

REFORMED

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**A MAGAZINE
FOR THE
CHRISTIAN
FAMILY**

Perspective

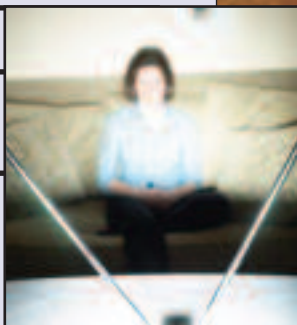
**Dying
with
Dignity:**
Christians
need not
fear death,
but
should still
cherish
life.

What's inside?

Pop Culture

**Should Christians
support the Flat Tax?**

**Remembering Quiet
Heroes**



Guest Editorial

by Michael Wagner

IS POVERTY WORSE THAN ABORTION?

Christians are frequently criticized for our opposition to abortion and sexual immorality. Feminists, homosexuals, and others claim that publicly expressing Biblical views on these issues amounts to “hate.”

While that’s almost to be expected these days, it is shocking when even prominent Christians speak out against Christian opposition to abortion and homosexuality. These critics claim that conservative Christians have been diverted from a Christ-centered agenda to an agenda set by right-wing political leaders.

Where should Christians concentrate their efforts?

One of the leading Christian critics of this kind is the prominent American evangelical Tony Campolo. He argues that Christians should focus on the specific words of Jesus Christ in the New Testament to determine their priorities for social activism. Jesus didn’t explicitly condemn abortion or homosexuality, but he did speak a lot about poverty. Therefore Christians should be much more concerned about poverty than issues like abortion or homosexuality. Among other things, this seems to suggest that Christians should dispense with pro-life activism in favor of anti-poverty activism.

Misplaced priority?

On the surface, this sounds rather plausible. Jesus was concerned about poverty. But aside from the fact that focusing on the specific words of Jesus to the exclusion of the rest of the Bible is a serious error (it actually contradicts the teaching of Jesus Himself), there are other problems with this view.

For the sake of argument, let’s equate the problems of poverty and abortion, as if they were equally bad (although they’re not since one involves the deliberate murder of an innocent person). How much effort do various levels of government in Canada expend on combating poverty? Lots. There are numerous sections of government, and probably thousands of government workers across the country, devoted to helping the poor. Billions of dollars are spent each year to help alleviate poverty in Canada.

In contrast, how much effort do various levels of government in Canada expend on combating abortion? None. In fact, governments in Canada pay for and defend abortion as a “human right” of all things. They will do nothing to prevent it, and even at times promote it, i.e., “reproductive choice.”

With this in mind, where should Christians concentrate their efforts? If Christians don’t tell the truth about abortion and work against it, who will? Certainly not the civil authorities who are supposed to be the ministers of God (Romans 13:4).

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If not us, who?

This same line of argumentation applies in a similar way to the homosexual rights issue. While the various levels of government in Canada expend great effort and huge sums of money to alleviate poverty, none of them will lift a finger to tell the truth about homosexuality or take steps to oppose homosexual rights. Some agencies of government, notably the human rights commissions, are in fact working to restrict the expression of Biblical views on this issue. So who will oppose the homosexual movement if Christians abandon this fight to work against poverty?

Another question to ask is this: How does God view the situation? There are innocent babies being killed just about every day in Canada. This is a heinous situation that brings God's judgment upon our land. Canada will be under the judgment of God as long as abortion is permitted, protected, and funded by governments in Canada.

Is God concerned about poverty? Of course, but generally speaking, poor people in Canada still receive the basic necessities of life. There are considerable efforts already being made to improve the lives of poor people in Canada. No one is dying from poverty in Canada, at least not regularly or in large numbers. But people are dying regularly and in large numbers as a result of abortion. Which issue, then, is more pressing? Where should Christians concentrate their efforts?

Biblical positions on issues of personal and social morality are not popular these days, to put it mildly. No one likes to be unpopular, but Christians are obligated to uphold Biblical teaching. There will always be temptations to find reasons to downplay the teachings of Scripture in favor of the world's views. Dropping social activism against abortion and homosexuality to concentrate on alleviating poverty would be very popular with the world, but it would not constitute faithfulness to Christ.

The specific words of Christ in the New Testament are extremely important. So are all of the other words in the Bible. It's a serious error to pit some parts of the Bible against other parts of it. When people like Tony Campolo come calling, remember 1 John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (ESV).



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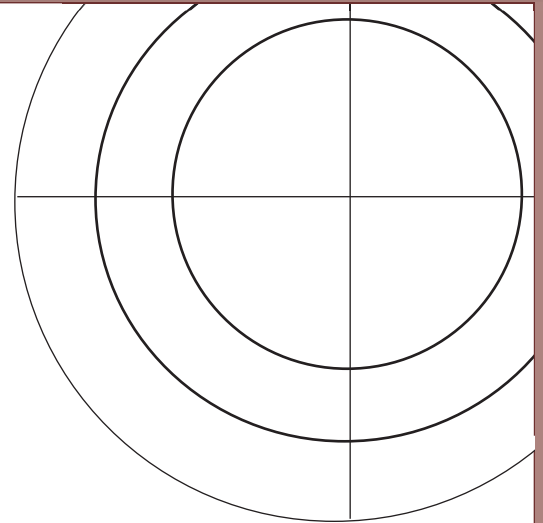
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Christian crossfire

Australia's top two politicians address an audience of Christians

It is some time ago that we have looked at the political scene in Australia. And as they say, "24 hours is a long time in politics." Be that as it may, much has indeed happened during the last few months.

