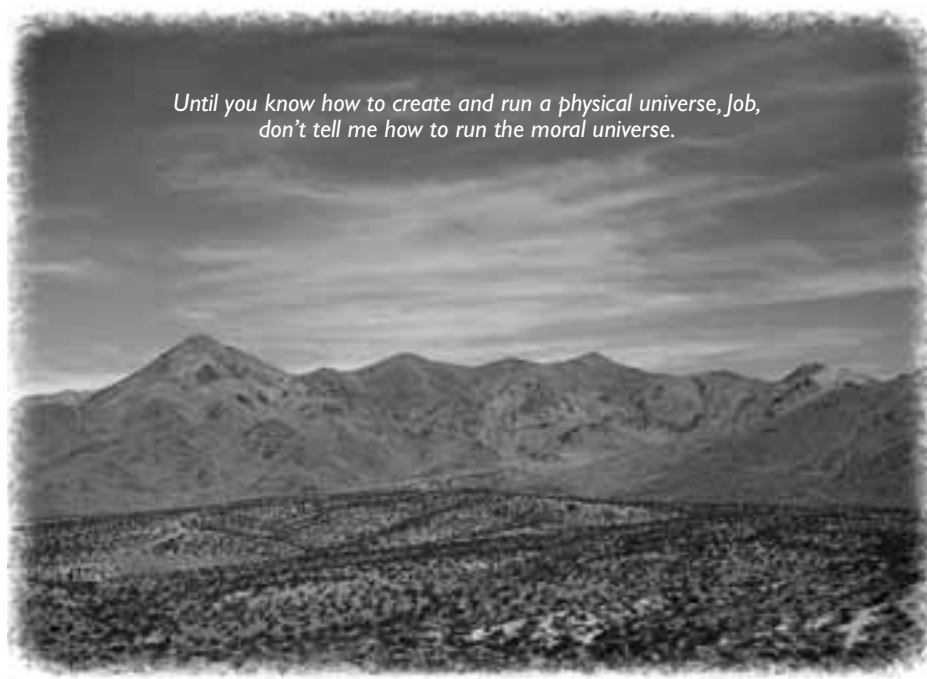
affliction. "Faith is a footbridge that you don't know will hold you up over the chasm until you're forced to walk out onto it" (Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Lament for a Son* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 1987. p. 76). That tested faith leads to perseverance; in fact, a quality like perseverance will *only* develop in the midst of trying circumstances.

We might be tempted to ask, "Does God then simply introduce suffering into our lives in order to bring about a particular good result?" Again we do well to remember that questions about cause lie in God's domain; we cannot expect to understand those answers. We should not speculate what the purpose or end result of a particular tragedy might be. We have no right to suggest, for example, that since some relatives were convicted by the pastor's message at a funeral, that must be why God took their family member home. Our response to suffering is our responsibility. What God does with it is not.

Wrestling with sorrow and pain

Suffering can move us toward God or away from Him, and consequently away from being fully human and alive. If we are closed to sorrow, we will also be closed to true joy. Very often, we focus on the event in order to resolve it as quickly and painlessly as possible; but, if we are to experience the good that God intends through our suffering, at some point we need to ask the crucial question, "What happens to me, deep down, at the core of my heart when I face loss, suffering and harm?" (Dan B. Allender's *The Healing Path*. Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press. 1999. p. 15). Suffering changes the human heart, for good or for ill. We need to face the challenge of learning how to wrestle with sorrow and pain, so it will bring about the greatest good. If we are to become what God wants us to be, we need to consider what it means to live well in a fallen world rather than scramble to escape the vale of sorrow.

*Until you know how to create and run a physical universe, Job,
don't tell me how to run the moral universe.*



As followers of Christ, we are called to walk the path He walked. Jesus, “a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (Isaiah 53:3) did not deal with the reality of life in this vale of tears in a blasé, cynical or angry manner. The route to Golgotha was strewn with temptations to sidestep death, but Jesus learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8).

.....

What he wanted from Job was surrender, an admission of trust.

.....

