

REFORMED

A MAGAZINE
FOR THE
CHRISTIAN FAMILY

Perspective

Volume 27 No 11
September 2008

BEST BOOKS:

**Ten Titles
you won't
be able
to put down**



Three Ways to Make a Good Library Great

by Jon Dykstra

Only a decade ago the general populace didn't read – instead of paging through books we watched TV. But then Al Gore invented the Internet and reading once again became popular. . . though books did not. We scrolled through our emails, chatted online and visited our friend's blogs. It was progress, of a sort – instead of catatonically clicking through 500 channels we were now interacting with those around us.

But even more progress is possible, and needed. If the Internet connects us to our friends, great books allow us to step beyond our chosen circles and connect to people we've never met, living in lands we may never visit. Proverbs 24:6 talks of the wisdom in seeking guidance from many counselors – great books allow us to talk to the wisest not only of our time, but also times past!

It's encouraging then to see that Reformed churches across Canada are starting up libraries. In the past, if one of our churches had a library, the book selection was limited to a set of *Calvin's Commentaries*, a bound collection of all the past issues of the church bulletin and perhaps a random assortment of study books that were either in Dutch, or translated from Dutch. The demand for this material was such that these libraries were located in backrooms, with the entrance way usually hidden by a collection of stacked chairs, or perhaps some mops, brooms and other janitorial supplies. This was the Reformed version of a time capsule, to be rediscovered only every ten years or so.

Fortunately things are quite different today. Churches are placing their libraries in more prominent locations, and stocking them with a wider assortment of books, from commentaries to Christian fiction. And, most encouraging of all, these libraries are being put to regular use – we're reading!

The situation has improved but there are areas where improvements could still be made. A few libraries remain in "time capsule" mode, undiscovered by most of the congregation. Others seem to be a random assortment of titles rather than anything planned. And finally, in almost every library there are questionable book choices – blasphemous novels, theological texts by ardent Arminians, commentaries by cultists, as well as material that though "theologically correct" is so unattractively presented it's unreadable.

So how then can our libraries go from good to great? By focusing on three areas.

1. Have a vision

If our churches are going to encourage reading by starting libraries, they need to have a clear vision for their collection. It's not enough to get people reading – we want to get people reading *good* books. After all, a primary motivation for any church library is going to be the education of the congregation. And because education is a primary focus, it's not a stretch to apply to

whoever is making the book purchases the warning given to teachers in James 3:1:

“. . .we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (3:1).

It's a weighty warning that underscores how important it is to have a well-thought "vision" or purpose for your church's library.

What should that vision be? There are many possibilities:

- A consistory might take a Philippians 4:8 approach (that which is pure, lovely, commendable, excellent. . .), stocking only the best, both theologically and literarily.
- Another consistory might decide they can use the library to teach discernment via short book reviews in every book that highlight the book's worldview, its strengths, and its weaknesses.
- A consistory might conclude that with the state of Christian fiction being what it is, they wouldn't stock many novels and would instead focus on Bible study books, and commentary sets.
- Or they could decide that Bible study books and commentaries should be the backbone of each *individual's home library*, and that therefore the church library should focus on Christian fiction or DVD documentaries, and other material that is only read or used once.

Regardless of what direction a consistory sets, it is important that they do make a clear choice. Otherwise it will become quite hard to decide which books are appropriate, or inappropriate for the collection. Some books are clearly too horrible for any collection (Harlequin Romances, *The Prayer of Jabez*. . . anything by Al Gore) but often whether a book belongs, or doesn't, will depend on a library's *raison d'être*. For example, the DVD series *Planet Earth* is an absolutely stunning nature documentary that will have Christian viewers praising their Creator long before the credit's role. And yet the narrator is an evolutionist, and he interjects that worldview every once in a while. A brilliant, exceptional documentary series, but with a very notable flaw. Should it be in a church library? That depends on what sort of vision the consistory has for its library.

2. Share the vision

Having a clear vision is a necessary first step, but for a good library to become great that vision needs to be communicated to the whole congregation. No one should be left guessing about the library's goals. Why? Image if one church decided to stock material that, while it had strengths, also had notable flaws. Now imagine that some of the congregation members assumed that the books in their library were all carefully vetted and "theologically pure." They might make the mistake of swallowing whole a book that is not completely savory.

Or imagine a church decided to build a library of light, entertaining Christian fiction. Fine. Except if some congregation members mistake this milk for meat. That's a disheartening thought.

A great church library shares its vision with the congregation. Otherwise members will be left to make their own assumptions.

3. Get feedback

Mistakes happen – that's another reason a library's vision needs to be made clear to the congregation. No matter how knowledgeable the library committee might be, they won't know the back-story to every book or every author, so bad books will sneak their way in. Some authors (Philip Yancey, Lee Strobel, C.S. Lewis, etc) have written amazing books, and then followed them up with shallow, silly or even heretical efforts. So mistakes are inevitable in any functioning library; the only way to be free of them is to go back to the way our libraries used to be: theologically pure, but never used.

However, if the entire congregation understands the goals of the library they can help spot and fix mistakes quickly and can suggest other titles. Our congregations include some pretty well-read people, so it only makes sense, as again Proverbs 24:6 advises, to seek advice from as many of these members as possible. A great church library will spell out exactly how to make suggestions and send in complaints.

Conclusion

Our churches are taking an active role in encouraging reading. That's a very good thing – we *need* to be readers. But with this new undertaking comes a new responsibility: to ensure that the books chosen are a help, and not a hindrance, to readers. The best way to ensure this is by setting clear goals, sharing them with the congregation, and constantly seeking feedback. That's a very good way to make your church library a great one.

Other resources

Christine Farenhorst's July/August 2000 article "Rating books for the school library" available at www.ReformedPerspective.ca 

What's Inside

Our annual Reading Issue features:

- a book praised by secular critics – the Pulitzer Prize winning *Gilead*,
- a book praised by *Left Behind* critics – the anti-Dispensationalist thriller *The Fuse of Armageddon*,
- and a book that will be praised by art critics – the stunningly beautiful *True Story of Noah's Ark*.

In addition we have a few books, like *Dr. Oma*, that will have particular appeal to those of Dutch origin. But as long-time RP contributor Rene Vermeulen told me, good Dutch books have a broad appeal: "my wife who has no Dutch blood in her was, if anything, more excited about [*Dr. Oma*] than I." The only real difficulty with these "Netherlands novels" is that they can be hard to find locally. However, all the books in this issue can be purchased quite easily through the Internet.

Another highlight of our Reading Issue is Greg Koukl's contribution: *Why settle for merely reading a book when you can master it?* If you want to get the most out of your reading you must read his article.

Finally, we have a fantastic follow-up to last month's theme on Canada's Human Rights Commissions. *Kangaroo Canada* is an insider's perspective written to explain the craziness of these commissions to those living outside of Canada – it is by a Canadian but first appeared in the American publication *First Things*. Since these commissions are confusing even to those of us living in the Great White North, this article is sure to be an eye-opening experience to everyone.

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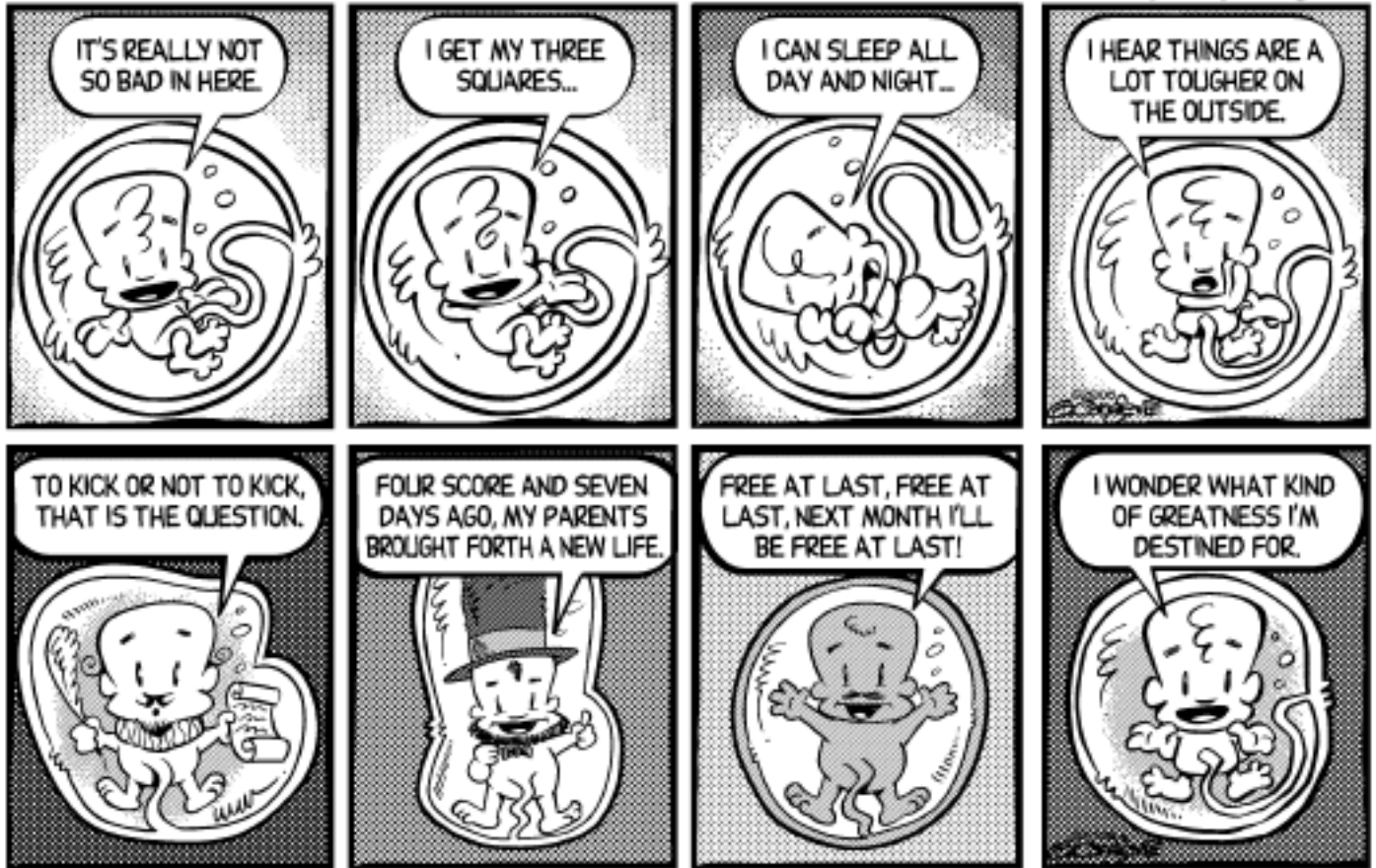
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Address for Administrative Matters (Subscriptions, Advertisements, Change of Address):

Premier Printing, One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2J 3X5
Telephone: (204) 663-9000, Email: subscribe@reformedperspective.ca

Editor: Jon Dykstra

Address for Editorial Matters (Letters and Submissions):

Reformed Perspective, 3573 McKinley Drive, Abbotsford, BC, Canada V2S 8M7
E-mail: editor@reformedperspective.ca

Managing Editor: Wilhelm Gortemaker

Regular Contributors:

Sharon Bratcher, Jane deGlint, Christine Farenhorst, Margaret Helder, Johan Tangelder, Rene Vermeulen, Michael Wagner

Board of Directors: John Voorhorst, Chairman;

James Teitsma, Secretary/Treasurer; Peter DeBoer, Wilhelm Gortemaker, Jakob Kuik, Henk VanderVelde, Theresia Weessies

Secretarial Address (Board Matters): James Teitsma
449 Almey Avenue, Winnipeg, MB Canada R3W 1P6

Contact Address for South Africa:

Arie Roos, Box 584, Kuilsrivier, 7580 Republic of South Africa

Contact Address for Australia:

Pro Ecclesia Bookshop, PO Box 189, Kelmscott, W. Australia 6111

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Nota Bene

News worth noting

by Sarah Meerstra



McDonald's boycott

The American Family Association is urging its more than 2 million members to boycott fast food giant McDonald's until it stops its active support of the homosexual agenda. McDonald's recently donated \$20,000 to show its support for, and gain a seat on, the board of directors of the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC).

The NGLCC now lists McDonald's as a "Corporate Partner," along with other large companies such as Burger King, Kodak and AT&T.

"This boycott is not about hiring homosexuals, or homosexuals eating at McDonald's, or how homosexual employees are treated," states the AFA. "It is about McDonald's, as a corporation, choosing to put the full weight of their corporation behind promoting the homosexual agenda, including homosexual marriage."

Source: LifeSiteNews.com, July 4, 2008



Abortionists forced to tell the truth

A federal court of appeals has ruled that doctors performing abortions in South Dakota will now have to tell patients that the abortion "will terminate the life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being." Women also will have to be told they have a right to continue a pregnancy and that abortion may cause women psychological harm, including thoughts of suicide. While there are still some more stages before this law will become a reality, pro-life groups are hailing this as a significant victory.

Source: *The International Herald Tribune*, June 30, 2008

Samuel Golubchuk dies naturally

The Manitoba man at the centre of a heated court battle to keep him alive on life support has died peacefully and naturally. The Orthodox Jewish family had been fighting doctors who wished to remove him from life support, thus ending his life. The family's lawyer spoke to the press, saying, "Mr. Golubchuk won. He didn't die because they pulled him off life support. He died when his time had come."

Source: LifeSite News, June 25, 2008

Abortion in Canada down... slightly

The most recent data from Statistics Canada show that in 2005 the number of abortions declined by 3.2% from the previous year, with a total of over 96,000 abortions being performed. Almost a third of these abortions were performed on women between the ages of 20 and 24.

Jim Hughes, president of the Campaign Life Coalition, commented, "Canada likes to brag about its human rights record at home and abroad, while it ignores the mounting death toll that it has refused to stop. The blood of these innocent babies cries out for justice. We are killing the future of our country. We are already a country which is not replacing itself and we have eliminated more than three million people from our population."

The statistics also do not include women who aborted their children using chemical means such as RU-486.

Source: LifeSiteNews.com, May 21, 2008



Christians are better husbands/fathers

A study by University of Virginia sociology professor Bradford Wilcox has found that religion plays a significant role in encouraging “strong family orientation” among American men. Specifically, his research found that men who regularly attend church are happier in their marriages and more involved in their children’s lives. Concludes Wilcox, “This brief provides an array of evidence indicating that religion is an

answer to the male problematic – that is, the tendency of fathers to become detached, emotionally or physically, from their children and the mothers of their children. I find that fathers who are religious, and who have partners who are religious, are – on average – more likely to be happily married, to be engaged and affectionate parents, and to get and stay married to the mothers of their children.”

Source: Center for American Values, June 2008



No spanking. . .

Parental rights continue to come under attack in Canada.

In the Senate, an anti-spanking law was quietly passed by the liberal majority, raising the possibility that parents could be charged for using corporal punishment with their children. Bill S-209 seeks to remove section 43 of the Canadian Criminal Code, which allows parents, teacher and caregivers to use reasonable force to discipline and correct a child. During the Senate’s lengthy debates on this bill, it was amended to allow parents and caregivers to use reasonable force in situations where the child is about to do something that

would cause them immediate and serious harm. Other than that, however, no corporal punishment would be allowed. The bill is now heading to the House of Commons.



. . .and no grounding?

In another disturbing case, a Quebec judge has ruled in favor of a 12-year-old girl who took her divorced custodial father to court for forbidding her from attending a class trip as punishment for posting inappropriate photos of herself online. With her mother’s support, the girl challenged her father in court, since she needed both parents’ permission in order to attend the multi-day trip. The judge ruled that the punishment was unduly harsh and punitive, especially given the bitter custodial battle the family was currently involved in.

An article in the *Ottawa Citizen* pointed out the irony of this decision, suggesting that his behavior ought to be applauded by those who oppose the use of even “reasonable force” to discipline a wayward child. “This was hardly an instance of cruel or arbitrary authority. There was no abuse involved, not even close,” it stated. “The father, it seems, used clear and consistent warnings, letting his child know that there would be consequences for inappropriate behavior. This is how you raise responsible children who understand the results of their actions. It is an approach to discipline that should be encouraged, not outlawed by the state.”

The father intends to appeal the decision.

Source: *Today’s Family News*, June 25, 2008



No more girls in India

A report by British charity ActionAid is warning of serious sex imbalances in some Indian regions, due to selective abortion and abandonment and neglect of female babies. In one area of the Punjab, the study claims, boys outnumber girls 10 to 3 in the most prosperous castes, while most regions average 10 boys for every 8 girls, significantly lower than the natural average of 10 boys to 9.5 girls.

The imbalances are the greatest in more prosperous areas, suggesting that increased access to ultrasound technology is a contributing factor. Other outlawed practices, such as allowing a newborn girl’s umbilical cord to become infected, are also reportedly still taking place.

ActionAid says India faces a “bleak” future if it does not end its practice of cultural preference for boys.