Let me start by emphasizing that Australia is going through a boom time. Unemployment is as low as it has been in more than 30 years. My home state, Western Australia, is doing particularly well with mining and mineral exploration providing job opportunities that companies sometimes find difficult to fill.

..... *So who is Kevin Rudd?*

And so, looking at things as they are, one would expect that the Federal Government of Prime Minister John Howard would be a certainty to be re-elected later this year. And yet, if the opinion polls are to be believed, nothing is further from the truth. If they are to be believed the next Prime Minister will be a Mr. Kevin Rudd.



Kevin Rudd (red tie) and his son at a political event earlier this year

(Photo by David Jackmanson)

Some months ago he challenged the then leader of the Labor Party for the party's top position and won.

So who is Kevin Rudd?

The facts of his life are very easy to find and I might be excused for downloading what his party had to say about the man. Mr. Rudd was first elected in

1998 and appointed to the Labor Party's Shadow Cabinet in 2001. December 4, 2006 the Labor Party Caucus held a leadership ballot and Kevin Rudd defeated Kim Beazley to become Labor Leader and Leader of the Opposition. Before entering political life Mr. Rudd worked for the government in Australian Embassies in Stockholm and Beijing and worked in various roles for the Queensland's state government.

Not in his official bio

What is not mentioned on the party's website is that the Rudd family is Anglican. The significance of that will become apparent as I describe what happened when both the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader were invited by the Australian Christian Lobby to address a group of church leaders in Canberra. These addresses were beamed around the country and churches were invited to arrange the showing of this event in their church buildings.

The Prime Minister, whom I believe is also Anglican, started his address by reminding his audience that this year we remember the life of William Wilberforce and the 200th anniversary of his successful effort to abolish the slave trade in Britain. He then told his audience that from the perspective of a politician two parables remind him of the task in hand. The first parable is that of the Good Samaritan – showing the need to help those in need – and the second parable he considered important in this regard is that of the Talents. He then continued to address his audience about the achievements of his government.

Kevin Rudd the leader of the Opposition started his address by reminding his listeners that during the last census 70 per cent of Australians claimed to be Christians and that 4 million assert that they attend church monthly and 2 million do so on a weekly basis. "Hence we can be proud of our Christian heritage."

During question time the two leaders were asked about things such as their approach toward marriage. Both were quite clear that marriage is between a man and a woman. Mr. Howard recalled that the Australian Parliament had made an amendment to the Marriage Act which made it very clear that as far as the Parliament was concerned marriage is a voluntary union for life between a man and a woman. He reminded his listeners that this "is the only view a Christian society can have of marriage."

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I admire both men for being prepared to address a Christian audience

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And they defended the right of Christians to promote their beliefs. Hence it was clear that neither would condone the legal action taken against two pastors in the state of Victoria whose only "crime" was explaining during a church service why the Muslim faith is contrary to the Christian faith.

As Mr. Howard made the point: "Why do Christians have to prove their tolerance by denying their own heritage?" Mr. Howard also told his audience that the prayer before the sittings of parliament would remain as is. "We are a Christian nation so why should we change?" This was his answer when he was reminded that the U.S. congress had started a day with Hindu prayers.

Respected their audience

So what was our impression of these two men?

First of all, both of course knew that they were addressing a Christian audi-

ence and that was obvious. At the same time I was impressed by the performance of Kevin Rudd and his willingness to address the issues head on.

Our Prime Minister spoke well, did justice to the questions put to him, but at the same time showed that he was a thorough politician. He believes that his party should be re-elected even though all indications are that Australian voters are ready for a change.

The Leader of the Opposition also spoke well and also tackled the questions put to him head on. My concern is that his party has not shown itself of recent times to support a Christian approach to politics. In many instances, especially in the states, the opposite is true. Whether Mr. Rudd can carry out what he confesses to believe or whether when the chips are down he will be pushed aside remains to be seen.

I admire both men for being prepared to address a Christian audience and for acknowledging that this audience has a right to be taken into consideration.

Late breaking news

As I was finishing this article someone was able to drag up some muck on Kevin Rudd. It seems that some 4 years ago Mr. Rudd got drunk while in New York and together with a colleague entered a strip club. When the message broke it caused quite a bit of furor in the press. After all, here was an opportunity too good to be missed.

Mr. Rudd's response was to simply say that he was not proud of that event and that nothing untoward happened that evening and that therefore people should let the matter rest.