“Jesus’ choice to embrace life to the point of death resulted in the healing of the greatest wound of our hearts: separation from God” (Allender, p. 16).

Healing of the greatest wound

The healing of this greatest wound is what Marva Dawn would characterize as the bedrock for the Christian’s existence and reason for Joy. Her “three level theory” explains how the life of a Christian differs radically from the one who lives without a relationship with God. The latter experiences only two levels of existence: happiness and sorrow. Our two hands placed on top of each other can illustrate these two aspects of reality. The top hand is the hand of happiness – a new better paying job, good marks in school, loving friendships. The bottom hand is the hand of sorrow – contention in the family, illness, financial woes. Everyone experiences these two levels, to some degree.

Dawn explains that the Christian experiences a third level of existence. She instructs her readers at this point to place both their hands on the floor of the room, the happiness hand on top. They are to imagine that the floor is infinite, stretching out to forever, and that it is made of indestructible, impenetrable rock. This floor is the bedrock for the existence of the Christian’s two hands of happiness and sorrow.

It represents this one foundational fact: the truth that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and made possible, for all time, our reconciliation with God. Nothing can destroy this eternal victory over death and evil. Dawn calls this confident reliance on the resurrection fact *Joy*. This Joy gives stability and confidence in both our happiness and our sorrow. Even if one were to remove “the happiness hand” and be left only with “the sorrow hand,” that sorrow hand finds constancy in the foundational Joy. (Marva Dawn’s *I’m Lonely, Lord – How Long? Meditations on the Psalms*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 1998. p. 81-84).

This Joy gives the Christian courage to persevere in the most trying circumstances. We read of such heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. We learn of them through the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Joni Eareackson Tada. They have become famous, but it is often in the quiet lives of ordinary folk, simple Christians who endure great pain and suffering, that evidence of true Joy shines the brightest. Two such ordinary folk are Diet Eman and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

In the lives of ordinary folk

Diet Eman, a young Dutch woman, and her fiancé, Hein Sietsma, risked everything to rescue Jews imperiled by Nazi persecution in occupied Holland during World War II. Diet and Hein’s courageous efforts in the Resistance saved the lives of hundreds of Dutch Jews. Eman writes, “All of the Jews we had hidden with Christian farm families made it – every single one” (Diet Eman’s *Things We Couldn’t Say*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans. 1994. p. 368)

Diet and Hein’s story gives convincing evidence that God can truly accomplish remarkable things through the humble and meek. In the spring of 1944, during her long and terrible imprisonment in the Vucht Concentration Camp, the day came that Eman was to be interrogated. She had devised a false identity for herself, an identity that needed to be believable for the sake of others in the Resistance. As she followed

the German officer through the camp to the interrogation room, she trembled with fear, but also with hatred for the atrocities that she had witnessed.

She writes:
And then suddenly God’s promises came to me: *Don’t worry. If you appear before authorities and kings I will give you the words.* This is what I heard in my mind: *Not a hair of your head will be harmed without the will of your heavenly Father.* “Okay,” I thought, “I have often broken my promise to you, Lord, but you’ll never break your promises. You take over now. You promised it – now you have to do it. I said it to God as if I were confronting him: “I am going into my hearing, and you have said that you would be my God. Now I’m going to hold you to it” (p. 268-269).

“Without the will of my heavenly Father. . . .”

Diet went into the interrogation room comforted and confident. Her hatred dissipated; she was at peace. As she looked at her interrogators, the irony of the situation struck her:

.....

You have said that you would be my God. Now I’m going to hold you to it.

.....

“There they sat well-fed and well shaven, with loads of decorations on their uniforms, and here I sat with those horrible pus things [on my face] and my prison gown and greasy hair. And I thought to myself, *You big shots think you can decide on my life, but I have news for you: you can’t touch a hair on my head without the will of God my Father, because he is on my side. . . .* The greatest miracle was that in the end I could actually feel pity for those men because

they were so deluded: they thought they had power and really they had nothing" (p. 278).