Source: BBC, June 21 2008



Looking back at the Reformed influence in Canada: THE LORD'S DAY ACT OF 1906

by Michael Wagner

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there was a government that respected the Christian Sabbath . . . actually, it was Canada just a few decades ago. For much of Canada's history, prohibiting certain activities on the Lord's Day was seen as a legitimate task of the government. In fact, it wasn't until the Charter of Rights was adopted that federal legislation regulating business on Sunday, the Lord's Day Act, was struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Although the Lord's Day Act was not enacted until 1906, Canada had restrictions on the Sabbath long before that. In 1868 the editor of a periodical called the *Christian Guardian* wrote that Canada had "the best kept Sabbath in the world." By the late 1800s, most of the provinces had laws protecting the Lord's Day because it was believed such legislation was a provincial responsibility.

Lord's Day Acts struck down. . . in 1903?

Nevertheless, many Presbyterians were not happy with the existing laws because they were considered to be too lax, and permitted such things as railway business traffic and post offices to be open. These people wanted federal Sunday legislation. To deal with this issue, in 1888 the Lord's Day Alliance of Canada was formed in Ottawa under a minister,

Rev. W.D. Armstrong, who was also the convener of the Presbyterian Church's Sabbath Observance Committee. Although the Lord's Day Alliance was technically nondenominational, it was dominated by Presbyterians.



The Alliance grew to 512 branches across the country by 1902



In 1899 the Alliance appointed its first full-time paid field secretary, Rev. John Shearer, himself a Presbyterian minister. Under his leadership the Alliance grew to 512 branches across the country by 1902.

Then a court decision made the role of the Alliance more important than ever: the Privy Council in England struck down all of Canada's provincial Sunday laws. As researcher Paul Laverdure puts it,

"The judges reasoned that since Sunday laws were based on the fourth commandment, and as the commandments against perjury, murder, and theft had become part of the criminal legislation of the Christian world, all religious legisla-

tion was part of criminal law. Under the British North America Act, criminal legislation was a federal responsibility. Thus all provincial Sunday laws passed after Confederation in 1867 were void."

Although the effect of this decision was the elimination of laws regulating Lord's Day activities, the reasoning clearly portrays Canada's criminal laws as being based (at least in part) on the Bible.

The feds take over

Anyway, the Alliance now had a much better case for pushing for federal Sabbath legislation. It established a newspaper called *The Lord's Day Advocate* that soon had a circulation of 40,000. Presbyterian influence was particularly evident in the *Advocate*, and it published pieces by prominent Presbyterians such as Rev. Charles Gordon, who was Canada's best-selling novelist of the time under the pen name Ralph Connor. Laverdure states, "Clearly, the Lord's Day Alliance, under Shearer, was a Presbyterian organization with Methodist help."

In 1906 the Liberal government of Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier introduced the Lord's Day Act which would severely curtail business activities on Sunday. Despite heavy opposition from business interests and the province of Quebec, the law was passed.

An abrupt end

It wasn't long, however, before the effectiveness of the Act began to erode. During the First World War, 1914-1918, both business and government ignored the law to maximize the war effort. Nevertheless, after the war the Act was still in effect.

By the time of the First World War the general secretary of the Lord's Day Alliance was another Presbyterian minister, Rev. William Rochester. At the World's Christian Citizenship Conference of 1920, he was elected to be the chair of the World Commission on the Christian Sabbath. According to Laverdure, Rochester "thanked God for the survival of the Canadian Sunday as a day free from newspapers, theatres, and paid sports. The Presbyterian General Assembly thanked Rochester for the reputation Canada's Sunday had around the world."

Slowly, however, support for the cause dissipated. The Alliance began to decline, and during the Second World War the Lord's Day Act was suspended in order to allow for munitions production. But a few years later, Hockey Night in Canada chose to broadcast on Saturday, rather than Sunday, due to the Act.

As Christianity declined in Canada it's also likely that popular support for restricting activities on Sunday declined. But it was the Charter of Rights that put an end to the Lord's Day Act. In 1985 the Supreme Court of Canada struck down the law because it amounted to compulsory observance of the Christian Sabbath. This could no longer be tolerated in a "secular" country.

It is interesting, however, that for so many years the Sabbath was enforced, at least to a certain degree, in Canada. And it's also interesting that the driving force behind the push for the Lord's Day Act had been Protestant ministers, especially Presbyterian ministers. The idea that Canada's laws should be based on the Bible has a good historical pedigree.

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Five Lines FREE

Do you have an event going on you'd like to let everyone know about? Let us know, and we'll post it here, in *Reformed Perspective's* new Five Lines Free column. If your Young People's, Ladies Aid, school, church or other non-profit group is selling cookbooks, hosting a speaker, putting on a rally, or staging a play you can post the details here.

Send your requests to editor@reformedperspective.ca.
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ECP Centre fundraiser in Langley, BC on September 18, 2008. Proceeds to build our legal fund to support Christians' freedom to publicly proclaim Christ without hindrance from the State. Tickets \$100. Email doug.schouten@ecpcentre.org for more info.



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- this is for non-commercial groups (whose philosophy and worldview is in accord with that of *Reformed Perspective*, so we reserve the right to refuse any ad).



BEST OF THE WEB

Top Ten

We are now taking nominations for the best Reformed websites on the Internet. If you know of any contenders please send in the web link and a few words as to why you think this Reformed site is well worth checking out.

You can nominate one site or even several.

Send your nominations to Top10@reformedperspective.ca



by Douglas Farrow

Mark Steyn is the author of the bestselling *America Alone*, a witty tirade against the decline of the West, a portion of which appeared in the Canadian magazine *Maclean's*. Ezra Levant was the publisher of a journal called the *Western Standard*, which in 2006 reprinted cartoons depicting Muhammad from a Danish newspaper. Steyn and Levant have now been hauled before Canada's human rights commissions to answer to charges of hate speech.

These commissions (HRCs, for short) were set up in the 1960s and 1970s with the aim of combating discrimination on a practical level. In recent times, however, they have transmogrified into mechanisms for enforcing politically correct ideologies and silencing dissent. "It never occurred to us," remarks Alan Borovoy, one of the originators of the HRCs, "that this instrument, which we intended to deal with discrimination in housing, employment and the provision of goods and services, would be used to muzzle the expression of opinion."

Don't you dare hurt my feelings!

That is exactly what has happened, through the mechanism of Section 13 of the Human Rights Act, which prohibits hate messages. Under Canada's criminal code, the incitement of hatred is already counted a crime – but against that charge, truth and good faith are viable defenses, and the burden of proof lies with the accuser. Not so with the Human Rights Act. As James Allan, a law professor in Queensland, marvels: "To be in breach of these hate-speech provisions, you don't have to counsel violence; you don't have to urge discrimination; you don't have to express hatred; you don't even have to have said or written something that did, in fact, subject some group to hatred or contempt. All that is needed is that your comments, in the view of the sort of people chosen to staff these tribunals,

are 'likely' to expose someone or some group to contempt or hatred."

Allan, like many other bemused observers, refers to the HRCs as kangaroo courts. Their proceedings display a bouncy ineptitude and, simultaneously, a sinister level of collusion. Take, for example, Richard Warman, a former investigator for the national commission who decided that it was more fun to be the aggrieved victim of a human rights violation. He has filed twenty-six complaints so far, including more than half of Section 13 complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC). What's more, he has a perfect 100 per cent conviction rate for these complaints.

THE INFAMOUS SECTION 13 OF CANADA'S HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

"It is a discriminatory practice for a person or a group of persons acting in concert to communicate. . . any matter that is likely to expose a person or persons to hatred or contempt by reason of the fact that person or those persons are identifiable on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination."

These quasi-judicial bodies are staffed by political appointees who have neither the qualifications nor the independence of regular judges. Their ad hoc procedures provide no firm rules for evidence; bigoted comments, posted by strangers to websites in foreign jurisdictions, have been judged admissible, for example. No actual proof of harm is required in order to obtain a conviction. Investigations and deliberations are driven by far-reaching, utopian mandates to “reduce discrimination and promote social change.”

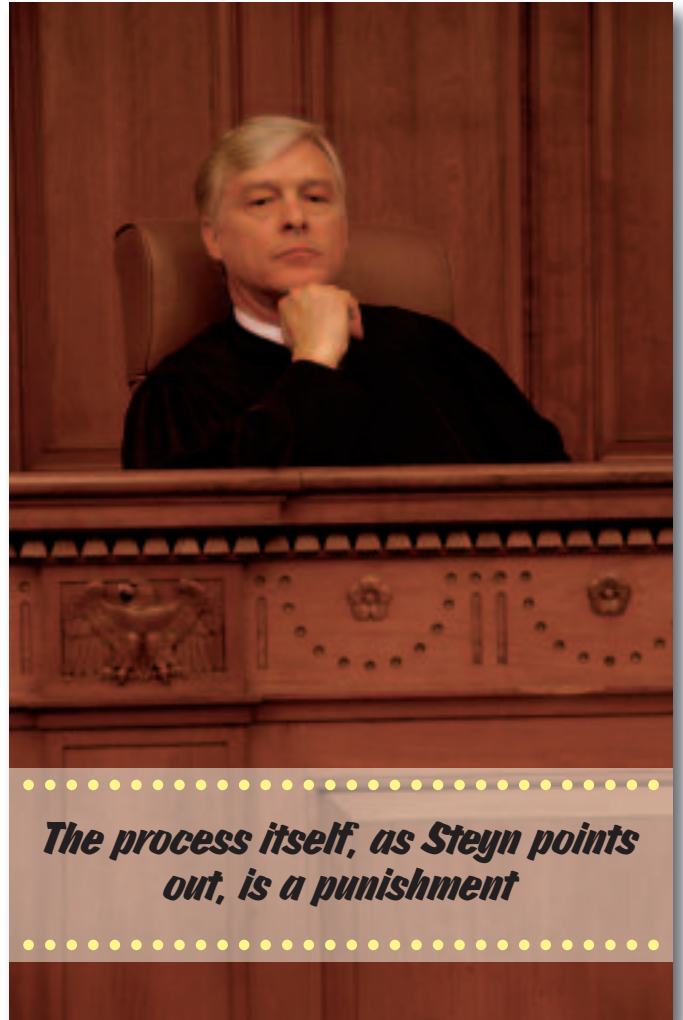
The growing train of hate-speech prosecutions might have been derailed as long ago as 1990, when an appeal brought Section 13 under review by the Supreme Court in *Taylor v. Canada*. The court found, however, that the Charter’s guarantee of freedom of expression “is not unduly impaired.” Writing for the majority, Chief Justice Dickson opined that, “as long as human rights tribunals continue to be well aware of the purpose” of Section 13, “there is little danger that subjective opinion as to offensiveness will supplant the proper meaning of the section.”

That view now appears rather naive. Allegations have been made that agents or former agents of the CHRC have themselves posted hate messages online under pseudonyms, and even by way of Internet identity theft, and that their activities in manufacturing offenses have been covered up by evidence and transcript tampering.

We won’t tolerant intolerance!

Meanwhile, for evidence that “subjective opinion as to offensiveness” is getting the upper hand, one need look no further than the recent judgment against Stephen Boissoin. A Protestant pastor, Boissoin was brought before the Alberta commission for a letter to his local newspaper in which he issued a “war cry” against “the aggressive propagation of homo and bisexuality” and articulated some decidedly countercultural opinions, asserting that “where homosexuality flourishes, all manner of wickedness abounds.”

The commissioner who heard the complaint – which was brought by a heterosexual, an activist named Darren Lund – might well have noted that political orientation, unlike sexual orientation, is not a protected category. Neither, for that matter, is moral orientation. From which it follows that the coercive power of the state ought not to be used to settle the agenda wars of private citizens. Instead, Commissioner Lori Andreachuk – with the support of the Alberta attorney general, whose office intervened on Lund’s side – decided that Boissoin’s views could not be tolerated. “In this case,” she wrote, “the publication’s exposure of homosexuals to hatred and contempt trumps the freedom of speech afforded in the Charter.”



The process itself, as Steyn points out, is a punishment

In the absence of any particular victim, Andreachuk determined that Boissoin should pay Lund \$5,000 for his personal sacrifice in lodging the complaint and should also provide him with a written apology. But here is the kicker, which highlights the naiveté of the Supreme Court’s view that Section 13 is “sufficiently precise and narrow.” The commissioner also ordered Boissoin and his organization to “cease publishing in newspapers, by email, on the radio, in public speeches, or on the Internet, in future, disparaging remarks about gays and homosexuals.” She further prohibited them “from making disparaging remarks in the future about Dr. Lund or Dr. Lund’s witnesses,” and directed that “all disparaging remarks versus homosexuals . . . be removed from current web sites and publications of Mr. Boissoin.” In short, she served up a comprehensive lifetime ban that prohibits Pastor Boissoin from ever saying anything that someone like Darren Lund might find offensive.

Alternatives to the HPV Vaccine

7 reasons to reconsider vaccinating our daughters against the humanpapilloma virus

by Yvonne Harink

This September is human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination month in many schools across Canada. This vaccine is aimed at stopping the spread of a sexually transmitted disease that makes women susceptible to cervical cancer.

Before having your daughters immunized against HPV in September, parents should really do some research on the wisdom of this choice. Just remember, it *is* your choice. Immunization is not compulsory, and parents are going to be the ones to deal with the consequences of what is actually a massive experiment.

Question the HPV vaccine

Here are some points to think about:

1. The human papillomavirus (HPV) has so many types and affects so many different body systems that it's very complex. There are over 100 types of HPV, and Gardasil (the name of the vaccine) only offers protection against 4 of the more common strains.
2. Merck & Co, the US pharmaceutical company that is rushing this product to market, has done very little research on the long-term effects of the vaccine. In fact in Canada the approval of the drug was based on trials that involved only 1,200 girls over a period of 18 months.
3. The American Medical Association admits that it does not know how long the vaccine will last, what is the right age to immunize girls, and what its long-term effect will be.
4. Bad reactions are claimed to be rare, and in the incidents that have been reported Gardasil's defenders have been quick to say there is no evidence that the vaccine was the cause. But in the US there have already been around 8,000 events filed to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System. Reactions included: dizziness, fainting, severe headaches, temporary loss of vision, slurred speech, joint pain, muscle weakness, massive wart outbreaks, involuntary contraction of the limbs, seizures, paralysis and at least 10 confirmed deaths.
5. There is no pressing need. Canada does not have an epidemic of cervical cancer. In fact it has one of the lowest rates of cervical cancer in the world.
6. Immunization is big business – the HPV vaccine alone is costing Canadian taxpayers close to a billion dollars. One really wonders if part of the reason Merck is ramming this vaccine through in such a hurry has anything to do with the fact that its competitor GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) will soon be coming out with a competing HPV vaccine.
7. HPV is a sexually transmitted virus. Gardasil supposedly protects from only 4 strains of this one disease,

which in turn is just one among several hundred venereal diseases. Clearly vaccination is not much of a solution, even if it does work as advertised.

Alternatives

Before letting the daughters of our nation be used as guinea pigs in a massive experiment, why not consider alternatives? Consider teaching our sons and daughters about the health benefits that result from making wise choices in:

- saving sex for monogamous marriage (proven 100% effective in HPV prevention!)
- not smoking
- eating healthy food
- getting plenty of fresh air and exercise, and de-stressing your life

While ultimately God holds our health in His hand, he created us with the ability to make responsible choices.

For more info

For more information, here are some helpful articles on HPV and the Gardasil vaccine:

- www.LifeSiteNewsHPV.notlong.com
- www.CMInstitute.notlong.com
- www.RWCanada.notlong.com

This article was, in a slightly modified form, originally a letter that the author sent to the editor of her local newspaper.



Catholic vs. Protestant

The fact we have common opponents doesn't diminish our differences

by Rene Vermeulen

On the chair next to me are a heap of newspapers which all deal with the same subject: Australia and Sydney, and how this city will soon be hosting an important event, World Youth Day.

This is an event organised by the Roman Catholic Church, which culminates in a visit by Pope Benedict XVI to Australia. According to reports, some 250,000 young people will gather in the city for this celebration. It is expected that 125,000 of these people will be from overseas.

I found comments by some of Australia's news media noteworthy, in particular what a certain Paul Kelly wrote in the *Weekend Australian*:

"The visit to Sydney of Pope Benedict XVI is a deeply ambiguous event – it is a test of the standing and spirit of the Catholic Church in Australia while offering certain judgment on the tolerance of a secular Australian nation towards religion. Beyond the squabbles over security, transport inconvenience and taxpayer-funded support, the Australian traditions of utility and pragmatism have been on display. World Youth Day will be a grand event, to many an inspiring event where religion will briefly dominate the public square. Yet its preparations have been marked by a community irritation that signifies a rising hostility and fatalistic indifference in Australian attitudes towards organised religion."

Kelly then goes on to suggest that the current pope is an insignificant man who simply doesn't measure up to his predecessor, John Paul II. It may well be true; I don't know what to think of it. But this becomes clear – religion is of little consequence in Australia if this editor is to be believed.

Quite a few other commentators had similar comments. And what upset a lot of commentators even more was when an-

other prominent Catholic, Cardinal Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney, had the audacity to suggest that Australians should have bigger families if only to maintain the current size of the Australian population.