It was obvious that the press was having a hay day. Here was a man who professes to be a Christian caught doing something that was obviously wrong.

But as I commented to my wife: "the press seems to be so full of hypocrisy." 

SHOULD CHRISTIANS SUPPORT THE FLAT TAX?

by John Boersema

As Christians, we know that governments have a right to tax their citizens. The specific command of our Lord Jesus in Mt 22:21 to “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” makes that clear, as does Paul’s exhortation in Romans 13:6-7: “This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. . . If you owe taxes, pay taxes.”

However these texts say nothing specific about the types of taxes that governments may levy. Nevertheless, in this article, we suggest that we can use some biblically-derived principles to suggest a preference for certain tax policies.

In particular, we will look at the debate concerning a flat rate income tax (a “flat tax”) versus our current progressive tax system. One Canadian province, Alberta, has recently adopted such a flat rate tax system and various groups, including the Canadian Alliance party (now merged into the governing Conservative party) have pushed for the adoption of such a system federally. Elsewhere in the world there has been somewhat of a shift recently to a flat rate system. In particular, the countries of the former Soviet Union have introduced it beginning with Estonia in 1994, with Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine, Slovakia and Georgia following over the next ten years.

Illustration

In a progressive tax system, income up to a given amount is taxed at one rate and the income above that amount is taxed at a higher rate. In fact, there are likely to be several tax brackets with progressively higher tax rates for each. Consider, for example, the following tax situation:

<u>Income level</u>	<u>Tax rate % on excess</u>
Up to \$8,500	0%
\$8,500 to 35,000	22
35,001 to 60,000	31
60,001 to 70,000	33
70,001 to 115,000	41
115,001 and over	45

Under this illustrative progressive tax regime (which is loosely based on combined Canadian federal and Ontario tax rates), John Poor who earns \$15,000 annually would pay a total of \$1,430 in tax – the first \$8,500 of income would be tax-free; the rest of his income of \$6,500 (\$15,000 - \$8,500) would be taxed at 22% or \$1,430.

On the other hand, Joe Prosperous who earns \$75,000 a year would pay \$18,730 in tax (\$0 on the first \$8,500; \$5,830 or 22% on the next \$26,500 of income; \$10,850 or 31% on the next \$35,000 of income and \$2,050 or 45% on the final \$5,000 of income). That is, the income falling in each tax bracket is taxed at a progressively higher tax rate.

On the other hand, under a pure flat rate regime, both Joe Poor and Joe Prosperous would pay the same percentage of income. For example, if both taxpayers paid the same rate of tax, a pure flat tax rate of 22.4 % would derive the same total tax from these two taxpayers but John Poor with an income of \$15,000 would pay \$3,360 (rather than \$1,430) while Joe Prosperous with an income of \$75,000 would pay \$16,800 (instead of \$18,730).

Ability to pay

To evaluate the two alternative tax systems, we will first consider “ability to pay.” This criteria is consistent with the biblical principle of Neighbor Love. It is also recognized in the Old Testament in determining the animal to be brought for a sin offering (Lev 5:5-12). Those who could not afford a lamb or goat, were to bring a more affordable offering of two doves or pigeons.

A progressive tax system, considers ability to pay and seeks to equalize tax burdens. Consequently, it tends to be favored by Christian writers. It appears to be a just and compassionate tax system which ensures an equally fair “sacrifice” is paid by all. If, on the other hand, *all* income were taxed at the *same tax rate* (a “flat” tax rate) the lower paid would end up shouldering a much heavier relative burden than the higher paid. In the earlier example, if Mr. Poor and Mr. Prosperous pay the same tax rate of 22.4% the difference from the current system of \$1,930 would be a major increase to Mr. Poor’s tax burden (12.8% of total income) but would be only a relatively minor sacrifice (2.5% of total income) to Mr. Prosperous. Put another way, under the progressive system, Mr. Poor paid an effective tax rate (total tax paid divided by his total income) of 9.5% while Mr. Prosperous’ rate was 25%.

Under the pure flat rate system, they would both pay 22.4%. Mr. Poor will, however, require most of his remaining income for essential living costs. Mr. Prosperous will have a significant amount left over for discretionary spending. The burden of that tax will be significantly more for Mr. Prosperous than for Mr. Rich. A pure flat tax system, then, does not take ability to pay into account; it does not reflect Christian neighbor love.

Flat tax with a basic exemption

Now it is true that proponents of a flat tax system generally do not envision a *pure* flat tax system but generally recommend a single tax rate along with a major basic exemption. With a basic exemption (or tax credit), the specified amount is not taxed and all income over that rate is taxed at the one rate. In addition, most proponents would do away with virtually all other current deductions and tax credits.

Including a basic exemption does introduce a degree of progressivity. The degree of progressivity depends, of course, on the new flat rate tax and the exemption. In any case, the total tax take will have to be roughly the same as that of the current system if expenditures are unchanged. It is worth noting that since the

proponents of a flat tax also tend to be proponents of “small” government, it is likely, as some critics have suggested, that proponents understate the required single tax rate or overstate the possible exemption that is possible.