Diet was eventually released and valiantly continued her work, hoping all the while that once the war ended she'd get to wear the wedding dress that was hanging at home. It was not to be. Hein perished in Dachau. Others in her group of Resistance fighters succumbed as well. The enormity of her loss was difficult to digest. "O God, could it really not have been different? Could you only fulfill your purposes for our lives in this one way?" (p. 371).

Even now people ask her if she wishes she could have skipped that part of her life, if she had it to live over again. She replies, "I tell them that I [would] not. That part of my life was very, very difficult; I cannot think about it today without crying. . . . But . . . those years of my life were very special, the time when I was very close to God – so close, in fact, that I not only *knew* that he kept his promises, I actually *experienced* his faithfulness. The God of creation did not renege on what he'd promised me as his child" (p. 373-374).

" . . . the pain, the cold burning pain. . . "

Diet Eman took a stance against the evil that confronted her. This choice led to immense suffering, to which again she, by the grace of God, responded with Christian resolve and courage. Nicholas Wolterstorff was not given such a choice. He and his family were plunged into sorrow when a fateful phone call informed them, "Eric has had a serious accident. Mr. Wolterstorff, I must tell you, Eric is dead. . . . For three seconds I felt the peace of resignation; arms extended, limp son in hand, peacefully offering him to someone – Someone. Then the pain – cold burning pain" (p. 9). Day turned into night.

Lament for a Son is the honest and poignant exposition of a father's grief in the year following his son's death in a mountain climbing accident. In the end, Wolterstorff comes to this profound conclusion:



Nicholas Wolterstorff was plunged into sorrow when a fateful phone call informed him his son was dead.

Suffering may do us good – may be a blessing, something to be thankful for. This I have learned. . . . Suffering is the shout of "No" by one's whole existence to that over which one suffers – the shout of "No" by nerves and gut and gland and heart to pain, to death, to injustice, to depression. . . . And sometimes, when the cry is intense, there emerges a radiance which elsewhere seldom appears: a glow of courage, of love, of insight, of selflessness, of faith. In that radiance we see best what humanity was meant to be (p.96).

The vale of soul-making

This radiance gives courage and can be a blessing to others. Yet, Wolterstorff struggles with the paradox: How can we

treasure this radiance while we struggle against what brought it about? Can we receive suffering as a benefit, while at the same time pray to have it removed? He professes to have learned. . .

. . . something stranger still: Suffering may be among the *sufferer's* blessings. The valley of suffering is the vale of soul-making. But now things slip and slide around. How do I tell my blessings? For what do I give thanks and for what do I lament? Am I sometimes to sorrow over my delight and sometimes to delight over my sorrow? And how do I sustain my "No" to my son's early death while accepting with gratitude the opportunity offered of becoming what otherwise I could never be? How do I receive my suffering as blessing while repulsing the obscene thought that God jiggled the mountain to make *me* better? (p. 96 – 97).

In a certain sense, we've come full circle. But thankfully, our path is not a circle but a spiral, ascending toward God. The Lord's promise lights our way. In the meanwhile, we live with a glorious paradox, a divine dialectical tension. The suffering that we pray to have removed may well be the blessing we pray to receive.

In that suffering, we may become a blessing to others. Diane Komp suggests this radical perspective: "Joni Eareckson Tada has been of more use to God quadriplegic in a wheelchair than she ever was on two feet. Watergate conspirator Chuck Colson has been of more use to God because he went to prison" (p. 85). Each of these modern saints has journeyed from the question, "Why me?" to "In what redemptive way will you use this mess, Lord?" When our power comes to its end in weakness, the power of Christ tabernacles in us. Man is broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is the glue. In redeemed brokenness we become icons of God's inestimable grace, weak vessels that demonstrate the awesome power of the Spirit at work in us, stained glass windows through which the light of Christ shines with ever-increasing clarity.



Community Gardens: Where Cooperation is a Growth Industry

by John Helder

The history of gardening is as old as this world. In Genesis 2:8-9 we read: "And the Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food. . . ."