All this is happening during a period in which the Roman church is under attack for evil happenings within the church's hierarchy. Thus matters such as priests abusing children sexually have become news of the day.

A Protestant response

The Anglican Dean of Sydney, Philip Jensen, also decided to have his say, and wrote that, although happy to have World Youth Day in Sydney,

"We object to the Pope claiming to be the Vicar of Christ. We reject all claims of authority that imply the insufficiency of Scripture. This protest against Roman Catholicism is no small complaint. It goes to the very heart of God's central message to mankind, the way of salvation."

Then, according to an account written by the *Weekend Australian's* Mike Stekette, Philip Jensen quoted the articles of the Anglican Church that state "the Church of Rome has erred" and he added that the errors have been compounded since then with doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception and the infallibility of the Pope. "There is nothing in modern Roman Catholicism that reduces our need to protest," Jensen said.

A Catholic counter-response

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference general secretary Brian Lucas remarked that there remains a small group of Protestants,

"who still define their Protestantism as anti-Catholicism. There is a tradition amongst some extreme Protestants that

the Church of Rome is the embodiment of the antichrist and the Reformation represented the re-establishment of the pure, Bible-based Christianity."

A Reformed recognition


I suppose our Reformed churches belong to these extreme Protestants. After all we still confess in Lord's Day 30 that, "the mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry."

That does not take away from the fact that much of what was written about the events in Sydney was motivated by the writers' general opposition to anything religious, whether it is Roman Catholic or Protestant. They regard any expression of religious devotions as being out of date and even dangerous for the general population.

This means that all of us, young and old, must do all we can to hold fast to our confessions and teach them to our young people, always keeping in mind what our Lord said: "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

Quick book recommendation

In that context – praying for those who abuse us – I thought that a book I have been reading does a good job of showing us what our task is in this world. The book is a novel and has elements in it that are not Reformed yet I would still recommend it because it demonstrates that prayer is so very important in all we do. . . whether or not we get what we pray for.

The book is called *The President* and is written by Parker Hudson. For more information on this book, see the review in the July/August 2001 *Reformed Perspective*. 



Opportunity to the Devil

by Jane deGlint

From the first pages of the Bible to the last we are confronted with the Devil. It has been his intention from days of old to start a war with the Creator. He will not give up till he is thrown into the lake of fire and the peace of the heavenly Kingdom has been re-established on the renewed earth.

The Devil is the dark antagonist in the story of creation. Himself a creature, he rebelled against the Creator. Indeed, this proves him a fool from the beginning. But God responded to his stupidity in wisdom. With unfathomable insight he designed the course of history which would bring out the earth's potential, prepare for the work of the Savior, and decisively destroy the Father of Fools and his children.

If there is any comfort in the stupidity of the Devil, it is the fact that he will remain stupid till the end. He may appear to be sly, he may connive wicked schemes, he may even have an incidental success story, but his every move hastens his end. His ultimate stupidity was his role in the death of our Savior. It was through Devilish lies and blatant apostasy that our Lord Jesus was killed, but his death was the decisive blow to the Father of Fools. The Judas kiss was reciprocated with a kiss of death.

Having caught a glimpse of Satan's folly we begin to see how all human stupidity results in choices against the Creator. The book of Proverbs provides numerous instructions for recognizing such foolish behavior. "A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom" (Proverbs 1:21).

The way of fools sharply contrasts the wise ways of our Covenant Lord. God's compassionate insight forms the foundation of his wise commandments, which bring healing to his people in the fallen world. The Covenant law guarantees a presence of divine wisdom among God's people till the explicit articulation of commandments becomes superfluous in a perfect world.

It becomes one of Satan's most insidious obsessions to scramble the script of God's good law as it is written on the hearts of the believers. By confusing the commandments he has a far greater success rate than by deleting them. If someone would propose that we kneel to a large idol in the central park of a large city, we would protest. We would put our societal position at stake rather than deny our Lord. But if we were enticed by material gain to compromise our integrity, we might not immediately realize that we fell for the idol of materialism.

If we would give our children permission to buy illicit drugs we would realize that by breaking the commandment to protect life we in fact break the fifth commandment by forsaking our parental task. On the other hand, if we gave in to our children about seemingly trivial matters such as overspending or wasting time, we are not only undermining our own authority but also their respect for their Lord.

Unwittingly we give Satan countless opportunities to deceive us. To make things worse, we become insensitive to the results of disobedience. We do not register that the nearness of the Lord is becoming less real. We fail to realize that we are making wrong choices. We overlook that we are promoting ourselves in our advice to others. We blame our increasing unhappiness on other people or on adverse circumstances. We fail to notice that our choice of words is becoming offensive at times, that we start twisting the truth, and that we start bearing grudges. But the spiritual realm is aware. God is displeased, the angels shudder and the devils gloat.

.....

We give Satan countless opportunities to deceive us

.....

Our misbehavior has a direct effect on the realm of the spirits. God will send his angels to protect us and keep evil away from us. The evil spirits may initially gain confidence, but eventually start to blunder. Our Lord Jesus will increase his intercessory prayers for us and even sympathize with us in our temptations, since he knows how it is to be tempted. And if the mobilization of all these heavenly forces of the spiritual realms were not sufficient, the Holy Spirit will revive our weakened heart and redirect us to the Lord's wise ways.

The Lord has several means available to pull us back. We feel the correctional tug when an unpleasant experience stops us in our tracks. This does not mean that all pain, physical or spiritual, is a direct result of specific misbehavior. But all suffering brings us to the throne of God with the elementary question: Why have you hidden your face from us, O Lord? Suffering leads to self-examination, and whatever we find, the

result is a renewed walk with the Lord. Whether we have been reassured by his ongoing involvement, or whether we have shamefully realized that we have temporarily left the face of God to our own peril, spiritual self-examination brings us closer to the Lord.

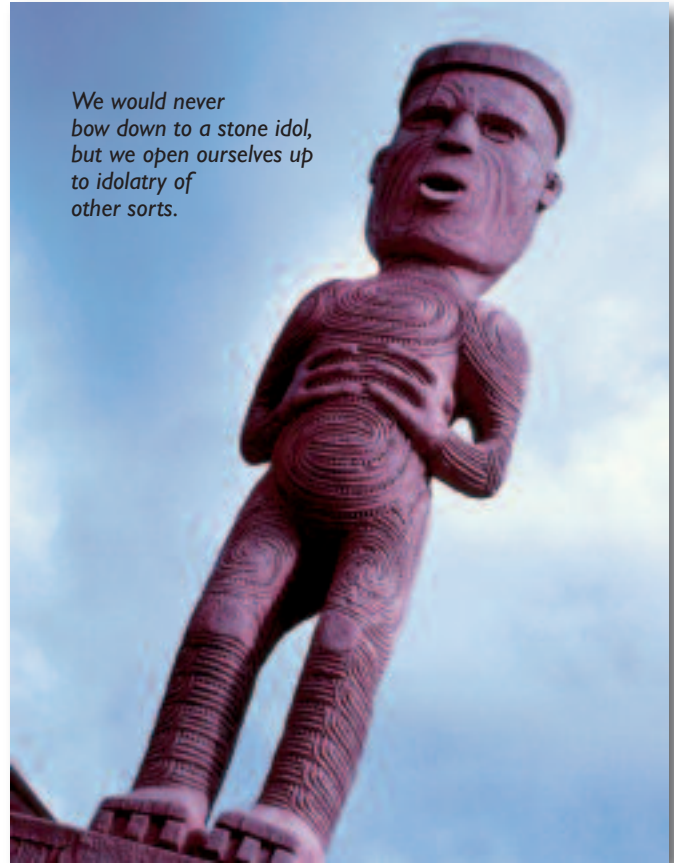
At times this peril is short-lived and does not extend beyond the temporal. However, each time we give in to temptations we put our eternal peace at stake. This not a denial of our Lord's covenantal faithfulness or an undermining of the gospel of salvation for all those who are called to be saints. Rather, it means that there are consequences for those who rebel against the Lord, as the prophets and apostles pointed out time and again.

Before their entrance into the promised land the Lord warned the Israelites through Moses, the great prophet and lawgiver, that they would be scattered among the nations if they would not walk in the statutes (see Deuteronomy 28). This warning comes into effect during the times of exile. "My God will reject them, because they have not obeyed him; they will be wanderers among the nations" (Hosea 9:17). It is true that the Lord shows mercy, but only a remnant will return. "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number" (Jeremiah 23:3).

As the apostles carry the gospel of salvation to the ends of the world, they are very aware of the fact that the evil spirits will step up their attacks to prevent the establishment of a worldwide Kingdom of Heaven. The New Testament contains several specific warnings to remind us that straying from the path of truth makes us vulnerable for the traps of the Evil One. "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin, do not let the sun go down while you are angry – Do not give the Devil a foothold!" (Ephesians 4:25-27).

In 2 Corinthians 2 the apostle Paul sheds further light on the work of the Devil. Parenthetically, light exposure is very damaging to the evil spirits, since they only operate in the darkness. In 2 Corinthians 2 Paul explains the need to forgive each other. Holding grudges confuses our sight on the redeeming work of our Savior. The Devil rejoices when we forget about forgiving. "If you forgive anyone, I will also forgive him. And what I have forgiven – if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes!" (vs. 10-11).

Our sinful behavior does not only provide the Evil One with an opportunity to enter our hearts, it also causes damage to the church. Our pollution of Christ's body provides the Devil with an opportunity to slander God himself and desecrate his name. "So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan!" (See 1 Timothy 5:14-15, as well as 1 Timothy 6:1 and Titus 2:5.)




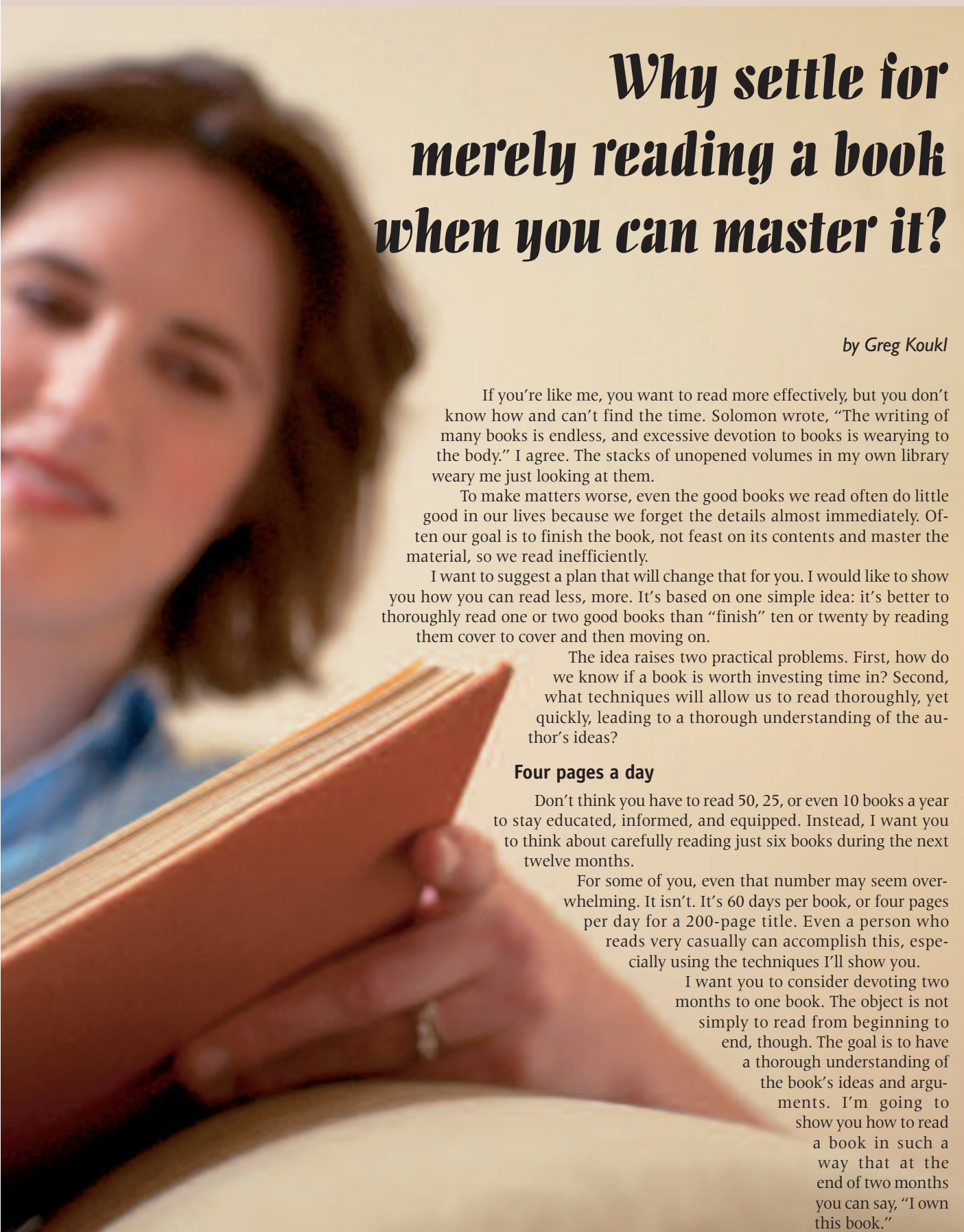
*We would never
bow down to a stone idol,
but we open ourselves up
to idolatry of
other sorts.*

The warnings of Hebrews 10 belong undoubtedly to the most forceful words ever spoken to a group of believers. "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (vs. 26-27).

One should not conclude that the Lord of the church has no option but to cut off someone who continues in sin. Two seemingly contrasting sides are in fact the two aspects of God's dealing with his people. On the one hand the believers are called to the light of the gospel out of mere grace. On the other hand our deliberately sinful actions can give the Devil opportunity to destroy us eternally.

Yet, the believers do not have to fear. They can take comfort in the words of Jesus to Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32). The Lord does not only forgive us when we fall into temptation, but he also restores in our calling. We can still actively function as members of the body of Christ.

We can be sure that those who are with us always outnumber those who oppose us. Our wise Lord has never lost control of the battle. Not only are the evil spirits foolish, they are also scared. If we just stand up to resist them, they will flee in terror. We have the power of the Word, by which we can fell the Prince of Darkness. "Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God, and he will come near to you" (James 4:7-8). 

A woman with dark hair is shown in profile, looking down at an open book she is holding. The background is a soft, out-of-focus yellow. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Why settle for merely reading a book when you can master it?

by Greg Koukl

If you're like me, you want to read more effectively, but you don't know how and can't find the time. Solomon wrote, "The writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body." I agree. The stacks of unopened volumes in my own library weary me just looking at them.

To make matters worse, even the good books we read often do little good in our lives because we forget the details almost immediately. Often our goal is to finish the book, not feast on its contents and master the material, so we read inefficiently.

I want to suggest a plan that will change that for you. I would like to show you how you can read less, more. It's based on one simple idea: it's better to thoroughly read one or two good books than "finish" ten or twenty by reading them cover to cover and then moving on.

The idea raises two practical problems. First, how do we know if a book is worth investing time in? Second, what techniques will allow us to read thoroughly, yet quickly, leading to a thorough understanding of the author's ideas?

Four pages a day

Don't think you have to read 50, 25, or even 10 books a year to stay educated, informed, and equipped. Instead, I want you to think about carefully reading just six books during the next twelve months.

For some of you, even that number may seem overwhelming. It isn't. It's 60 days per book, or four pages per day for a 200-page title. Even a person who reads very casually can accomplish this, especially using the techniques I'll show you.

I want you to consider devoting two months to one book. The object is not simply to read from beginning to end, though. The goal is to have a thorough understanding of the book's ideas and arguments. I'm going to show you how to read a book in such a way that at the end of two months you can say, "I own this book."

For that you need a system. Starting at the beginning and reading through word by word to the end is a system, of sorts, but it's not a very good one. The key to effective reading is going through a book more than once at different levels. I'm going to show you how. Follow these four steps for non-fiction books: overview, preview, read, and post-view.

Not every book deserves a good reading. The initial overview allows you to determine whether a title merits your attention. It gives you a sense of the main thrust of the book in five to ten minutes. Start by reading the jacket cover. Read the table of contents. Skim the book's preface and the introduction. Read the conclusion in the last three pages of the book. Browse through the index in the back. Note the publisher and the date of publication. If you don't like what you see, abandon the effort and look for a better book.

You've only lost a few minutes and possibly saved hours of fruitless reading. If the work looks promising, though, page through the entire book at the rate of 2-3 seconds per page. Don't try to "speed read." This first step is a casual one. Let your eyes stroll over the material as your gaze falls on the text and enjoy the process of serendipitous discovery.

An overview like this takes less than twenty minutes in the extended form and can be done while you're browsing in the bookstore. If you like what you see, buy the book to read more thoroughly later. The overview is always the first step of thorough reading.