We will assume a flat tax rate of 30 per cent. The Canadian Alliance proposal was for a 17% federal rate; Alberta has a rate of about 11% but Ontario would probably need more. A combined rate of 30% would, therefore, not be unrealistic. We will also assume a \$10,000 exemption as in the Alliances proposal. The table “Effective tax rates at various incomes” illustrates three different effective tax rates:

First we see a pure flat rate system in which the effective rate of tax is 30% at all income levels. The next column shows that with a \$10,000 basic exemption a certain amount of progressivity does occur. Comparison of this column with Canada’s current regime in the final column, however, indicates that while those at incomes of \$10,000 would gain a bit, the big gainers are those at the top incomes. The medium income earners – from \$20,000 to \$80,000 – will end up paying more! Thus, while the exemption introduces some progressivity, will such a plan really adequately consider “ability to pay”? Unfortunately, that is a

Effective tax rates at various incomes

INCOME	30% Flat tax with no exemption	30% Flat tax with \$10,000 exemption	Progressive tax (Canada's current system)
\$10,000	30%	0.0%	3.3%
20,000	30%	15.0%	12.7%
40,000	30%	22.5%	18.5%
60,000	30%	25.0%	22.6%
80,000	30%	26.3%	26.2%
100,000	30%	27.0%	29.2%
200,000	30%	28.5%	36.8%
300,000	30%	29.0%	39.5%
400,000	30%	29.3%	40.9%
500,000	30%	29.4%	41.7%

matter of opinion. Personally, I feel that such a system would not show adequate love of our neighbor. As a minimum, a progressive system is better for the poor – and, probably, for the middle-income earners.

Impartiality

In spite of this advantage of a progressive tax system, some Christian authors have also come out favoring a flat rate. Calvin Beisner, for example, has argued that the progressive tax is “contrary to the biblical principle of justice because it fails to meet the criterion of *impartiality*. He refers to Deut. 1: “Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike.” and Lev. 19:15: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.”

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One Canadian province, Alberta, has recently adopted such a flat rate tax system

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Others, in my view correctly, limit the two texts above to the “civil arrangements in rendering justice.” Favoritism is also forbidden in social relationships. James, for example, warns against “paying special attention” in meetings to “the man wearing fine clothes” (Jas 2:2-4,9).

When it comes to distributive justice, however, impartiality means that, “one does not *arbitrarily* treat one person less well than another.” Rather justice should treat all people alike in terms of specified criteria. One of those criteria in biblical justice, is *need*. The group named in close connection to justice in, for example, Deut 10:18 – the orphan, the widow and the stranger – have in common their need. The Bible, thus, is partial to those lacking in basic needs. This partiality is also seen in Lev. 19 which, although it in verse 15 forbids partiality to the poor or great when it comes to “judging your neighbor fairly,” earlier in verses 9 and 10 contains regulations that provide special protection for groups of the needy. The Israelites were not to harvest their fields and vineyards completely but leave food behind for the poor and the alien.

Passages such as Prov. 29:7, “The righteous care about justice for the poor” and Jer. 5:28 where the wicked “do not defend the rights of the poor” also imply a biblical partiality – special mention – for the poor.

Even if one does consider this criterion of impartiality as applicable, it does not forbid a progressive tax system. Rather, a progressive tax system seeks to *impartially* divide the tax *burden* while the flat tax system would *impartially* assess a tax *rate*. There

appears to be no direct biblical evidence that shows one view of fairness or impartiality to be more biblical than the other. When the concepts of neighbor love and justice to the poor are brought in, dividing the tax *burden* impartially (progressively) would seem to be more biblical.

Old Testament taxes

Some have further sought to justify a flat tax by pointing to the biblical tithe of ten per cent (e.g. Lev. 27:30,32). Professor Michael A. Livingston, however, points to the difficulty of applying the tithe literally in our modern world and, more importantly, to the fact that the tithe was “only one of a series of tax or tax-like provisions in the Old Testament” and that “there is evidence of adjustments and exemptions in the tithe that gave it a mildly progressive character.” As example, we noted already that in Lev 5:5-12 ability to pay is considered in determining the animal to be brought for a sin offering. In any case, although we need to apply the underlying teachings of the Mozaic laws, we must recognize that the civil law applied to the people of Israel at that time only, while the ceremonial aspects have been fulfilled by Christ.

Obeying the authorities God has put over us

Another evaluative criterion to be considered is that of tax evasion. Where there is a significant history of tax evasion (and/or lack of enforcement) and a very complex tax system with high rates, a switch to flat tax system does appear to have increased tax compliance. When Russia switched to a single tax system with a 13% rate, tax revenues increased by 26%; compliance was up by one third! Many of the countries of the former Soviet Union have, in fact, adopted flat tax regimes for this reason.

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A progressive tax system, considers ability to pay and seeks to equalize tax burdens

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Since their tax restructuring, however, also included the introduction of withholding tax at source, tax audits and better identification of taxpayers, the improved tax collection cannot be attributed solely to the switch to a flat tax.