It is interesting and important to note that these plants were first of all pleasant to the sight and secondly good for food. Before the fall (Gen 2:15) "The Lord took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and to keep it." The activity of gardening was one of the blessings that was to occupy man's time in a perfect world, in a creation that God had pronounced very good.

Certainly creation was plunged into a ruin by man's fall into sin, but the Bible continued to speak of the beauty of creation. In Matthew 6:28 and 29, Christ refers to the beauty of the lilies of the field and how Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as one of these. The Bible speaks of the bounteous blessings of food: fruit and grains and herbs. Though the curse was pronounced on all of creation, yet the work of God still reflects his wondrous power. Our dependence on the growth of plants is still as important as in times of old.

Benefits abound

As a horticulturist, I feel blessed in my calling – working with plants and in a small way being able to contribute to the beauty of our environment. I expect

that the farmer in the same way gains great satisfaction working and being able to contribute to the food needs of the world. Working with plants allows us to maintain a deep appreciation of the beauty and the food that we may enjoy. The involvement with plants helps us to be constantly reminded of the miracle of God's creation.

Of course this blessing is not limited to people with a professional interest in plants. We may all look about us and enjoy

God's creation. None the less, it seems to me that being involved with plants: growing them, nurturing them, watching them grow, harvesting them and learning about them, can be very satisfying and rewarding.

In previous generations, gardening was a more common activity than it is today. It appears we garden less not only because of urbanization and our limited access to land but our busy modern lifestyles also get in the way. There is a tendency to purchase more processed foods



"Our Urban Eden" was chosen as the name for the garden.

and fast foods, to take something out of the freezer, use the microwave and enjoy a meal with minimal work. These possibilities are undoubtedly a blessing. However growing food for one's own use or growing flowers to add beauty to the home, or sharing such bounty with others, can also be very satisfying and rewarding.

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The most successful gardens include a mix of people.

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The benefits of gardening are many. The activity can be enjoyable – a form of recreation. It can be a very healthy activity, providing exercise in the great outdoors and exposure to fresh air and sunshine. Gardening can be very therapeutic – a change of focus from the busy pace at the work place. But seeing plants grow and develop is also just plain fun and nothing beats fresh produce, straight from the garden, in taste or nutrition. It is also delightful to surround oneself with the beauty of the flowers, their colors ranging from bold to delicate hues, their textures, their intricate design, their fragrance. . . And again seeing the hand of the Creator in their growth and development can be inspiring.

Urban Eden

A very popular activity these days is community gardening. In urban areas people may garden in groups if land is limited. In many cities there is parkland, vacant land, utility corridors, road right of ways and other public or private land that is being made available for gardening activity. The gardening groups may be a diverse collection of people from the community. In downtown Edmonton, in

an area with numerous high-rises and without any sense of community, some vacant land became available for cultivation. In February a notice was distributed throughout the community to announce a meeting about a possible community garden. A disparate group of people with a common interest in gardening attended. From that meeting the group, with the assistance of a community development office, was galvanized into action. Fund raising took place and a number of wooden frames were constructed to serve as raised beds. These frames were filled with fertile topsoil so that the plants could be grown in good soil rather than in the rubble and debris of the site. A neighbor was contacted and arrangements were made to use his tap water to irrigate the garden. "Our Urban Eden" was chosen as the name for the garden. In each of the subsequent years the garden grew. New people joined the group. Apartment dwellers overlooking the area acted as neighborhood watch. People who had no friends, relatives, or even acquaintances suddenly had links to the community. The garden acquired a picnic table, a fire pit, a canopy for shelter from rain or the heat of the sun. . . Now no matter what the time of day people gather at the site to socialize, to read, to enjoy the garden, discuss progress and the development or failure of crops. Everyone is welcome whether they are gardeners or simply neighbors or passersby. People too shy, or too troubled, or stigmatized to be able to meet and make contact with people are able to exchange greetings and over time, are able to discuss their crops. Plants are exchanged, produce is shared, people are introduced to plants and foods popular with specific ethnic groups represented in the garden.