Even if you already own the book and have decided to read it (or it's been assigned to you for a class) don't skip this step. It provides you with a quick glimpse of the general structure of the work. Knowing these things in advance makes the book more interesting when you slow down for a more detailed read. It also helps you to better understand and remember the material.

Preview the book

Next, go through the book a second time. Sit down and read it at a slower rate, but still not word for word. I suggest you skim at the rate of four to ten seconds per page. Force yourself to move quickly.

Obviously, you're not reading all the words. You're skimming. I read the headings and the first sentence of some of the paragraphs. I try to get a feel for the author's main case and his progression of thought.

This is more aggressive reading than you did in the overview, but still ca-

sual. Don't linger, though. Force yourself to push ahead, turning the page every four to ten seconds. You might even break the book in as you go, gently pressing each page back as you move forward. You will be amazed at how much you'll absorb during this quick preview phase. When I interview authors on radio, this is the way I "read" many of their books. I don't have time to cover everything, in my preparation or on the air. This step gives me a thorough grasp of the contents, though, in a very brief mount of time.

QUICK SUMMARY

Overview

- Get a sense of the book in 10-20 minutes.
- Read jacket copy, contents, skim preface & introduction, read conclusion (last 3 pages) and skim the index. Note publisher and date of publication.
- Quickly page through the entire book at the rate of 2-3 seconds per page.
- Determine if you want to read the book more thoroughly, give it away, or file it for future reference.

Preview

- Skim entire book at a slower rate (4-10 seconds per page), breaking the book in as you go.
- Look for structure, outline, key facts and concepts.
- Write a quick summary for the book in pencil on title page.

Read

- Preview each chapter again before you read it to get the structure (4-10 seconds per page).
- Read every word at the fastest comfortable speed using a pointer so you don't wander, hesitate, regress, or lose your place. Mark the margin, but don't underline the text.
- Write a 1-4 sentence summary in pencil at the beginning of the chapter. This serves as a quick overview of the content of the chapter.
- Sketch a quick outline or recall pattern.

Post-view immediately

- Re-read the chapter quickly, focusing on marked sections, interacting with the text.
- Refine your 1-4 sentence summary at the beginning of the chapter, if necessary.
- Review at regular intervals, looking over recall patterns and summary material.

When you're done, write a summary sentence or two on the title page capturing the main thrust of the book. Answer the question, "What is this book about?" or "What is the author trying to accomplish?" Use pencil because you may want to change the summary after you've read the book more thoroughly.

The second step of our approach will take 20 to 40 minutes at four to ten seconds per page, depending on the book. When you're done, you will have gone through the entire book twice – overviewing and previewing – in about an hour,

with a summary statement capturing the central idea of the book.

This "layering" method imbeds the book's basic ideas in your mind in a way that won't happen if you simply start at the first page and read through to the end. The first layer – the overview – gives you a general sense of the material and allows you to decide whether the book is worth reading or not. The preview clarifies the basic content and organization of the book, and gives you the author's approach and main argument.

Read the book

Now it's time to actually read the book. This can be done in multiple sessions, one chapter at a sitting. Start by quickly previewing the chapter once again, 4-10 seconds per page. This is important. It reacquaints you with the material and its structure, but takes only minutes. Then read the text word for word, as quickly as possible. Don't linger and don't regress (don't reread what you've just been over). Don't stop to underline, either. It slows you down. Instead, use a pencil and make a vertical line in the margin to mark those things worthy of note. You'll come back to those places later. You don't want to lag here, even though you're reading carefully.

Complete this phase by writing, in pencil, a summary sentence or two in the big white space above the title at the beginning of each chapter. Use pencil because you may want to make refinements later. Try to capture the main point of the section.

This is one of the most useful exercises of our reading plan. You cannot summarize an author's ideas unless you have thought a bit about what exactly he is trying to say. Further, your summaries will serve as quick reminders of each chapter's contents when you review the book in the future. Reading them quickly in sequence gives you a quick synopsis of the book in your own words.

Post-view the chapter immediately

Finally, go back over the chapter one more time right after you've read it word for word focusing on the marks you made in the margin. Review the material, interacting with the author's ideas and making further notations in the margins if you like.



At the end of each chapter or in the flyleaf you might want to sketch a quick outline or recall pattern. Look at the summary you placed at the beginning of the chapter and see if it's accurate and precise. Refine it if you need to.

Go through each chapter in the same way. Preview it, skimming quickly, then read it carefully but at a good clip, making your notations during the post-view. If you take a break and resume your reading a day or more later, review your summaries at the beginning of the book and each preceding chapter before you pick up where you left off. This will only take a few short minutes, but will set the stage for your next session.

This is aggressive reading. When you're done, you will have gone through the book at least four times in a fairly short period of time working from the whole to the parts to the whole again. You'll have brief chapter summaries and an outline – handy tools for quick review in the future – and a solid grasp of the material.

In the future when you simply skim through the book again, all the information will come back to you. You'll be able to clearly state who the author is, his main point, the structure (development) of his thought, if you think his views are correct (why or why not) and what difference it makes to you. You will have mastered the book, not just read it.

I think you might also discover something else: Going through the book four times in this way will actually seem to go faster than reading it the "old" way.

Double your reading speed instantly

Let me give you an additional tip that has the potential to double your reading speed in one step. Use your finger as a pointer and move it along underneath the sentences at the fastest comfortable speed you can read. You can read above your finger, ahead of it, or behind it, whichever is most comfortable for you.

You might substitute a pencil or pen as your pointer, as long as you don't give in to the temptation to underline

during your main reading. Instead, make short vertical lines in the margin next to sections you want to focus on in the post-view. Don't do any underlining until that stage.

Using some kind of pointer to keep you moving forward forces you to read more aggressively, with more concentration. Don't be afraid to push yourself a little bit. Go as fast as you can and still grasp the material. Don't stop, pause, or reread portions of what you've just covered (regressing). Keep up with your moving pointer, just like following the bouncing ball.



***I am convinced that
anyone is fully capable
of mastering six books
a year***



Again, this is not "speed reading," taking in whole paragraphs or pages in a glance. You're still reading every word just as you normally would, but you're using your pointer as a pacer, increasing your speed and keeping your eyes from wandering. You'll be surprised how dramatically your reading speed will increase. If you're reading 150 words a minute (a relatively slow rate) you can jump to 300 words per minute simply by consistently using your finger as a speed guide. Just move it underneath the words and follow along. Your comprehension and retention will improve too, even though you are moving faster.

Finding the time

I am convinced that anyone is fully capable of mastering six books a year, but I also know it will not happen by itself. It takes a plan (which I've just given you) and the will to apply a modest amount of time to your goal. Thirty minutes three or four times a week is all you need. But how do you find the time? It's easier than you think.

The first thing you can do is turn off the TV. The average person watches two to three hours of TV a day. Even the slowest of readers can read 50 books a year in that time. Devote some of that TV time to reading. Skip the nightly news. It's the worst possible source of information and will almost always put you in a sour mood. Instead, use that half hour to read. You'll be amazed at how much you'll get done and how civilized you'll feel as a result.

Here are some other ways to redeem pockets of useful time for reading. Try getting up half an hour earlier in the morning. Go into a quiet room before the household is up and read. Or redeem the time you spend sitting in the bathroom. Just ten minutes a day will get even slow readers 150 pages a month. That's six books a year. I also keep a book with me in the car so I can read while waiting for an appointment or when I'm stuck in line.

Just do it

Now it's time for action. You have the plan. Now you only have to do two more things.

First, I want you to think for a moment, what six books would you like to have mastered a year from now? Consider *Mere Christianity*, the short classic by C.S. Lewis, or Gregory Ganssle's *Thinking about God*. Each is a wonderful little tome that is very accessible to the average reader.

Second, decide how you're going to redeem 10-20 minutes per day for your personal reading time. Opportunities abound, if you look for them. Carve out the time and then protect it.

This is something anyone can do. One year from now you will be a deeper, better informed person as a result. Just choose your titles carefully, then apply the plan. This may be one of the most rewarding habits you'll ever develop. I hope you start today.

Reprinted with permissions from the Jan/Feb 2008 issue of Solid Ground which can be found at www.str.org.



*There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul.*

*Some times I feel discouraged,
And think my work's in vain,
But then the Holy Spirit
Revives my soul again.*

*There is a balm in Gilead
To make the wounded whole;
There is a balm in Gilead
To heal the sin-sick soul.*

*If you can't preach like Peter,
If you can't pray like Paul,
Just tell the love of Jesus,
And say He died for all.*

Is There Balm in Gilead?

reviewed by Jeff Dykstra

Reformed Christians often assume – generally accurately – that anything produced by the culture around us is motivated by rebellion against God’s word. Our recognition of our culture’s hostility to God makes it seem very strange that a recent Pulitzer-Prize-winning novel should have a title, a cover, a setting, a main character, and themes that are compelling to Reformed Christians. Perhaps it should not be so surprising when we think about the background of the author, Marilynne Robinson, who – like the main character – attends a Congregationalist Church in Iowa. After all, since Congregationalism arose originally in England partly as a Calvinist response to the corruption in the state church in England, there should be some harmony between Robinson and Reformed people. Is there balm in *Gilead*?

Cover gives more than a clue

First, let’s look at that title, and the cover. Gilead, Iowa, the hometown of the main character – John Ames, a Congregationalist minister – was heavily in-

involved in the abolitionist movement that sought to bring freedom to black slaves in America before the Civil War. Black slaves themselves would have often sung the spiritual “There Is a Balm in Gilead,” which was based loosely on a couple of verses in Jeremiah (8:22, 46:11) that are “about the presence in Gilead of a messiah, a word very similar in its origin to the meaning of balm, or purifier” (*Wikipedia*). *Wikipedia* says further that “Christians believe that the balm, the messiah, appeared in Gilead in the person of Jesus Christ and for that reason the term has come into spiritual meaning in the English language, including its songs and literature.”

The cover of the edition that I read of *Gilead* confirms that view of the “Balm of Gilead.” It shows a portion of a door panel – probably from the old church in which Reverend John Ames preaches – in which the crosspieces between the wooden panes of the door form a cross. In this sense the balm of Gilead certainly appears to be identified on the cover as the gospel of Christ.

Real balm for real woes

Reverend John Ames certainly is in need of balm, of comfort, both for himself and for others. The conflict in the novel centers not so much on whether Christ is that comfort (as Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism tells us), but whether we can feel His comfort in the Gilead of our difficult daily lives. Many of us perhaps find it easier to believe in Christ’s comfort in the abstract than to apply it in the concrete gritty details of sometimes strained family relationships and the aging of ourselves and others. John Ames reveals his struggles with his loneliness and envy of others’ large families after losing both wife and newborn son at a young age. Then at seventy-six, deeply in love with his second, much younger wife, who has borne him a son, he suffers from the knowledge that his heart is dangerously weak. The entire novel is his letter to his seven-year-old son, so that if John Ames dies suddenly, the son will have some understanding of his absent father. The minister reveals that his father and

Gilead

by Marilynne Robinson

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004
256 pages; Paperback \$14



grandfather, also preachers, have also felt a need for comfort in the face of what they perceived as the barrenness of Gilead. His grandfather, an abolitionist before and during the American Civil War, is broken finally by the fact that neither the people of Gilead nor his own son (the narrator's father) shares his burning passion for justice for the slaves. John Ames' father has nearly the opposite concern in his reaction to his own father's involvement in abolitionist violence, and becomes a strong pacifist. John Ames himself struggles with just how to integrate his own convictions into his preaching without doing violence to his calling or the word of God. Both he and his father also struggle with how to relate to and remember John Ames' spiritually strayed brother Edward. Finally, and most importantly, John Ames struggles with how to deal with another prodigal, the son Jack of his Presbyterian minister friend Boughton.

What makes this central conflict more poignant is the fact that the young Jack Boughton is actually originally named after John Ames. Jack's return to Gilead after more than twenty years away continually strains Reverend Ames' spiritual resources. Reverend Ames does not know whether to forgive Jack (who has never offended him personally in any meaningful way), to warn others against him (without any certain knowledge of Jack's intentions), or to minister to him in some way (even as Jack seemingly mocks Reverend Ames' Calvinist beliefs). One of the ways Reverend Ames' struggles are shown is in his difficulty with getting sufficient sleep. He feels both that he needs to pray more to sleep well, and that he needs to sleep more to pray – and love – properly. When we suffer emotionally or spiritually (for ourselves or others), we feel these same strains and tensions.

Well-expressed wonder

Part of what sustains Reverend Ames in all his troubles is his keen sense, over and over, of the beauty of life (even in the shadow of death) and of the joy awaiting us in heaven. Here are just two samples of such a poetic appreciation of both this life and the next:

I have been thinking about existence lately. In fact, I have been so full of admiration for existence that I have hardly been able to enjoy it properly. As I was walking up to the church this morning, I passed that row of big oaks by the war memorial – if you remember them – and I thought of another morning, fall a year or two ago, when they were dropping their acorns thick as hail almost.... [T]here was such energy in the things transpiring among those trees, like a storm, like travail.... and I thought, It is all still new to me. I have lived my life on the prairie and a line of oak trees can still astonish me. (56-57)

Boughton says he has more ideas about heaven every day. He said, "Mainly I just think about the splendors of the world and multiply by two...." So he's just sitting there multiplying the feel of the wind by two, multiplying the smell of the grass by two. (147)

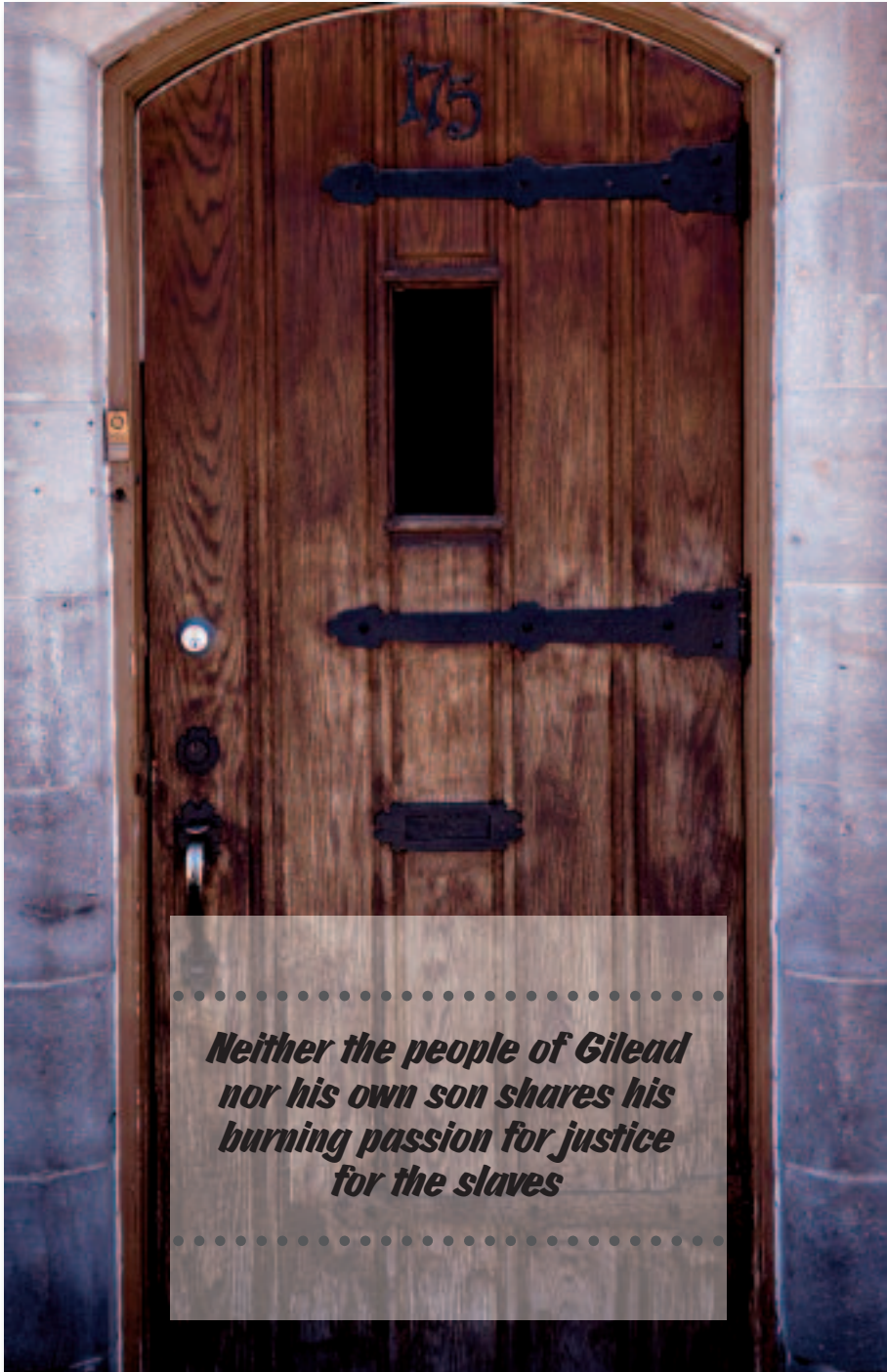
Although Reverend Ames copes with life (and his approaching death) through a simple gratitude for God's creation, dealing with Jack Boughton is not so easy. The end of the novel shows some of Reverend Ames' tensions resolved by his willingness (worked by God's grace) to do two things – to risk himself emotionally

by loving (rather than simply tolerating) the prodigal, and to then leave that prodigal to God's working. After Jack reveals a secret about his own past that Reverend Ames cannot pass on even to the young Boughton's father, Reverend Ames finally blesses Jack with the same blessing that we receive from Numbers 6:24-26 in church. Since Jack is leaving Gilead, Reverend Ames cannot, of course, tell the effect of his benediction, but significantly, the novel ends with echoes of two earlier themes. First, Reverend Ames stresses to his son his belief that Gilead is, in all its backwater barrenness, a beautiful place in God's creation:

To me it seems rather Christlike to be as unadorned as this place is, as little regarded. I can't help imagining that you leave sooner or later, and it's fine if you have done that, or you mean to do it. This whole town does look like whatever hope becomes after it begins to weary a little, then weary a little more. But hope deferred is still hope. I love this town. I think sometimes of going into the ground here as a last wild gesture of love – I too will smolder away the time until the great and general incandescence. (246-247)

Finally, Reverend Ames changes his attitude to prayer and rest in his fading life. Instead of praying for the peace that will give him better sleep, or sleeping so that he can pray more properly, he looks forward confidently in the peace of Christ to refreshment in both prayer and slumber:

I'll pray that you grow up a brave man in a brave country. I will pray you find a way to be useful. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep. (247)



Two cautions

Two cautions: First, I realize that the hymn at the beginning of this article could be seen as Arminian, depending on whether you interpret the line

“He died for all” as violating the idea of limited atonement spoken of in our *Canons of Dort*. In the same way, the novel’s treatment of prodigals like Ames’ brother Edward and Jack Boughton could be seen either as naïvely univer-

salist (“In the end, God loves everybody...”), which is wrong; or as simply hopeful (“Who knows what God may do in the lives of the straying sheep, even when we have lost contact with them?”), which is right.