Simplification/efficiency

A flat tax system can provide greater efficiency which is obviously attractive from a stewardship perspective. However, it is hard to believe that in this computerized age the difference

between one flat rate and 3 to 6 different tax brackets would really make a significant change.

Rather than the number of tax brackets, it is the multiplicity and details of tax deductions and credits that make the system so complex. Advocates for a flat rate system tend to favor combining the one flat rate with doing away with all the various available tax deductions and credits (except for one large personal deduction/credit). Simplification of the overall system to this extent would certainly provide efficiencies. However, every tax deduction/credit serves to meet a social-economic policy objective. Deductions for Registered Retirement Savings Plans, for example, encourage individuals to exercise their personal responsibility and save for their retirement as well as provide savings to fund investments in new factories and equipment. Although those objectives may well be unwarranted or outdated (or better achieved in other ways), a review of the specific deductions is in order before sacrificing them all in the name of tax simplification – as necessary as that may be.

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***Some have further sought to justify
a flat tax by pointing to the
biblical tithe of ten per cent***

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Considering that many taxpayers feel the need to use the services of tax-professionals, tax simplification is certainly commendable – particularly since many deductions or special mechanisms may only be available to those “who have the resources to penetrate the maze of tax legislation.” Simplification should also make it less costly to administer the tax collection system. In principle, there is no reason, however, why the number of specific deductions cannot be reduced and further simplification attained while maintaining a degree of progressivity.

Promoting economic activity

Another aspect of stewardship that we need to consider is the promotion of economic activity, particularly, the creation of employment. One of the advantages of the flat rate tax system is that it will reduce the top marginal tax rates. High tax rates are contrary to good stewardship in that they reduce incentives to work and motivate people to waste resources to seek to lower taxes or even to evade them altogether. Lowering the overall rate of tax, and particularly the top rates, usually encourages more entrepreneurs to set up business, create jobs and improve the economy. Finally, high marginal tax rates have an impact on savings. Since people with higher incomes save more, an increase in the top progressive rates will reduce the rate of sav-

ings within a country. Since savings are used to invest for the future, this is likely to have negative long-run implications for a country's prosperity.

Acceptance of a progressive tax system does not, however, condone a “soak the rich” philosophy. I have argued previously that Christians should have a conditional preference for the market. Such a preference implies that the top tax rates must be kept as low as possible – not only to provide incentives to work as mentioned but also to reduce tax-evasion. Reducing taxes to improve incentives, etc. can be done in a progressive tax system as well as in a flat rate system – although not as much. Thus, a derived preference for the market – a striving for smaller government – does not necessarily require a flat rate system.

Economic stability

Progressivity also has another advantage in that it provides more economic stability: i.e., it reduces the severity of recessions and the extent of inflation. When the economy goes into decline, incomes drop and, consequently, consumption drops. With fewer goods being purchased, production must be cut and jobs will be lost – thus worsening the decline. Income taxes are, however, a form of “automatic stabilizer.” When incomes drop, income taxes will automatically also drop. Disposable income and consumption, then, will drop less than total income. The recession will, therefore, be less severe than it might otherwise have been. Similarly, when the economy is expanding rapidly and threatening to become inflationary, the increased tax taken from growing incomes lessens that inflationary tendency. The more progressive the tax system is, the greater is the economy's built-in stability. A flat rate system would reduce that stability.

Conclusion

Overall then, I propose that Christians should favor tax systems that are at least moderately progressive. The degree of progressivity, however, remains subject to debate. A progressive tax system is best on the grounds of ability to pay. Although Christians have argued for a flat rate system on the grounds of biblical claims for impartiality and Old Testament taxation practices, those claims are not convincing. Furthermore, the advantages to good stewardship to be obtained by a flat rate system – reduced tax evasion, simplicity and good work incentives – can also be worked towards in a progressive tax system. Reducing top tax rates and removing deductions is necessary in any case.

This article is an adaptation from part of a draft chapter, “Stewardship of the Nation's Finances: Taxation,” taken from an upcoming book by Dr. Boersema. This chapter contains further detail and relevant bibliographical information. Interested readers are invited to request, and comment on, the full version by emailing the author at jboerse@redeemer.ca.



Valuable Daughters

The killing continues, quietly, in China

by Sharon L. Bratcher

An art contest hosted by a local college invited students to get creative on the topic of social injustice. Reflecting on books recently read, I determined to present my choice for worst social injustice in the world: parents in China who are forced every day to give up their beloved children.

These are the facts, gathered from *The Lost Daughters of China* by Karin Evans, and *Wanting a Daughter, Needing a Son* by Kay Johnson.

Deadly overpopulation myth

About 30 years ago, China adopted a one-child per family, or in many areas, a one-son/two-child policy. This was partially begun due to pressure from Western nations to stop what was considered a runaway population explosion.