Another success story in Edmonton involved a group interested in gardening on a utility corridor with high-pressure gas pipelines far underground. To gain per-

mission they dealt with many stakeholders including several City departments, a provincial utility agency and several energy companies. This well organized and persistent group was authorized to garden this land by way of a user-friendly "Partners in Parks" agreement that is now the model used for community garden projects. This type of agreement allowed for the growth in community gardens from four in 1996 to twenty-eight in 2001. This particular garden on the utility corridor was instrumental in bringing people together. The corridor in a residential area acted as a boundary between single family homes on one side and a high density development on the other. The gardening activity encouraged people to talk together and effectively reduced the tension between the two solitudes.

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Why not start a community garden at a Christian school . . .

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Community Gardens are highly regarded by social activists and environmentalists. They are touted to help provide a measure of food security. People concerned about use of pesticides can ensure that their crops are grown organically. Foods grown locally do not need transportation deemed to contribute to pollution and to reduce nutritional value. Be that as it may, the gardening activity is a boon especially for the poor and for those people who are unable to maintain employment. It is no wonder then that many gardens are developed with special target groups in mind. These could include new immigrants, people with disabilities or seniors. For people who have restricted mobility and are dependent on walkers or wheelchairs, raised



The garden acquired a picnic table, a fire pit, a canopy for shelter from rain or the heat of the sun.

beds may be designed that will allow for easier access to the plants and the soil. Teaching gardens for children are also established to encourage interest in growing. Generally gardening groups are not exclusive and all are welcome. In established communities some neighbors may be very concerned about people coming to participate as a group in any activity, even an activity as innocent as gardening. Gardening may be deemed OK, but if some of the participants represent another culture or visible minorities, then old fears may be aroused. Possibly the gardeners may be deemed to be different or lazy. Whether their slower pace is due to a disability or not matters not one iota. Redneck mentality often prejudices those who are different. It would appear that the most successful gardens include a mix of people. Thus gardens set up for the mentally ill, or the poor tend to stigmatize the gar-

deners rather than allow them to mix with a diversity of people.

Gardening outreach

I have become very familiar with community gardens in Edmonton through my work with the city. Having observed many positive results for individuals, families and neighborhoods, I recommend that gardens be considered for senior housing developments or group homes. Making a number of plots available to able-bodied people may encourage these people to provide a measure of support for the less able. Why not start a community garden at a Christian school and allow for student learning but also get older folks with gardening experience involved. The benefits of intergenerational activities are obvious. A youth group may garden to provide produce for a home, an institution, the food bank, or a soup

kitchen. Perhaps the gardeners could sponsor food for a church social. Another good project would be for the gardeners to adopt some individuals from their local community that have special needs and work with such individuals to allow them the pleasure of gardening. How about a community garden as part of a mission in the inner city to provide support for the disadvantaged and use the gardening activity as a way to develop contacts to support evangelization efforts?

Again any group of individuals can get together, seek out some land and have fun, be challenged in growing the largest pumpkin or tomato and besides support any number of goals to help our neighbors. Moreover this is a wonderful way to work with God's creation and marvel at the beauty, fragrance and taste sensations. What beauty He has wrought!



PUZZLE PAGE ENTICING ENIGMAS AND CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

Send Puzzles, Solutions, Ideas to PUZZLE PAGE, 43 Summerhill Place, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4V4 **OR** robgleach@aol.com

NEW PUZZLES



Riddle for Punsters # 75

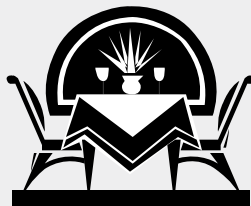
Did you hear about the jail bird that was guilty of gander slander?

He was charged with g _ _ _ e a _ _ _ e .

Problem to Ponder # "Table Able"

Fran's Furniture Fair sells custom-made furniture. It takes 6 of her workers to make 15 dining room tables if they all work for 30 hours at the same speed.