Secondly, Marilynne Robinson distances herself from what an interviewer calls “fundamentalists” by stressing the complexity of Scriptural interpretation. Some of her minister narrator’s applications of the Old Testament, or of Protestant theology, may strike readers as rather strained. In the same interview, she also criticizes some of those who apply their faith to politics in what she feels is a “coercive and exclusivist” way. It is not clear to me what her attitude to Reformed participation in politics might be. Thoughtful readers and listeners can draw their own conclusions.

In the end, thoughtful readers can indeed draw not just conclusions, but some real insight into the nature of Christian compassion, from a novel that makes its readers both think and feel deeply.

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Jeff Dykstra is an English Teacher at Immanuel Christian School In Winnipeg, Manitoba. 

The Canadian, Christian, best-selling author you've never heard of. . .

RALPH CONNOR

by Michael Wagner

Though his first novel was only a moderate success, after he published his second book he soon became one of the best-selling authors in the world. In fact the writing of this Canadian missionary and Presbyterian pastor was so popular that his first three novels sold a combined total of over five million copies... in the early 1900s.

Back then his name was known throughout the English-speaking world and he could number famous people such as Henry Ford and US President Woodrow Wilson among his fans. Who was this man? Charles W. Gordon, better known by his pen name, Ralph Connor.

Gordon was a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Canada and first served as a missionary in southern Al-

berta in the 1890s before becoming pastor of a church in Winnipeg. He began writing fiction under the name of Ralph Connor in the 1890s to generate support for mission work in western Canada. Many of Connor's earliest novels had a strong evangelical Protestant punch and his heroes tended to be Presbyterian ministers.

While Connor may no longer be well known among most contemporary Christians his popularity decades ago shows that Canadian culture was at one time very receptive to an overtly evangelical Christian perspective. By today's standards Connor's novels would be seen as backward or even intolerant because evangelical Protestantism triumphs over other influences. But his novels express the sincere sentiments of an earlier period of Canadian history.

Gordon used his writing as Ralph Connor to promote his Christian vision for Canada. It was a distinctively evangelical vision in the sense that he was calling people to a personal commitment to Christ, to read the Bible and pray. This comes across especially clearly in some of his earliest and most popular novels. Among these are *Black Rock*, and *The Sky Pilot*.

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Black Rock: A Tale of the Selkirks* also known as *Jim Craig's Battle for Black Rock

Black Rock is written from the first person perspective of Ralph Connor, in this case an artist working as "an illustrator and designer for railway and like publications." Black Rock is the name of a fictitious town in the Selkirk Mountains of western Canada, a focal point for the forestry and mining industries in the region. The miners and lumbermen spend their free time and their money in Black Rock on rest and recreation – mostly vice, in fact, especially drinking at the saloon.



213 Pages; Paperback; \$10 CDN

Within this environment labors a Presbyterian minister, Mr. Craig, intent on turning the men from their hard-drinking ways and to Jesus Christ. He manages to organize an Abstinence League among some of the men. But many are lured back to a night of drunken revelry by a clever saloonkeeper and his anti-abstinence cohorts. The death of one of the revelers, who had violated his own abstinence pledge, then leads to a reconstitution of the League on a stronger basis than before. And when the saloonkeeper's infant dies, he too turns his back on alcohol.

A major theme within the book is the struggle within men to overcome

their temptation to do what feels good rather than to do what is right. The miners and lumbermen spend countless hours at work to earn their wages, but when they are given time off, they feel an uncontrollable urge to go to town and get drunk, spending their hard-earned dollars on temporary pleasure. Then they go back to work and start all over again. Craig thus refers to Black Rock as “this devil’s campground, where a man’s lust is his only law, and when, from sheer monotony, a man must betake himself to the only excitement of the place – that offered by the saloon.”

In this kind of situation only God’s divine help can enable a man to resist such temptation and live clean. Only those who turn to Christ will succeed and get ahead. The explicitly Christian and evangelistic theme of the book is unmistakable. Early in the book, for example, Craig gives his own testimony of personal salvation. Old man Nelson turns to Christ, and later he also gives his personal testimony:

“The old man’s voice steadied as he went on, and he grew eager as he told how he had been helped, and how the world was all different, and his heart seemed new. He spoke of

his Friend [Jesus Christ] as if He were some one that could be seen out at camp, that he knew well, and met every day.”

After his conversion Nelson is one of the most stalwart abstinence supporters. And he presents his testimony just before one of the major events of the book, the formation of Black Rock Presbyterian Church.

Craig is concerned about more than just his local congregation, however. He is concerned for western Canada as the railway arrives and opens up the region. “With the eye of a general he surveyed the country, fixed the strategic points which the Church must seize upon.... ‘The Church must be in with the railway; she must have a hand in the shaping of the country. If society crystallizes without her influence, the country is lost, and British Columbia will be another trapdoor to the bottomless pit.’”

One of the final chapters, entitled “Graeme’s New Birth,” focuses on the spiritual awakening of one of the book’s main characters. Graeme returns to his parents’ house in Ontario. His father was apparently a Presbyterian minister. Connor writes, “I saw Graeme as a new man the night he talked theology with his fa-

ther. The old minister was a splendid Calvinist, of heroic type, and as he discoursed of God’s sovereignty and election, his face glowed and his voice rang out.”

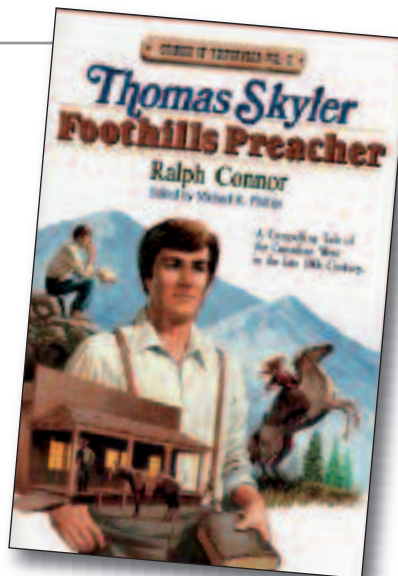
Graeme would subsequently have opportunity to testify to his faith in Christ while in conversation with some old friends. One of the old friends, Rattray, takes the Lord’s name in vain, and Graeme quickly rebukes him for doing so. At that point another fellow, Beetles, replies that, “no one takes seriously any longer the Christ myth.” Graeme responds, “I fooled with that for some time, Beetles, but it won’t do. You can’t build a religion that will take the devil out of a man on a myth. That won’t do the trick. I don’t want to argue about it, but I am quite convinced the myth theory is not reasonable, and besides, it won’t work.” Then after discussing some of the events that occurred in Black Rock, and on the way back to Ontario, he states, “That’s why I believe in Jesus Christ, and that’s why I think it a crime to fling His name about!”

There was much evangelistic work yet to be done as western Canada was being developed and filled with settlers, but Craig and his fellow-laborers were rising to the task.

***The Sky Pilot:*
A Tale of the Foothills
also known as
*Thomas Skyler, Foothills Preacher***

Like *Black Rock*, *The Sky Pilot* is written from the first person perspective of Ralph Connor. In this instance Connor is a college student who comes to visit a cousin on his ranch in the foothills of southern Alberta. After his arrival, he becomes the schoolmaster of the local town, Swan Creek.

As schoolmaster Connor receives a note from a missionary who wants to come out to Swan Creek to plant a church. The news that a missionary is coming was welcomed by the few young



169 Pages; Paperback; \$10 CDN

families in the region, but resented by many of the single men. They saw “the establishment of a church institution” as “an objectionable and impertinent as well as unnecessary proceeding.” One long-time resident of the area (known as the “Old Timer”) who was particularly negative towards the arrival of a missionary nicknamed him “The Sky Pilot,” and the term stuck.

Connor does not state the denominational affiliation of the missionary, whose name is Arthur Wellington Moore. However, when Moore demonstrates his proficiency at playing baseball, he is asked where he learned to play so well, and he replies, “Oh! I used to play in Princeton a little.” That comment is significant

WHERE CAN YOU GET RALPH CONNOR'S BOOKS?

Many of Ralph Connor's books are available for free on the Internet where they can be downloaded or read online. See: www.gutenberg.org, www.manybooks.net, and www.classicreader.com among other places. Some titles are still in print and can be purchased at places like www.amazon.com

Edited, modernized versions of two of his books are also available. In 1988 the prolific Christian novelist Michael Phillips (he is the author of more than 50 books) edited two Ralph Connor titles – *Black Rock: A Tale of the Selkirks* and *The Sky Pilot: A Tale of the Foothills*. He reissued them in abridged formats under the titles: *Jim Craig's Battle for Black Rock* and *Thomas Skyler: Foothills Preacher*. Inheritance Publications recently gained permission to reprint Phillip's edited versions so both books can be had from them for only \$10 each (see www.RalphConnor.notlong.com).

because Princeton Seminary was a prominent bastion of orthodox Calvinism during the late 1800s and early 1900s. It was a leading seminary of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., and had an international reputation for its defense of historic Protestantism against the cancerous inroads of theological liberalism. As such, it is reasonable to conclude that this character, Moore, was a conservative Presbyterian of sorts.

Before the baseball episode, a number of local ranchmen give Moore a hard time at his inaugural Sunday service. Moore realizes that things went poorly for him, yet resolves, "But I am right! It's true! I feel it's true! Men can't live without Him, and be men!" Shortly thereafter Moore is called upon to fill in for a fellow who was to be playing baseball, and when the ranch men see his tremendous skill at the game, he is hailed as a hero and the resentment towards him quickly dissipates.

With his newfound status, Moore continues regular services, now with much more success. "The preaching was always of the simplest kind, abstract questions being avoided and the concrete in those wonderful Bible tales, dressed in modern and in western garb, set forth."

One of the ranchers, Bruce, begins to drink his life away. He no longer takes care of his cattle, his home or himself. Moore asks why no one helps Bruce, but is told that "a man ought to look after himself." Moore agrees but states that a man should also look after his brother a little. "You all do just what pleases you regardless of any other, and so you help one another down." People are, to some degree, responsible for each other. "This was certainly a new doctrine for the West; an uncomfortable doctrine to practice, interfering seriously with personal liberty, but in The Pilot's way of viewing things, difficult to escape."

The Old Timer is a widower with a teenage daughter named Gwen. Gwen's mother died when she was quite young, so she was raised by her father with the help of some Indian companions. Gwen

emerges as a talented cowgirl, and is admired by the ranchers who know her. Moore introduces her to Christianity and Bible stories, which she eagerly receives.

"And, as more and more it grew upon The Pilot that the story he was reading, so old to him and to all he had ever met, was new to one in that listening group, his face began to glow and his eyes to blaze, and he saw and showed me things that night I had never seen before, nor have I seen them since. The great figure of the Gospels lived, moved before our eyes. We saw Him bend to touch the blind, we heard Him speak His marvelous teaching, we felt the throbbing excitement of the crowds that pressed against Him."

Gwen is especially delighted to find out that her mother was a Christian and is therefore in Heaven with Christ. Noting that Gwen's mother sees Him all the time, Moore goes on to say that "He sees us, too, and hears us speak, and knows our thoughts." Gwen's introduction to

the Bible and its message changed her. "The experiences of the evening had made the world new to her. It could never be the same to her again."

Moore and Gwen become close companions, and he reads to her frequently from the Bible and also from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. However, Gwen's new faith is sorely tried when she has a ranching accident and loses the use of her legs. She becomes quite angry at God. Moore is able to comfort her, though, by making an analogy between her situation and the growth of flowers in a nearby canyon, both of which are very dear to Gwen. The canyon is like a large wound in the prairie, and within it grows the most beautiful flowers. In the same way, the "fruits of the Spirit," the most beautiful character traits, will take root within Gwen due to the trial of her handicap. As Moore puts it, "The fruits – I'll read 'flowers' – of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control, and some of these grow only in the canyon." Gwen was tremendously encouraged by this teaching.

Moore wants to erect a church building in Swan Creek, but even some of his parishioners oppose the idea because they think it would be too expensive. When Gwen hears of this she uses her influence among some of the ranchers to help raise the funding necessary for the task. Thus Moore triumphs as his church is built. However, he soon falls seriously ill, and is unable to lead the first service in the new church building. Shortly thereafter he dies.

Moore's burial service is conducted by his "chief," probably a denominational superintendent. This man had been a pioneer missionary himself. "But out of his kindly blue eye looked the heart of a hero, and as he spoke to us we felt the prophet's touch and caught a gleam of the prophet's fire." The hero of the book was dead, but not before endearing himself to all the people of the region, pointing many to the Savior, helping the ranchers to be better men, and especially encouraging Gwen through her trials.

Childrens Books

Mr. Pusskins: A Love Story

by Sam Lloyd
Atheneum Books, 2006
32 pages; Hardcover; \$14

reviewed by Jon Dykstra



One of my favorite teachers was an English professor who would point out how the works of all the West's great authors were either inspired by, contending with, or a derivation of something in the Bible. It turns out that what's true for the greatest literature in Western Civilization is also true for *Mr. Pusskins: A Love Story*.

Now this is a great kids' book any way you measure it: the pictures are big and bold, simple but still emotion-laden, and the author captures the very essence of "cat" with his main character. But what really sets this picture book apart is the biblically-based moral. Actually I'm not entirely sure the author did it consciously, but to any Christian the parallels to one of Jesus most memorable parables will just leap out – this is the tale of *The Prodigal Cat*.

Mr. Pusskins is a well-loved and well-treated cat. His master, little Emily, adores him. However Mr. Pusskins, as cats are prone to be, is rather self-centered and doesn't realize how good he has it. He wants more and so one night he leaves to discover the rest of the world. He has fun, at the start. He plays naught tricks with the Pesky Cat Gang and goes all the places he isn't supposed to go. But soon enough, after his friends abandon him and he gets lost and dirty, he starts to realize just how good he had it and starts to wonder if his master might still, possibly, love him.

I'd highly recommend this book. Little children will love the big bold pictures and parents can use it as an opportunity to talk about ingratitude. One caveat: little Emily at one point uses the expression "thank goodness" so I want to warn those who regard this as a too close substitute for the similar expression that takes God's name in vain, that it does happen once.

The True Story of NOAH'S ARK

by Tom Dooley and Bill Looney
Master Books, 2003
72 pages; hardcover; \$17.50

reviewed by Jeanette Dykstra

This is the book I wish I'd written. The Noah's Ark story as told in the Bible often brings up a lot of questions about what it must have been like to build, for so many years, such a huge structure, as designed by the Divine Architect.

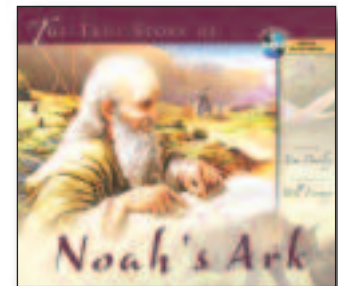
What was the reaction of Noah's family, his neighbors, his countrymen? Where did he get all the equipment and supplies? How did he and his family cope with the ridicule and jeering he no doubt received? And then, after more than a hundred years, what an awesome sight! The animals arrived from far and wide and entered the ark.