Tradition and religion in China demand that a family produce a son so that he can carry on the family name and he can pray for his ancestors. The state's restrictive family-planning conflicts with the family's strong need for a son and creates a situation where women fear bringing a baby girl to their husbands or especially to his family. Instead, they drown or suffocate them so that the family can try again for a boy. It is most common for a second-born girl to be destroyed.

But there are many parents who love their little ones and cannot bring themselves to murder. And so they go stealthily into a busy marketplace or railroad station and place their precious bundle down and disappear, often watching from afar. Sometimes the baby is found with coins as a parting gift. One child was wrapped with this note, which gave her name and date of birth and then said:

"I am heart-broken to give her up. But in China, women have no power and I have no choice. I hope someone will care for her."



Many thousands

According to Evans, "there is mounting evidence that the problem of female abandonment is severe in some regions of the country and that many tens of thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of children are abandoned each year." She relates that these mothers are "loving and desperate. . . I can't imagine any other state of mind that would accommodate the reality of giving birth, caring for a child for 3 months, and then laying her down in a marketplace and walking away." Some Chinese women say, "many women break their nerves that way . . . there [at the site of abandonment] she would experience a kind of death."

When the baby girls are found, they are taken to an orphanage, where they are cared for until they can be adopted, usually going to the United States, Canada, or Europe. One adoptive mother thinks about this sacrifice often, and says, "I'm sad my daughter's mother will never know her child but I'm happy she was brave enough to give birth to her." This is because so many of the baby girls are killed at birth – one couple murdered five infant daughters, always hoping their next baby would be a son.

Just as awful is the fact that abortion is legal, promoted and often even coerced. Evans states that, "A woman could be forcibly taken in for an abortion, no matter what the length of her pregnancy. . . . They dragged her to the hospital for an abortion and it was a late abortion – the kind a baby

could have survived." In another form of coercion, more than 30 million women were forcibly sterilized in 1991.

A rural family who decided to have another child said that the government dismantled their house and made them homeless. An urban woman said she would like more children, but she would lose her housing subsidy and medical care if she did. High fines are another deterrent.

According to Evans, "careful study has led at least some experts in the population field to argue that the benefits gained from reducing population growth are not as great as usually assumed and are not significant enough to warrant coercion." And there is "a huge toll of human suffering and discrimination that will leave scars not only on the surviving children, but also on those who must live with their deeds in shameful silence." The price of birth planning in China has indeed been high.

Only now is China experiencing a "gender gap," finding that its young men are having difficulty finding wives. Evans refers to this as "the world's first international female diaspora."

"For the orphaned girls of China, international adoption offers a way out of the institution, a chance at a new life, but life in a culture vastly different from the land of their birth. . . . These girls may have once been lost, but now they are clearly found, deeply and completely wanted [including Evans' own adopted daughter.]"

Our culture is not so different

God's Word always, always speaks of children as a blessing. In our own societies we see a lack of appreciation for children – they are viewed as an economic and social burden. A look at China can show us exactly where this line of thinking is leading.

May God give us the courage and strength to value children above material blessings.





It's time to rethink the way we VOTE

A case FOR Proportional Representation

by Julia Bareman

We often pray that the leaders of our country will make decisions that will be in line with how the Bible says we are to live. While prayer is a critical tool, the lack of Christian direction, or even debate in our nation begs the question, is there more that we can do? Is there a way that we can actively promote the application of Christian values in all aspects of government? A phenomenon spreading through the provinces offers some hope in this regard.

Many of you will have heard of the Citizen's Assemblies on electoral reform that has taken place in British Columbia and, recently, Ontario. The Ontario Assembly's report came out on May 15. In it, they recommended that the government of Ontario adopt a Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system.

In December of 2004, a similar Assembly in BC recommended that the province adopt the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. While this recommendation was rejected by the BC voters in a 2005 referendum, the denunciation of the current electoral system is a curious development in provincial politics. Canadian citizens are rejecting the method used to elect our leaders and in its place they are suggesting a system that could allow for a rise in Christian debate within government. To better

understand the possibilities, one must understand how our current electoral system limits the opportunities for Christian influence in government.

Problems with "first past the post"

An electoral system is the method used to translate votes into representation in government. Currently, Albertans use the same electoral system Canadians use nationally. The Single Member Plurality (SMP) or "first past the post" system is the simplest system in existence; candidates run in individual constituencies, and the candidate with the most votes wins. SMP is a system that favors large parties and promotes a two or two-and-a-half party system. Because the margin of support needed to win seats is so high, parties are encouraged to act in what is called bridging behavior. They appeal to a broad spectrum of the population by refusing to focus on controversial or divisive issues. Typically, these issues are left up to the courts to set precedence, or are deemed "charter issues," issues that need to be decided on the basis of human rights.