- How many tables would the 6 workers be able to make in 36 hours?
- How many tables would be made in 30 hours if one of the workers is on holidays but the remaining five keep working?
- How many tables would be made if two more workers (who work just as fast) are hired and all 8 work for 30 hours?
- How long would it take 7 workers to build 21 tables?



Chess Puzzle # 75

BLACK

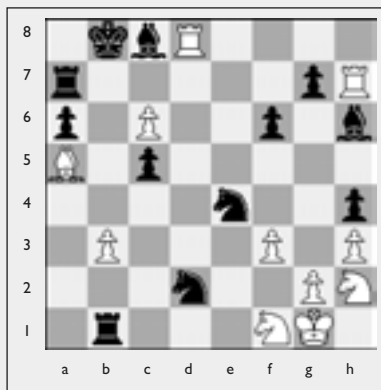
WHITE

WHITE to Mate in 3
Or, If it is BLACK's move, BLACK to Mate in 2

SOLUTIONS TO THE PREVIOUS (JANUARY) PUZZLE PAGE

SOLUTION TO CHESS PUZZLE # 74

2 mates in 2 to start 2002!



White to Mate in 2 Descriptive Notation

- QRxB ch KxR
- R-R8 mate

Algebraic Notation

- Rd8xc8 + Kb8xc8
- Rh7-h8 ++

Or, If it is BLACK's Move,
BLACK to Mate in 2

Descriptive Notation

- _____ B-K6 ch
 - K-R1 N-N6 mate
- (Since white's knight is pinned)

Algebraic Notation

- _____ Bh6-e3 +
 - Kg1-h1 Ne4-g3 ++
- (Since the knight on f1 is pinned)

Answer to Riddle for Punsters #74 -

Why did the jungle cat get into trouble at school. The m a n e reason is that it was found out that he was l i o n.

Why did a different wild cat receive a mark of zero on her exam? The teacher realized that she was a c h e e t a h.

What did the teacher tell the cats to show that the theory of evolution was wrong? He said that no one had ever found the missing l i n x.

Solution to Problem to Ponder #74

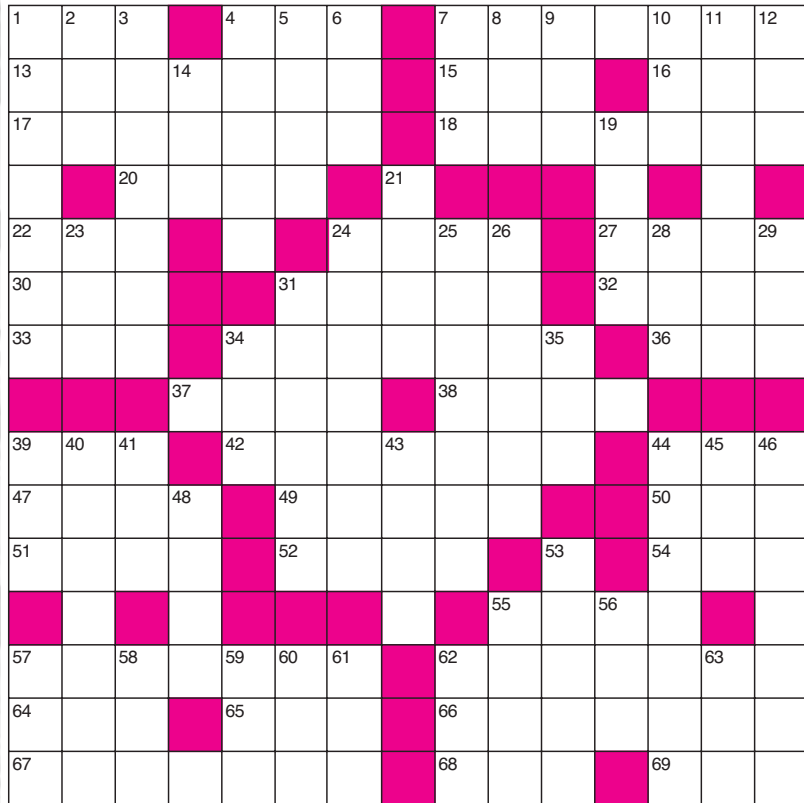
Wendy left home with some coins in her pocket. Due to a hole in that pocket, she lost one fourth of her money's value. Wanda later found the two lost coins but could not find the rightful owner. Wanda therefore put the coins with her own coins and as a result now had twice as much money. Wanda then spent three fifths of that money on sugarless gum and received twenty-four cents change. How much money in coins did Wendy leave home with and what were the coins that she lost?