The talented author and the creative illustrator have built on the biblical facts in a way that is honoring to our Heavenly Father and gives him the glory.

This book is great for reading to younger children (5 to 7) but older ones (8 to 12) will enjoy reading it for themselves. The beautiful illustrations will generate awe and many questions.

As a bonus, the book ends with a closer look at the ark's size and structure; with illustrations it compares its volume to that of a very large number of railroad cars, and its 450-foot length to that of a standard 300-foot football field.

I highly recommend this book for the little ones, the older ones, and, I'll bet, dad and mom will be fascinated by it too. Also, a great tool for primary teachers.



Teens Books

DO HARD THINGS A Teenage Rebellion against Low Expectations

by Alex & Brett Harris
Multnomah Books, 2008
256 pages; Hardcover; \$17

reviewed by Yvonne Harink



Twins Alex and Brett Harris – nineteen-year-old website designers, filmmakers, and now authors – want to challenge Christian youth to live by a higher standard.

“Some people look at our generation and the challenges we face and despair. We don’t. In every generation that faces intense challenges, God raises up those who will be his representatives to do his work. And often those representatives are young. We see this in Scripture when young people like Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Jeremiah, Ester and Mary were chosen by God for the time in which they lived – and they changed the course of nations.”

The Harris boys argue a large reason for low performing teens is that we believe in the myth of adolescence. Because we expect low performance, we get it – ideas have consequences.

While our society says that teenage years are a time to avoid responsibility, the Bible teaches otherwise. Alex and Brett want to inspire teens with a simple but very big idea. Teen years give a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for huge accomplishments – as individuals and as a generation. This alternative path can be described with three simple words: “do hard things.”

In the context of stories and anecdotes from their personal experience, Alex and Brett examine five “hard things”:

- 1) Things that are outside your comfort zone – taking that scary first step.
- 2) Things that go beyond what is expected or required – raising the bar.
- 3) Things that are too big to accomplish alone – learning about the power of collaboration.
- 4) Things that don’t earn an immediate payoff – doing small, painful hard things.
- 5) Things that challenge the cultural norm – daring to take a stand and go against the crowd.

In conclusion, this generation of teens is urged to respond to the Gospel. Responding means that we must

repent of our sins and trust and believe that Christ has done the ultimate hard thing for us. Believing this truth allows us to confidently and joyfully do hard things to the honour and glory of our Creator.

I found this book encouraging and would recommend it, not only for teens, but for any age and for both individual reading or group discussion (a study guide is also available).

This book is available for \$10 on the Harris brothers’ website www.therebelution.com

Dr. Oma: The Healing Wisdom of Countess Juliana von Stolberg

by Ethel Herr
P&R Publishing, 2006
206 pages; Softcover; \$12

reviewed by Bernice Vreugdenhil

Dr. Oma is a book well worth reading. The title character is Juliana von Stolberg – mother of Willem of Orange. And Willem of Orange was, as the author says, “The George Washington of Holland who began a revolution that finally won that country its independence from Spain.” Her granddaughter Maria comes to live with Juliana during Holland’s fight for freedom from Spain. There Maria is taught the reformed faith and the herbal healing secrets that her Oma is well known for. Oma Juliana is a wonderful example of wisdom and strength when confronted with heartbreak and adversity.

One caution: Ethel Herr gives a *very* accurate accounting of Willem of Orange’s evil second wife Anna von Saxony who was *not* a character of good moral standards. The author is true to history when she writes about Anna’s lifestyle which means this is not a book for the very young.

However, mothers would be wise to read this book with their 11-14 year old daughter(s) and discuss the author’s notes upon completing this book. The reason that “the Dutch people have given Juliana a special place of reverence in their hearts” comes clear in this novel. She lived her life trusting in God for everything. Historical fiction books are a favorite of mine and this particular one brings history alive.



Christian bookstores usually aren't

by Jon Dykstra

Most Christian bookstores are alike in that they all carry an unsettling mix of the sacred and the shallow with decidedly more of the latter than the former. But outright heresy was once rare – just an occasional *Gospel of Judas* here, or Bishop Spong book there – so it was possible to give the bookstore owners the benefit of the doubt.

Or at least it was possible until Catholic catechisms and papal plates started appearing. These are usually set a tactful aisle or two away from the selection of Martin Luther biographies but it hardly matters – having both in one store exposes the cynical nature of these “Christian” businessmen. Instead of lovingly serving their customers (Matthew 28:39) they are concerned with moving product. If some of that product denounces the Pope as the devil’s apprentice, and some of it reveres him as the very Vicar of Christ, no matter. What matters is whether the product will move.

In one of their more eye-opening and downright depressing episodes the Whitehorse Inn radio program (whitehorseinn.org) exposed the utter lack of Christian understanding in this industry. They sent an interviewer down to the annual Christian booksellers convention and asked 60 people to explain what the gospel was. Only one of these industry representatives could answer correctly.

Is it any surprise then that these stores peddle books like:

- *The Shack*: a best seller that portrays two of the Trinity as women.
- *Heaven and Hell*: a novel about a dead Christian husband who loves his deceased unbelieving wife so much he sets out to retrieve her from Hell.
- *Become a Better You*: a self-help manual by a preacher, Joel Osteen, who doesn’t like talking about the Cross, sin or Jesus.

Now some of these very same books are appearing on our shelves, at home and in our church libraries. We seem to be taking our guidance on what we should buy and read from these “Christian” bookstores. We’re relying on their discernment.

That’s a mistake. We mustn’t keep thinking the best of Christian bookstores – most simply don’t deserve it.

Adults Books

A Promise Kept: The Story of an Unforgettable Love

by Robertson McQuilkin
Tyndale, 200690 pages;
Hardcover; \$13 Can.

reviewed by Sarah Vandergugten



Robertson McQuilkin served as president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina (now Columbia International University) from 1968-1990. His was a prestigious position, one he filled with enthusiasm and competence. Yet in 1990, he gave it all up to stay home to care for his wife. *A Promise Kept* tells the story of how he came to this momentous decision and what followed.

In 1978 at age fifty-five, Muriel McQuilkin began to show signs of Alzheimer’s. In the early stages the family coped, making adjustments here and there, but gradually it became evident that Muriel would need full-time care. Robertson refused to commit her to a home; instead he became her fulltime caregiver for the next thirteen years.

In a moving resignation speech he declared that actually the decision was easy (“Google” the author’s name and you can hear a recording of this speech – it’s worth the listen). Muriel was the most content when he was physically present. When he was not, she was fearful and anxious. Clearly, she needed him fulltime. Robertson referred to his marriage vows, and that as a man of integrity he would remain true to his promise to care for Muriel until “death do us part.” For him, it was also a matter of fairness. Muriel had supported him in his work for forty years. Could he do less, now that she needed him so desperately? In the end, the decision was not hard; he considered it an honor to care for her.

In one sense, this book is an “easy read” – only ninety pages. But it is profoundly moving. Robertson’s tender care for Muriel exemplifies the love of Christ for his church. This man came to understand that doing what seems burdensome is actually freeing. “My imprisonment turned out to be a delightful liberation to love more fully than I had ever known. We found the chains of confining circumstance to be, not instruments of torture, but bonds to hold us closer.” In Muriel’s helpless dependence on him, Robertson sees an analogy of his own dependence on God. Profound lessons in a simply-told tale. Husbands and wives, read this book, but do have a box of tissues nearby.

Fuse of Armageddon

by Sigmund Brouwer & Hank Hanegraaff
Tyndale House, 2007
400 pages; Paperback; \$14
reviewed by Marty VanDriel



What would happen if a popular television evangelist took it upon himself to speed up the “end times” that he preaches about so powerfully to millions of viewers by desecrating a Muslim holy site in the hopes of stirring up the war to end the world?

Sigmund Brouwer, well known for his series of children’s books, and Christian apologist Hank Hanegraaff of the radio program “The Bible Answer Man” have teamed up to offer an enjoyable thriller. The authors consider the effects of the preaching of the fictional Rev. Jonathan Silver, who for years has delivered hell and brimstone sermons to his viewers, promising that the real battle of Armageddon will be taking place in Israel in the very near future.

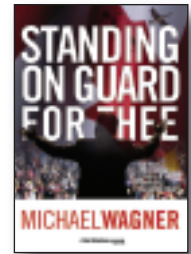
While in the Holy Land, Rev. Silver and a group of American tourists are kidnapped by an extremist Palestinian terrorist group, led by the crazed and mysterious Safady. The hero of the novel, Mulvaney Quinn, is called in as a hostage negotiator – although he himself is just one step ahead of the law, being wanted by authorities back home in the U.S. for a gruesome murder.

It’s clear from this book (and from their earlier work together in their *Last Disciple* series) that the authors believe that the prophecies of the book of *Revelation* have already been at least partially fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Brouwer and Hanegraaff have painted a picture of how misguided theology can lead to a wrong viewpoint of the modern political picture in the Middle East, with potentially dire results.

The plot is a bit improbable at times – but what thriller isn’t? I enjoyed the twists and turns of the tale, and was glad to be able to read a “page-turner” that was without the sex and foul language that is so prevalent in most fiction.

Standing on Guard for Thee

by Michael Wagner
Freedom Press, 2007
274 pages; Hardcover; \$40 Can
reviewed by Ken Dykstra



Interested in Canadian politics? Then this is the book for you. The subtitle of Michael Wagner’s book – *The Past, Present and Future of Canada’s Christian Right* – says it all. In this book you’ll find a thorough review of rightwing Christian politics in Canada throughout the last century.

Beginning in the early 1900s, Wagner covers all of the major players who helped develop rightwing politics as we know it today. Some of the names are familiar, such as Ernest Manning, Ken Campbell, and Ralph Klein.

Others like Robert Thompson, Gwen Landolt and Bob Birch probably aren’t as well known, but played crucial roles nonetheless. Chapter after chapter delves into the roles each of these people had, and provides examples of their struggles and successes as they fought to shine their light in Canada.

Wagner also shows how many of the organizations that we have grown familiar with, such as the Christian Heritage Party and even *Alberta Report* magazine were started in response to political developments brought about by the left, like legalized abortion, gay marriage, and the institution of the Human Rights Tribunals (these tribunals punish for “hate crimes” anyone who dares to condemn the homosexual lifestyle as wrong).

The writing style is remarkably easy to read, and is liberally interspersed with quotes from many other writers. While written from a Christian perspective, this volume makes no attempt to sugarcoat anyone or anything. In pro-choice versus pro-life clashes, for example, Wagner documents wrongs done on both sides!

All in all this is a very educational read, and gave me an appreciation for the political battle which has been going on for many years. Wagner ends it with a sense of urgency for Christians to stand up for our beliefs and become more and more involved in our political environment.

6 ways to RAISE A READER

1. Restrict television watching drastically.
3. Keep the computer usage under control. Don’t allow too many hours on pointless computer games or in chat rooms.
3. Have books and other good reading materials within easy reach.
4. Let your children see you reading.
5. Talk about books together; play games together.
6. Visit the library often, and listen to books-on-tape when traveling.

6 ways to KEEP YOUR OFFSPRING ILLITERATE

1. Schedule your children for every activity you can think of so they won’t be bored.
2. Never talk about ideas while eating meals.
3. Keep your house neat – no books or literary magazines in sight.
4. Never read stories out loud past age two.
5. Keep the lights low – buy only 40-watt light bulbs.
6. Absolutely no reading in bed!

From Gladys Hunt’s “Honey for a Child’s Heart”

*“Submit thyself to God, and thou shalt find
God fights the battles of the will resigned.”*

– Archbishop Howell

A Score and a Bit

by Christine Farenhorst

Albert Victor Christian Edward was born in the new year of 1864. The day was January 8, and all England rejoiced in the news that the Prince and Princess of Wales now had a boy child. His grandmother, Queen Victoria, was particularly touched that this child had been given the name of her dearly beloved (and departed) husband, Prince Albert.

Two months later, after the child’s baptism, Queen Victoria gave the baby a token of her love – a statuette of her husband, the baby’s grandfather. The figure, which showed the late Prince Consort as Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, was wearing armor. An older boy would have gloried in this gift, but the small baby was very likely more content with his soother and his rattle. A verse from Timothy was inscribed on the bottom of the statuette. It read: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.” A lower panel had the words inscribed: “Given to Albert Victor Christian Edward, on the occasion of his baptism, by Victoria Regina, his grandmother and godmother, in memory of Albert, his beloved grandfather.” Yet another side panel on the gift boasted a verse:

“Walk as he walked, in faith and righteousness:
Strive, as he strove, the weak and poor to aid:
Seek not thyself but other men to bless:
So win, like him, a wreath that will not fade.”

Queen Victoria’s good wishes were, no doubt, a testimonial to her love for the dead Prince Consort, on whom she had doted to the nth degree. But it is possible that the growing young boy took his grandmother’s words (as well as his mother’s love), to heart.

A world of experience

Prince Edward, for that was the name by which the young lad was called and not Prince Albert, was trained, together with his siblings, by tutors. At the age of thirteen he was sent, for two years, aboard the ship “*Britannia*” to pass through the rigors of a cadet’s training. He was treated as all the other midshipmen were treated, and performed all the duties they had to

perform. He took his turn in all kinds of weather, day and night, stood duty in watch-keeping and going aloft, at sail drill or boat duty.

After this two year stint of rigorous training, Prince Edward, was sent on a long cruise across the Atlantic – a cruise which took nearly three years and 45,000 miles. Edward saw some of the cities of Australia, passed through Fiji, Japan, Shanghai, Hongkong, Singapore, Egypt, Palestine, Crete and Athens. The teenage boy saw much of the world and upon his return to England was enrolled at Cambridge. He was concurrently part of an army corps. Some of his fellow officers would have liked, at this point, to initiate him into “the ways of the world” but he bluntly refused saying he was a man of the world in the best sense – a Christian gentleman.

His rooms at Cambridge were small and simply furnished. His manner was friendly and although he was not outgoing, he was well-liked. His tutor wrote of him:

“As regards traits of disposition and manner, . . . he was emphatically his mother’s son. The fact cannot fail to have impressed itself upon anyone who was ever brought into personal contact with him and with the Princess of Wales. Such, for instance, was the gentle amiability of demeanor, the modesty, almost akin to a retiring bashfulness, the slight involuntary action of the head while conversing, the turn of phrase and expression in which his thoughts found readiest utterance. Along with these were mingled a cheerful geniality and good nature and a kindly consideration and forethought for the feelings of others that extended itself sometimes to an almost extraordinary minuteness of detail, which he no less manifestly inherited from the Prince of Wales.”

Prince Edward loved his mother and sisters. If they visited, he would walk and talk with them and draw his arm through that of his mother’s, press it close and smile at her. A wonderful memory enabled him to recall peoples’ names. It also enabled him to excel in history.



As a young man

On January 8, 1885, Prince Edward came of age. He was 21 years old. Prime Minister Gladstone, a godly man, wrote him a congratulatory letter in which he said that the burden of a crown which he might wear at some point in the future would give him unparalleled opportunities to do good to the almost countless numbers whom the Almighty had placed beneath the scepter of England. Prince Edward wrote back:

“I wish I were better able to answer your very kind letter, conveying not only good wishes but carrying with them reflections on the past and advice for the future. . . I assure you the letter shall have that attention which it deserves. It admirably describes much which demands my most earnest thought on this, perhaps, the most important birthday of my life. . . .”

A ten-year-old schoolboy from Liverpool penned him some birthday wishes as well:

“May it please your Royal Highness that I, a little school lad, may be permitted to wish you many happy returns of this, your great birthday; and in doing so I pray that your noble parents and yourself may long be spared to follow the example of our great and good Queen – for what would England’s history be to us English boys without its kings and queens?”

Prince Edward kindly replied in his own handwriting the day after his birthday. “January 9th, 1885, Sandringham, Norfolk. Prince Albert Victor thanks master B.H. for his letter of congratulations on his birthday, so very neatly written. He is very glad to hear that Master H. likes history and he hopes he will continue to make progress in it.”

Shortly after coming of age, Prince Edward opened a Boys’ Club in a poorer district in London. He spoke to the boys who

eyed him with awe and were very impressed that he came in person to speak to them.

“I want you. . . to remember two things. First, whatever you do, whether it is blacking a pair of shoes, practicing gymnastics, reading a book, or helping a friend – do it as well as you can. . . Secondly, never do what you know to be wrong. Often you will feel inclined, either through your own wishes or through the prompting of companions, to do something you could like, but which your conscience tells you you ought not to do. Then is the time not to give way; be brave, stand firm, refuse under any circumstances to do what you are not sure is right. . . May God bless you all, whether here or in another country.”

Prince Edward opened several homes for boys, encouraging them in speeches to persevere in doing good, and to possibly immigrate to Canadian settlements.

In 1890, at the age of 25, Prince Edward became the Duke of Clarence and the Earl of Athlone, afterwards taking his seat in the House of Commons.

One day, while boating with some officers on the River Ouse, Prince Edwards saw a little girl reaching to pluck a flower close to the water’s edge. She over-balanced and fell into the water. He immediately dove into the water, and was able, through God’s grace, to put the little girl into her mother’s arms. He was gone again before the alarmed woman could thank him properly.