The result of this is that parties develop into large parties covering all of the

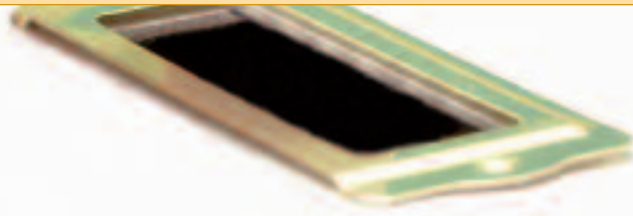
left-centre or all of the right-centre. Small parties that take strong stances on issues are enveloped by larger parties or become wasted votes because they fail to gain seats in Parliament. Minority voices are drowned out in favor of mass appeal policies that will garner the most votes. The use of the Single Member Plurality electoral system creates a political climate in which it is difficult for Christians to effectively promote their values.

Getting real representation

Canada inherited the Single Member Plurality (SMP) electoral system from Britain, as did many former colonies such as the US, Australia, and New Zealand.

New Zealand underwent electoral reform a few years ago, and replaced SMP with the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system. This is also the most popular choice for reform in Canada. MMP keeps representatives elected by constituency. In addition, national seats are designated that ensure results are proportional to the national totals. While I am sure there are few New Democrat supporters reading this, they are the best example of how MMP would benefit small parties. In the last election, the NDP

continued on pg 13



ONTARIANS GET TO VOTE ON HOW TO VOTE

What is Proportional Representation? And what is a First Past the Post system?

by Jon Dykstra

Hopefully this issue of *Reformed Perspective* will arrive at Ontarians' doors before October 10, because that's the day they get to choose between two different electoral systems. But whether it arrives before or after, the topic of just what sort of electoral system is most Christian-friendly is one that won't go away. Other Canadian jurisdictions – Prince Edward Island, BC and now Ontario – have explored changing their electoral systems, and interest in growing in other provinces as well.

The choice is generally between:

1. The current **First Past the Post** system, in which candidates run against one another in geographical ridings. Any number of candidates can run in each riding, which means that to win a candidate doesn't need to get a majority of the votes, he only needs one more than the person in second place. So, for example, if 10 candidates ran in one riding it would be theoretically possible for the winning candidate to win with as little as 11 per cent of the vote (if the other candidates got 10%, 10%, 10%, 10%, 10%, 10%, 10%, 10%, 10% and 9%). This is an extreme example, but it isn't unusual for a candidate to win with as little as 30 per cent of the vote.
2. Some form of **Proportional Representation** in which votes from the whole province (or sometimes the whole country) are tallied, and seats are allotted to the different parties on the basis of the overall percentage of votes they received. So, for example, if the federal election were to be run this way, and the Christian Heritage Party was to receive a mere 1 per cent of all the votes in the country, they would receive one per cent of the seats in Parliament, or 3 of the 308.

Ontarians are choosing between their current first-past-the-post system and a "Mixed Member Proportional Vote" system that would mix proportional representation with the old system: 90 seats would still be chosen the old way, and 39 seats would be delegated via proportional representation. Any party that receives a minimum of 3 per cent of the overall vote will win at least one of these seats. That would allow a smaller party, like Ontario's family friendly (and largely Christian) Family Coalition Party, to finally win seats in the provincial parliament.

That sounds so much better. . . but is it? Read on and judge for yourself.

received 17.5 per cent of the vote. Under SMP, they only received 9 per cent of the seats – half of what they should have earned. Under MMP, they would have received the 9 per cent of the constituency seats they earned normally, but would receive an additional 8.5 per cent of the national list seats in order to have the total 17.5 per cent of the seats to match their percentage of the vote.

MMP rewards small parties for the support that they have earned. This allows for diversification of parties and encourages parties to enact bonding strategies where they appeal to a specific segment of the population rather than a large swath of the population. Under a system such as Mixed Member Proportional, parties can take controversial

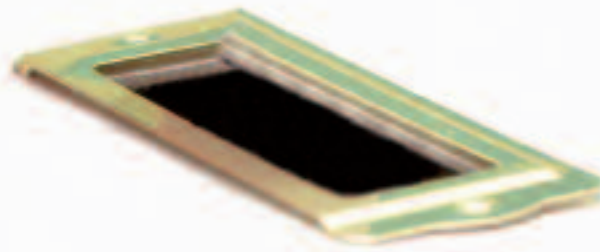
stands on issues and gain enough support to be rewarded with seats in parliament. Christians would be able support parties who promote legislative agendas with a Christian focus, without throwing away their vote. While these parties may never form the government, there is a greater possibility that these parties would have a voice in the governance of our nation.

Conclusion

As I stated earlier, electoral reform is currently a provincial phenomenon. Ontario and BC have held Citizen Assemblies, while Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick have held government commissions or legislative committees studying the issue. All of the reports have come back in favor of reform. My home province of Alberta is a prime candidate for reform, we

simply lack the political motivation to pursue it at this time; the Conservatives have a good grasp on power, why would they change the system that benefits them so dramatically? Nationally, the NDP is the only party that advocates electoral reform, but this could change with the current shifts in the party system.