If Wanda spent 3/5 of her money, then the remaining 2/5 was the 24 cents change, so 1/5 would be 12 cents (half as much), so 5/5 would be 5 x 12 = 60 cents. Wanda thus had 60 cents to spend after putting the found money with her own (doubling her money to 60 cents). Therefore, Wanda must have had 30 cents of her own and found 30 cents dropped by Wendy. The only way two coins add up to 30 cents is if one is a quarter and one a nickel. Also, if the lost 30 cents was one fourth of Wendy's money, she must have left home with four times as much, namely 4 x 30 = 120 cents.

Therefore, Wendy left home with \$1.20 in coins and then lost a quarter and a nickel.

Crossword Puzzle

Series 10, No. 1



Last month's solution Series 9, no. 12

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
P	E	C	A	N		P	R	O	P	B	A	B	A	
E	R	O	D	E		E	A	V	E	S	T	O	R	
L	A	D	E	N		S	N	E	A	K	O	X	O	
E	S	E			E	N	T	E	R	I	N	E	S	
			A			S	E	T	A		P	E	R	E
G	L	A	D	E	S				G	L	A	S	S	
R	I	P	O	S	T	E		P	E	A	L			N
A	R	E			K	I	N		I	N	N	I	R	A
B			R	E	N	D		A	D	D	U	C	E	D
S	T	A	R	T				A	S	T	H	M	A	
C	H	O	P		S	A	G	A		E				
H	A	M		A		P	L	I	E	S	O	P	A	
I	D	A		C	A	P	E	R		H	A	V	E	N
N	O	T		T	I	L	D	E		I	N	E	R	T
A	W	O	L		D	E	E	D		N	E	R	T	S

Joyce

ACROSS:

1. Current craze
4. Spigot
7. Quiet
13. Either continent of the Western Hemisphere
15. _____-de-France
16. Edison's exclamation?
17. Certain siblings
18. Kind of railroad car
20. Threadbare
22. Wrath
24. Loud noise
27. Newts
30. Yours and mine
31. System to detect aircraft
32. Phase of tide
33. Fish catcher
34. Gun holder
36. Timid
37. Where Guantanamo Bay is
38. Rip
39. Stereo component
42. Sharply painful
44. Girl's name
47. Phobia
49. Surgery reminders
50. Color
51. Story
52. Certain bills
54. What to put a letter in (abbr.)
55. Scars on bean seeds
57. Commonplace
62. Member of senate
64. Exist
65. A particular thing
66. Representations of the Nativity scene
67. Subsequent photographs
68. Charged particle
69. Before, poetically

DOWN:

1. Style
2. Pal, in Paris
3. Dinner finale
4. Layers
5. Measure of land
6. Faux _____
7. One of the family
8. Not well
9. Protecting shelter
10. Doze
11. Fastest land mammal
12. Part of the head
14. Map abbr.
19. Level
21. Masses of gum, or money
23. Regret
24. Bank statement word
25. Idle chats
26. Salad stuff
28. Alternative name of the Moroccan city, Fez
29. Watch secretly
31. Sturdy
34. Word used in marching
35. Informer
39. Near the tail of an aircraft
40. Standard of comparison
41. Good buddy
43. Group of antisocial people
44. Respire
45. Imitation fabric suffix
46. Unfavorable
48. Peruse
53. Cloth made from flax
55. Legendary figure
56. Insect secretion used to make shellac
57. Spoil
58. Profit
59. Something that affords protection and safety
60. Maiden name
61. Road curve
62. School subj.
63. Officer efficiency report