Prince Edward’s engagement was announced on December 7, 1891, to his cousin, the Princess Victoria Mary of Teck. The announcement was received with joy by the British people. Preparations were made for the wedding. Edward attended the Westminster Abbey Christmas services with his father, mother, brothers, and sisters. A week or two later his 28th birthday was celebrated with gladness.

Unexpected

Then, to everyone’s dismay, he fell ill. And a week later, instead of wedding bells, the somber tones of church bells tolled his death. Cut off in the prime of his youth, with a royal inheritance before him, Prince Edward would never sit on an earthly throne.

His mother, the Princess of Wales, wrote:

“In 1888, all my five children received the Holy Communion with me, and I gave Eddy a little book and wrote in it –

*‘Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.’*

And also –

*‘Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
O Lamb of God, I come.’*

When he was gone, and lay like one sleeping, I turned to the table at his bedside and saw the little book in which were written those words and I could not help feeling that he did cling to the Cross, and that it had all come true.”

There is no way of knowing how it was exactly with Edward’s heart or why God, in His infinite wisdom, took the young crown prince out of this life. But he did. Against all expectations and hope the young man was snatched away.

We are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning Moses said in Psalm 90, and we do well to remember that rich or poor, old or young, prince or commoner, we will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ at a time we know not.

Communion with St. Paul

That God might be glorified in Addis Ababa

by Marvin Olasky

"This is Christ's body, broken for you. This is Christ's blood, shed for you." As we give out bread and wine during the Lord's Supper, the actor is Jesus, the beneficiary is personal: you.

Ads last month on Ethiopian radio spoke of a "cleft clinic," a Project CURE program for children and adults with holes in their faces and their throats. I watched one afternoon as 20 patients, usually brought by their parents, came to Paul Lim, an American plastic surgeon who recently sacrificed security and a colossal income to move with his young family to Addis Ababa, the east African country's capital.

God's mercy is evident in both the Lord's Supper and the fact that most of us are born with faces with the right number of holes. At six to eight weeks of gestation our faces usually fuse. For some reason, in some children, the parts don't fuse. They have extra holes between their noses and their lips. They need additional grace.

"We'll make his nose better," Lim (through a translator) told one mother holding her baby. "We'll make his lip better. Jesus brought us, brought me, here for him." The mom left wordlessly.

A 23-year-old who could be very pretty except for her malformation came in, looking ready to cry. She had unskilled surgery as a child and is now a teacher, with students who sometimes hoot at her. Lim: "We'll make your nose better. Jesus brought me here for you." She walked out, dazed: Will this miracle come to pass?

A teenage mom walked in holding a 1-month-old with a completely cleft lip. She sat, gazed at her baby, and smiled – no, glowed: She's in love with her baby. The father, a few years older, wearing a Michael Jordan 23 shirt, was unsmiling. When Lim said, "We will fix his lip," the mom beamed even more broadly, but the father remained stern.

Then Lim said, "Jesus brought me, brought us, here for him." The man suddenly smiled, as if just getting it, and enthusiastically shook the doctor's hand.

A 13-year-old girl slipped in, holding up her scarf to cover her mouth. She uncovered her mouth only when seated before Lim – and her reason for hiding behind her scarf was immediately obvious. Lim maintained his composure, examined her, and said to the translator, "Tell her that she will need more than one operation. We will do

everything we can to help. Jesus brought us here, brought us all here, for her."

The girl again covered her mouth as she went out. Lim mentioned to me, "That's the first time I've seen this in person. We don't have this in the U.S. – I only saw pictures before."

A 12-year-old came in with his mouth frozen in a grimace. Malnourishment had provided the base for an infection when he was 5. Now he is missing a lot of tissue, skin, and part of his mouth. He had wanted to commit suicide, but Lim said, "We can help you. Jesus brought me, brought us here, for you." The grimace did not, could not (for now) change – but it will.

A father arrived from 50 miles away with his baby, who was dehydrated and shaking. The baby will get immediate help, and the operation will come later. Lim: "By God's grace we have an expert here on feeding children with cleft lip. Jesus brought us here for your son. That's why we are here."

Chapter 22 of Luke's Gospel: At the first Communion, on Passover, Jesus "took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body, which is given for you.'"

Communion with St. Paul Lim in Addis Ababa: He says to a 7-year-old in a Yao 11 NBA shirt, "We will take care of this. Jesus brought me here for you."

Two millennia ago Israelites asked Jesus why a man was born blind. He responded: "That the works of God might be displayed in him." Why are some born with a cleft palate? The answer could be similar: So that God will be glorified through the works of those He calls to help.

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AWESOME AUSSIE

The platypus looks fascinating from the outside, but a look at its inside – its DNA – is just as intriguing

by Margaret Helder

In recent years a strange assortment of animals, some familiar and some obscure, have enjoyed a brief moment of scientific attention. In each case the occasion for this special fame was the publication of the genome – the complete DNA sequence – of that organism.

If you remember your high school biology you'll recall that DNA is made up of numerous copies of four special molecules, called nucleotides, strung together in a particular order. The comparison could be made to how letters form words – just as letters have to be in a particular order to make words, nucleotides have to be in the right order to convey information. It is through the ordered structure of the nucleotides that DNA stores information.

While all such genome information may be interesting in its own right, scientists choose which organisms to investigate based on evolutionary theory. Thus bacteria, yeast, round worms, fruit flies, rats, dogs, apes and humans have all enjoyed their moment of fame. Most recently, in May 2008, the genome of Australia's platypus was published. This creature is justly famous anyway, but the genome studies have helped focus attention on why this is so.


Half duck, half beaver

When British naturalists first saw a pelt of a platypus, they were sure it was a hoax. With its thick fur, webbed front feet and duck bill-like snout, it certainly did not resemble any other animal known at the time. Further study showed however that the animal is perfectly genuine. Eventually naturalists dis-

covered that this animal lays eggs, but yet it suckles its young with genuine mother's milk. It seemed as if this creature was a strange jumble of bird, reptile and mammalian (feeds milk to young) characteristics. More careful study however reveals that this organism is actually a beautifully designed entity. The genome study further emphasizes this fact.

Research during the 210 years since the platypus was discovered by naturalists, has turned up only two species of the faintly similar Echidna, also native of Australia. Thus the duck-billed platypus remains a highly unusual creature. Not only its appearance, but many aspects of its biology are unique. These small animals (up to 60 cm long) spend most of their time underwater. Indeed they are able to find food only when submerged. Amazingly however, they swim blind, deaf and without the normal opportunity to detect odors since flaps cover their eyes, ears and nose while they are submerged. Recent research however has revealed that they have some unique abilities to compensate for lack of sight, hearing and smell.

Once the genome data has been collected, there is nothing obvious to show what stretches of DNA contain genes of interest. The number of nucleotides in the platypus genome is 2.3 billion, quite close to the 3 billion contained in the human genome. The number of protein coding genes thus far identified in platypus is also similar to the number in humans: 18,600 for platypus compared to about 25,000 for humans. Faced with endless arrangements of nucleotides, how do scientists "read" the information contained therein?



What scientists did was to start slowly in their early genome studies with attempts to identify sections coding for certain basic genes. Gradually they built up a computerized repertoire of DNA coding which identifies important genes in at least one organism. Then when they wish to study a different organism, they use huge computers to look for similar stretches of DNA in the new organism. Fancy mathematics allows the computer to decide whether similar sequences are close enough to represent the same gene or not.

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When British naturalists first saw a pelt of a platypus, they were sure it was a hoax

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Since the genomes of many organisms have now been documented, scientists now have a large collection of nucleotide sequences which code for important genes. The interesting thing then is to compare how the new organism resembles other creatures and ways in which it differs. Does it have similar genes or different ones? This analysis certainly reveals interesting things about the platypus.

Gender and reproduction

Genome analysis shows that gender determination in platypus is unique among milk producing organisms. Rather than X and Y chromosomes such as we normally see in milk producers, gender in platypus is determined by chains of tiny chromosomes. Females have five pairs of tiny X chromosomes, while males have 5 pairs of X chromosomes plus five tiny Y chromosomes.

The really interesting thing is that the genetic information on the X chromosomes is nothing like that in other milk-producing creatures. The information, in fact, is faintly similar to the Z chromosome which determines gender in birds. Scientists are totally astonished by this feature of the platypus genome.

Unlike other milk producers, platypus and echidnas have just one opening at the rear end of the body. Other milk producers have an opening from the digestive system plus a combined one for urine and reproduction. Platypus and echidnas have one combined opening for everything called the cloaca (like birds and reptiles).

But platypus has a unique way of producing young, not at all like birds or reptiles. The female keeps the fertilized eggs inside her body for 21 days. Meanwhile she seals herself into a small chamber lined with vegetation at the end of an 8 meter long tunnel dug into the bank of a lake or stream. There she lays 1 or 2 tiny sticky, leathery eggs. These she incubates until they hatch in about 11 days.

Initially only about the size of jelly beans and lacking developed organs and an immune system, the young suckle milk through pores on their mother's abdomen. After 4 months, the young become independent. The eggs, it is well known, divide in a manner similar to birds and reptiles and as a result, contain a yolk. However recent genome research reveals that the milk is very similar in composition to that of other mammals.

Underwater navigation

Recent research has revealed how the platypus is able to find food despite the fact that its ears, nose and eyes are closed underwater. Obviously the creature needs special hardware and talents designed for navigation. Thus it was that in 1985 German scientist Henning Scheich discovered some highly unusual properties of the platypus. This animal reacts to weak electrical fields in water.

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The platypus is able to find food despite the fact that its ears, nose and eyes are closed underwater

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What this scientist did was bury a small charged battery under a brick in the water. In addition, he placed a similar, but dead battery under another brick. The platypus dislodged the brick sitting on top of the charged battery, but it ignored the other brick/battery site. Later, the platypus avoided a mesh screen placed in front of a charged battery, but it collided with a screen placed in front of a dead battery. Further studies have amply confirmed that platypus have electroreceptors in their bills.

As sensitive as a star-nosed mole

Since the late 1980s, scientists have discovered that there are two kinds of electroreceptor and one type of touch receptor in the platypus snout.

At the front edges of the bill, there are tiny pores containing a membranous receptor. Moreover over the main surface of the bill there are oblique stripe-like arrays of pores which are mucous-filled. The mucous serves to enhance transmission of a signal to the nerve at the bottom of the pit.

The bill of the platypus has 40,000 electroreceptors, while the 2 species of echidna boast only 2000 and 400 respectively. Mapping of sensors was conducted on anesthetized animals. Electrical sensors were attached to the exposed cortex of the brain, and electrical and mechanical stimuli were applied to the bill. The resulting signals in the cortex were duly noted as were the locations in the bill where the sensitive pores were located.

The push-rod mechanical (touch) receptors in the bill are remarkable in their own right. Inside the pore is a compacted column of skin which can rotate about its base or move up and down.

These very sensitive touch receptors are similar to the highly unusual touch receptors in the nose of the star-nosed mole. The organ of touch in the snout of the star-nosed mole is so sensitive, that the information obtained from it is almost as detailed as vision. This animal also spends most of its time for-

aging for food in the water. Until recently, scientists knew of no other creatures with as sensitive a sense of touch. Now it appears that the mechanoreceptors in the bill of platypus are of even more sophisticated design.

There is yet another interesting feature of these sensory pores on the bill of the platypus – each is surrounded by petal-like skin flaps which open when the animal is underwater. When the animal emerges from the water, however, tiny sphincters around each pore close the flaps so that the sensors will not dry out.

The food which the platypus seeks are small animals living near or in the bottom sediments of lakes, ponds or rivers. These animals favor some larvae of insects, worms, small crustaceans and other invertebrates. Apparently these small creatures generate weak electrical fields as they move or simply maintain the processes of life in their bodies. With its electroreceptor capabilities, it seems that platypus can detect the field generated by a freshwater shrimp which is 10 cm away. Scientists suspects that platypus knows how far away an electrical source is, whether it is moving, and in what direction it is proceeding.





More and more talents

The remarkable thing is that these sensory talents of platypus are so unique. As far as electrical sensing of the environment is concerned, some fish also exhibit this ability. However in the case of fish, the sensors are all over the body and they are not nearly so sensitive.

But platypus has more talents yet! One might have imagined that platypus would not need much in the way of a sense of smell since their noses are closed under water. This conclusion is partly right and partly wrong. As far as genes for normal smell (chemical receptors) are concerned, the genome project shows that platypus has a reduced number of receptor types (only about half of what most mammals exhibit). However there are chemical receptors called vomeronasal receptors which may be located in the mouth or the nose and surprise, surprise, platypus has the largest variety of vomeronasal type 1 receptors known. At 950 different variations on the vomeronasal type 1 receptor (V1R) the platypus has 50% more than the mouse. Compare this to the chicken, which has no such receptors. Nor, for that matter, do people.

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***The male is able to deliver
a venom potent enough
to kill a dog***

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The platypus thus has very special electrical, touch and chemical (taste) receptors. The article on the platypus genome published in *Nature* (May 8/08) discusses the large number of genes which code for the special chemical receptors (V1R). But the article makes no mention of genes for electrical and touch receptors. Obviously there must be quite a number of genes in the platypus coding for components of these sophisticated sensors. However the sequence (order) of nucleotides does not come with labels identifying which sections code for what. Scientists need an already established standard order of nucleotides coding for such genes from another, not too different creature. Since these talents are highly unusual, however, no comparison with a similar gene in a similar creature can as yet be made. Thus we don't hear about how many genes code for electrosensory abilities and for extremely sensitive touch.

Defense: immunity and venom

Besides food and reproduction, an animal in nature needs to defend itself against larger animals and against microbes. The newly hatched young have only partially developed organs. They have no spleen, no thymus and no killer T and B cells which provide acquired immunity.

They do, however, exhibit a very unusual number of natural killer receptor genes. A natural killer is a precisely shaped molecule which is able to recognize other types of molecules characteristically produced by disease-causing organisms but not by the host organism itself. This capacity to stop a large number of common disease agents in their tracks is programmed into the genes of platypus and most other organisms as well.

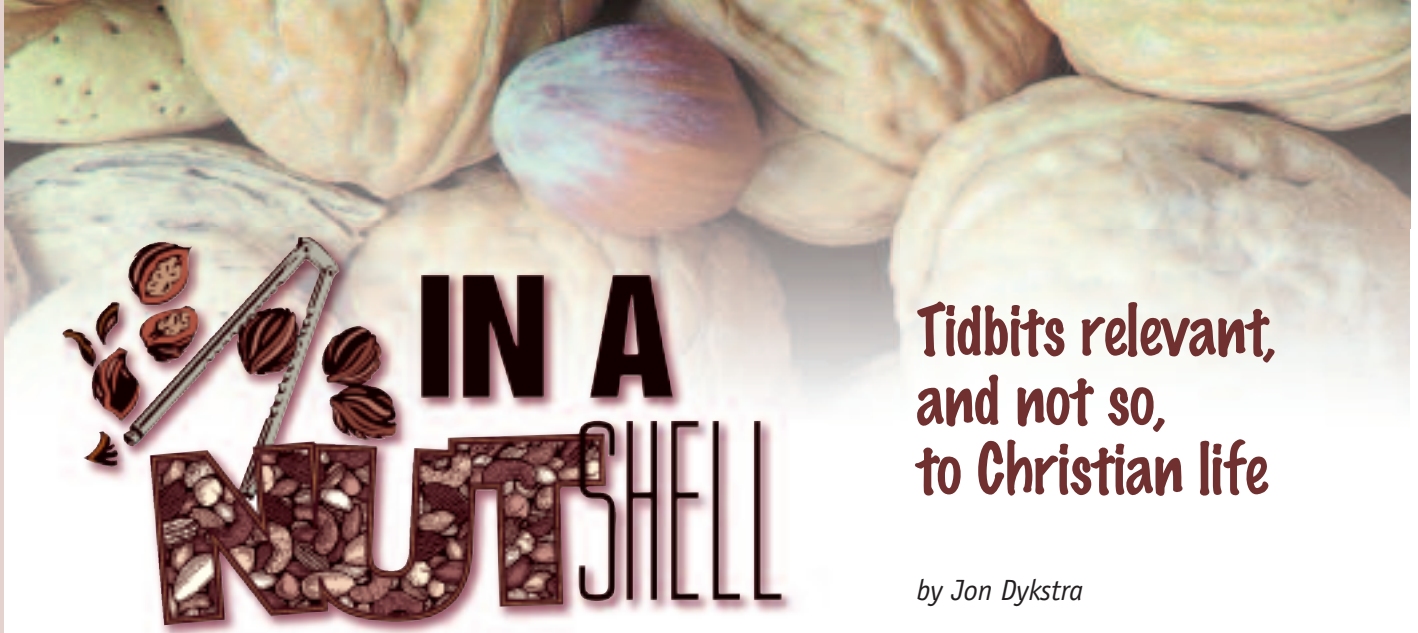
However, since the platypus young are so small and vulnerable, it makes sense that these animals are provided with an unusually large variety of natural killer type molecules (coded for on appropriate genes). The platypus thus has 214 genes for different variations on the natural killer theme compared to only 45 for rat, 9 for opossum and 15 for humans.

In addition, platypus is unusual among mammals in that the male is able to deliver a venom potent enough to kill a dog. There are only a few mammals which are venomous, but all of the others transmit the venom by means of a bite. The platypus, on the other hand, has spurs on its hind legs which deliver the venom. That venom is a cocktail of at least 19 different substances which exert various nasty effects on the victim.

God's creativity and intricate design

Secular scientists have long declared platypus to be a strange blend of reptilian, bird and mammal (milk producer) characteristics. Such people consider that the genome study has further confirmed this view. They are wrong. What that study has shown is that this animal is not a jumble of features from a broad assortment of organisms, but rather a wonderfully integrated collection of unusual anatomy and attributes. Certain features may remind us of birds and reptiles, but the similarities are merely superficial. The platypus truly is unique in its navigational abilities and in all the other features. Obviously this unusual creature was designed to pursue its unique but effective lifestyle and designed to delight us in yet another aspect of God's amazing creation. So give three cheers for a weird but wonderful inhabitant of Australia!!





Tidbits relevant, and not so, to Christian life

by Jon Dykstra

T-shirt truth

I might be Canadian, but I know enough about US politics to dismiss anything a Democrat says – they are, after all, the party that supports partial birth abortion, gay marriage, “artistic” pornography, and throwing money – more and more of it – at any problems they encounter. So when I saw a T-shirt that, in big bold letters on the front, blurted, “God is not a Republican,” I was going to ignore as just another silly Democrat jingle.

But there was something to this slogan. It may be pretty easy in the US to figure out which of the two main parties is the Devil’s very own, but the fact the Democrats are so very bad doesn’t mean God is a Republican. It seems almost silly when it’s put that way, but Christians in the Republican Party do, often, make the mistake of thinking God is on their side. But as God makes clear in Joshua 5:13-14a, He’s not on anyone’s side:

When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” And he said, “No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. . . .”

God doesn’t pick sides; what’s important, instead, is that we pick His side! God is not a Republican, and American Christians should never make the mistake of blindly supporting a party that has not declared itself to be on His side.

The T-shirt spoke truth.

And it turns out, the back side spoke yet another profound Truth; in even bigger block letters the reverse of

the shirt shouted, “...but He’s definitely not a Democrat!”

A couple of “clean” companies

Pornography may plague the Internet, but in at least a couple of instances groups are using the Internet to fight back against pornography. The creators of CleanHotels.com have created a website that allows vacationers or travelers to the US to find hotels at their destination that don’t offer pornographic channels or pay-per-view movies in their rooms. And Abunga.com aims to be a family-friendly online bookstore – it doesn’t sell the pornography or erotic fiction easily available on Amazon.com. Two sites that Christian travelers, or book-lovers, might want to bookmark.

Global warming debate ain’t over

The global warming debate continues to progress, but probably not in the direction you think. If you’ve only been hearing about it in the nightly news, or your daily paper (or from Al Gore) you haven’t heard how the evidence continues to stack up against the growing global warming hysteria. One example: NASA now admits that the hottest year on record in the continental US was not 1998 as they previously reported, but rather 1934. In fact, they are now reporting that six of the ten hottest years since 1880 occurred *before 1954*.

In the latest issue of the *Cornwall Alliance Newsletter* (July 29, 2008) scientific adviser and journalist Christopher Walter Monckton continues the assault against Al Gore and his ilk. Monckton marshals more than a dozen arguments – using fully documented scientific refer-

ences – against their hysteria. Abbreviated below are just a few of his points:

- Even if the global temperature has risen, it has risen in a straight line at a rate of 0.5 °C/century for 300 years since the Sun recovered from the Maunder Minimum (a 70 year period from 1645-1715 of very low sunspot activity – averaging less than 1 sunspot a year, instead of the usual 500+ per year)
- Even if the sun weren’t the obvious culprit, the UN hasn’t shown that humanity is to blame. CO₂ occupies only one-ten-thousandth more of the atmosphere today than it did in 1750.
- Even if CO₂ levels are to blame, that doesn’t explain why there hasn’t been warming since 1998. For 7 years *temperatures have fallen* and the Jan 2007-Jan 2008 fall was the steepest since 1880.
- Even if the UN was right about Earth being hyper-sensitive to CO₂ increases the peer-reviewed scientific literature almost unanimously agrees that there *will not be any sort of climate catastrophe*.
- Even if Al Gore were right that harm might occur, the Armageddon scenario he depicts is not based on any scientific view. Sea level may rise 1 foot by the end of the century, not 20 feet.
- Even if Armageddon were likely, scientifically-unsound precautions are already starving millions as biofuels – a crime against humanity – pre-empt agricultural land, doubling staple cereal prices in a year.
- Even if precautions were not killing the poor, they would work no better than the “precautionary” ban on DDT, which killed 40 million children before the UN at last ended it.



Soup & Buns

Little Courtesies

by Sharon L. Bratcher

Trash fell everywhere. Sarah had lifted the lid to put in one item and before she could, the loosely packed tower of papers, eggshells, and coffee grounds had fallen to the floor. Why hadn't someone emptied it earlier?

You might not think of household chores as acts of courtesy or of love. They may seem trivial or unimportant. But let's consider the lowly wastebasket, for instance, and think about its connection to caring.

The purpose of a wastebasket is to collect waste. When we no longer have use for an item, we achieve a sense of finality by disposing of it, and then getting on with our next task in life. To perform its function a wastebasket must have room left inside of it, or else it is useless.

Now, in order for this wastebasket to have useful space inside of it, someone must empty it occasionally. Maybe your household has no hard and fast rule as to "whose job it is to empty the wastebasket," and instead, it operates with the general idea of "when you see it is getting full, just empty it." Unfortunately, some people will go to amazing lengths to avoid this job.

One person might use his foot as a trash compactor *several* times, stating emphatically "see, it doesn't need to be emptied yet." (Never mind that it splits the plastic bag.) Others will simply "trash and run," disappearing from the vicinity. Still others leave their trash elsewhere in the room (this is the worst).

Then the parent comes home and finds excess debris overflowing. It is *impossible* to put another item inside of the container without sending some of it tumbling to the floor. The wastebasket has been rendered useless until *someone* empties it. Those who "trash and run" seem to feel like they "win" when someone else has to do it.

You're really saying. . .

Let's define courtesy and relate it to this chore. Courtesy is "a respectful or considerate act or expression; a favor, help or generosity; polite behavior." Let's add to that the so-named Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

When you put trash into the container which fills it up considerably, and you do *not* empty it, you are in essence saying:

1. Someone else should do this job, not me.

2. I do not care enough about the others in this household to provide for them a place to throw *their* trash. All that matters is that I have been able to dispose of *mine*.
3. I refuse to serve others unless someone forces me.
4. I don't care about the looks or smells of my household.

Will they ever learn?

Parents get upset not so much because they have to add 5 more minutes of work to their bulging workload, but because other household members show no courtesy. And since they have spent a lot of time trying to instill said courtesy into their family members, it feels a lot like failure. "Will they *ever* learn?"

And it's not just the wastebasket. The same can be said about replacing toilet paper on a spindle, or fetching another roll when you realize you have finished the last one, or just being sanitary in your habits, if you know what I mean. Otherwise, you are saying that you do not care about the next person coming after you.

Courtesy is also hanging up the hand towel so that someone else can use it, putting your glass in the dishwasher, and placing your shoes out of the way so that others will not trip over them. Courtesy is respecting the standards of the people who make the rules, who have only made them for the good of the group, not because they get a kick out of oppressing you.

When I first got married, I enjoyed being messy. With only two of us, it was possible for awhile. But after I had a couple of children, I discovered that it was incredibly frustrating to try to cook in a messy kitchen and there were germs and health issues to be dealt with both there and in the bathroom. Keeping house led to keeping healthy and keeping enough order to function.

And a wastebasket doesn't function if it's full. A washroom is fairly useless without toilet paper, and you impede the ability of others to get where they are going if your shoes are in their way.

Courtesy is really a matter of the heart. "Consideration" means making sure things are as good for others as they are for yourself. It's love.

So maybe, as you read this, it's about time that you get past your early life attitude of "it's someone else's job" and move towards "I see something that needs to be done – let me do it right now."

Because little courtesies add up to a big amount of love. 

ENTICING ENIGMAS AND CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

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

NEW PUZZLES

Riddles for Punsters #147 – “Fowl tasting food (quickly)”

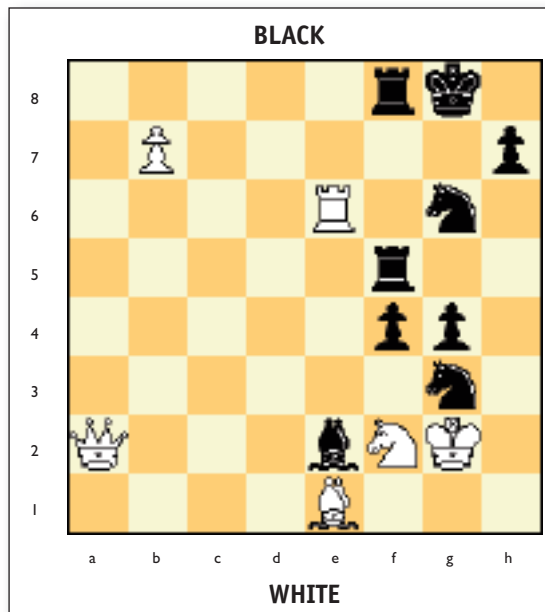
What did the mother turkey have to keep telling her son?
Eat slowly – don’t just _____ up your food.

Problem to Ponder #147 – “Up down up down up down up”

Yosef and Mari VanIsher travelled to a remote mountain chalet for their holidays. On the way there they drove for 456.5 km on a level highway, then 5.7 km on the road winding up a mountain and 5.6 km down the other side, then 4.8 km up a second mountain and 3.5 km down the other side, then 2.7 km up a third mountain and 1.4 km down the other side, then 2.4 km up a fourth mountain and so reached the chalet. Their vehicle travelled 10 km/L of gasoline on the level road, 6 km/L going uphill and 14 km/L going downhill. The average gasoline price was \$1.40 per L.

- How much did it cost the VanIshers to travel from home to the chalet in the mountains?
- What was their vehicle’s average rate of fuel efficiency (in km/L) for that trip?

Chess Puzzle # 147



WHITE to Mate in 4

Or, If it is BLACK’s Move, **BLACK to Mate in 3**

SOLUTIONS TO THE PREVIOUS (JULY/AUGUST) PUZZLE PAGE

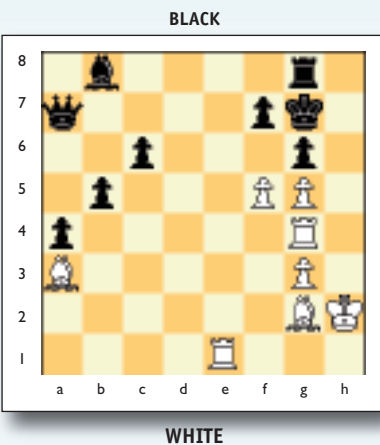
Answer to Riddles for Punsters #146 – “Dental Advice”

Why did Denny the fox wear his false teeth only when he was in his home? Because they were **d e n t u r e s**.

Answer to Problem to Ponder #146 – “You CAN do This”

The 20 “CAN” WORDS are given after the hint that was given for each.

- A bird – CANary
- A container – CANister
- A nationality – MexiCAN
- _____ Of Dort – CANons
- Light, not fluorescent – InCANdescent
- North of the U.S.A. – CANada
- A fruit – CANtaloup
- A shelter – CANopy
- _____ and Tax Collectors – PubliCANs
- It can produce light – CANDle
- Grouchy – CANtankerous
- A weapon – CANnon
- Amazing – UnCANny
- The Promised Land – CANaan
- A type of oil – CANola
- A waterway – CANal
- A type of worm or sore – CANker
- One running for office – CANDidate
- A river _____ – CANyon
- Sweet, can be eaten – CANDy



SOLUTION TO CHESS PUZZLE # 146

BLACK to Mate in 4 Descriptive Notation

- _____ R-R1 ch
- R-R4 RxR ch
- B-R3 Q-B7 ch
- K-R1 RxB mate

Algebraic Notation

- _____ Rg8-h8 +
- Rg4-h4 Rh8xh4 +
- Bg2-h3 Qa7-f2 +
- Kh2-h1 Rh4xh3 ++

WHITE to Mate in 2 Descriptive Notation

- P-B6 ch K-R1
- R-R4 mate

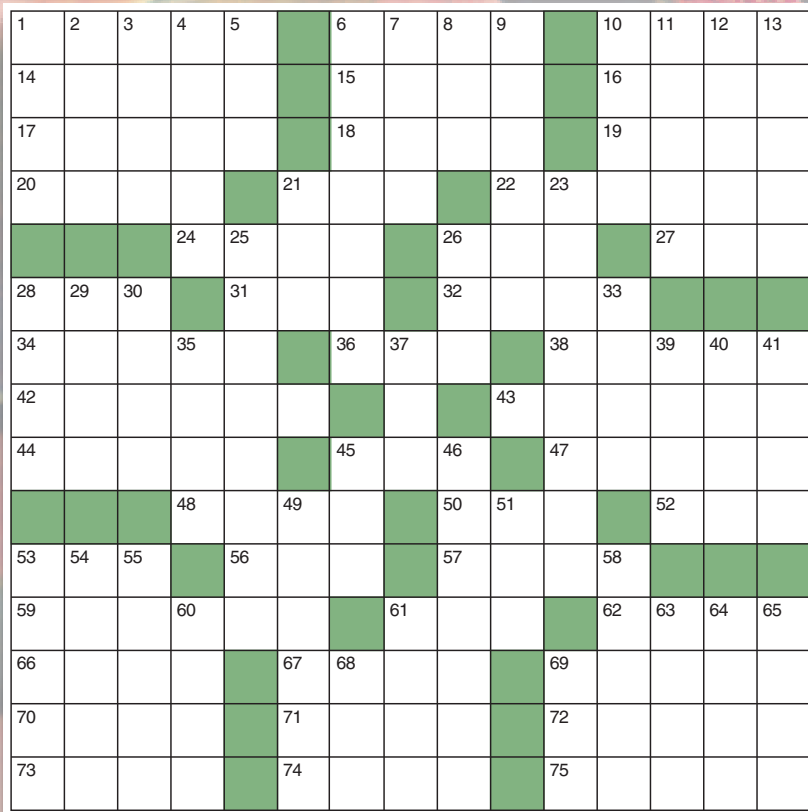
Algebraic Notation

- f5-f6 + Kg7-h8
- Rg4-h4 ++

Crossword Puzzle

Series 15 No 10

Last month's solution
Series 15 No 9



ACROSS:

1. Look unblinkingly at
6. Sports team accessory
10. Binder separators
14. Last one
15. Physically disabled
16. Give off
17. Garden tool
18. Ireland's alternate name
19. Organization for defense against aggression (formed in 1949)
20. Shrub or small tree with fragrant white flowers
21. Vehicle for multiple passengers
22. O.T. queen
24. Hot spot in kitchen
26. Get old
27. Direction
28. French word
31. Had dinner
32. Tough plant fiber used for making ropes
34. Special committee
36. Mens ____; criminal intent
38. Book symptom of overuse
42. Playground toy
43. School works
44. Wave top
45. Big bird
47. Kind of pole
48. Freshens outside
50. Maiden name
52. Advisory abbr.
53. Exist
56. A cereal grass
57. In the matter of; legally speaking (2 words)
59. Sounds people pull over for
61. End of the boat
62. Pool lengths
66. A person whose native tongue is a Slavic language
67. Compulsive fire starter
69. Southern Cdn. island
70. Otherwise
71. Islamic ruler
72. Tree fruit
73. Youngish person
74. Wander around
75. Ways into a house

DOWN:

1. Standardized Field Sobriety Test (abbr.)
2. Another name for teepee
3. Anatomy, for short
4. Music broadcaster
5. Extinction level event (abbr.)
6. Harvester of grain
7. Make money
8. French friend
9. Go back on a promise
10. Campground shelter
11. Indian housemaids
12. Cuts with the teeth
13. Put away for later
21. Animal doctor
23. Portion of school year
25. This ends when school starts
26. Lightbulb moment
28. Masculine, for short
29. European river running between Germany and Poland
30. Another form of "thou"
33. El ____, Texas city
35. Bones, plural
37. Large tree
39. New Zealand forest tree
40. Stared at
41. Diagnostical manual of mental disorders, 5th edition
45. Direction in Paris
46. School clothing, sometimes
49. A machine for scraping sugarcane
51. Medical specialist
53. Useful thing
54. Long narrow moon valley
55. Delete
58. Choose by vote
60. Level
61. Melody
63. Plant that soothes
64. Crime committer
65. Ottawa Senators, informally
68. Moosonee, ON, Canada – airport code
69. Ballet step

Joyce