The reality of electoral reform is that it is a top down process. There will be no uprising of downtrodden voters; reform will come when parties advocate it. It is important, therefore, to place this issue on the government's radar. As Christians, we need to encourage our elected officials to pursue a more representative form of government. In this way, we open the door for a Christian influence in the government of our country.



Staying with the same old same old

A case AGAINST Proportional Representation

by Jon Dykstra

An electoral system based on Proportional Representation (PR) would allow the federal Christian Heritage Party and Ontario's (largely Christian) Family Coalition Party to finally win seats. Christians who have long been ignored would finally have an elected voice in the legislatures and Parliament. PR allots seats to a party based on the percentage of total votes a party received. So if, for example, the CHP garnered 1 per cent of all the votes across Canada, under a PR

electoral system they would get 1 per cent of the seats in Parliament, or 3 out of 308.

So it seems pretty clear that Christians should support PR. . . right?

Not so fast!

1) It helps all small parties

In Ontario the Family Coalition Party (FCP) has come out in favor of a more PR-ish system. But so has the NDP. They say politics make strange bedfellows and this is one of the most extreme examples. The

FCP has come out in favor of PR because it would almost certainly get the party its first seat in the provincial parliament. The NDP favors it because they stand to gain a half dozen or more seats.

So while it's understandable why the FCP would favor PR, it isn't clear that Christians overall should favor it. Is the gain of one explicitly Christian MPP worth getting saddled with a half dozen anti-family, pro-abortion MPPs?

Additionally, PR won't just help the NDP and FCP but will help any small party able to get the minimum-needed percentage of the total vote. So, for example, the Sex Party in BC, if it could garner 3 per cent of the total vote across the province, under a PR system could get a seat or two in the provincial legislature. And it doesn't seem all that unlikely that they could pull it off. And under PR the Marijuana Party would almost certainly win seats.

So PR might get us one or two strong Christians, but it will also let in a whole host of very strange parties.

2) Elected representatives will be tied even more closely to their parties

Under Proportional Representation people vote for a party, rather than a person. The parties, rather than the voters, select who will fill the seats they win. If a party won a dozen seats they would appoint only their dozen most loyal members – men and women who would be sure to tow the party line on all issues.

That means that while we now have some pro-life MPs in largely pro-abortion parties like the Liberals, under the PR system this would almost certainly not happen. Members of Parliament would hold their office only because their party's leadership appointed them, so that's who these MPs would listen to. As Campaign Life Coalition put it, "These members will be outside our ability to lobby them because they will owe their appointment to the party elite, not the people."

3) Coalition governments cost more money

Finally, in the Spring 2007 issue of the *Canadian Student Review* two Fraser Institute policy analysts noted that countries with PR tend to have bigger, more costly governments. The research they cited analyzed more than 80 democracies and found that "A reform of electoral system from majoritarian (Canada's system) to proportional would increase [government] spending by about 6 per cent of GDP . . ."

This only makes sense. One of the common effects of switching to PR is the in-

crease in the number of parties vying for power. A few main parties might emerge but they will only be able to hold power by forming coalitions with the other smaller

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***PR has a tendency
towards increasing the
size of government.***

.....

parties. And the support of these smaller parties will need to be paid for in one way or another – the Greens will want expensive environmental programs, the NDP will want more money for daycares, and the

Marijuana Party will demand free bongos for every household. Coalitions are costly.

PR has a tendency towards increasing the size of government and that is a worrying thought.

Conclusion

A very strong argument could be made that a PR electoral system is more democratic than Canada's current First Past the Post system. But it's far from clear whether a more democratic system would be any more godly. In fact, in some ways, a PR system seems likely to loosen the restraints on some radically unchristian elements (like the BC Sex Party, or the Marijuana Party) in our country.

It might give us a strong Christian voice in Parliament but at what cost? 

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The Harvest of Imperfection

by Jane deGlint

Many people assume that things will get better with time. At present a family may still have a mortgage to pay, but give them time and their financial woes will ease up. Someone will readily admit that his evening classes are demanding, but he takes comfort from the fact that in the future many job opportunities will present themselves once the proper diplomas have been obtained. And, yes, right now there is the constant hassle of finding dependable babysitters, but before long the children will be able to look after themselves for an evening. Just give everybody time, and everything will fall into its proper place.

However, once the improved stage has been reached, the intensity of the pleasure usually wears off soon. Different challenges demand our attention. A member in the family becomes seriously ill. A shift in the economy causes unexpected hardships. A friend moves to another part of the world. These new clouds of trouble often quench the bold flame of excitement so radically, that we take our hard-won gains for granted. Our gratitude disappears correspondingly.

And even if our personal status is gradually improving without outside interference, we cannot hide our face from the troubles in the world. More emphatically, we are hurt in our souls when we hear that another human being was killed by a bomb. Earthquakes and hurricanes make thousands of people homeless. Each one of these thousands is an individual. It could be a child that used to daydream about becoming a fireman. Or a woman who is close to giving birth. Or a man who recently renovated his shop. Our empathetic suffering overrides any sense of personal accomplishment we might feel.

Freed from a fixation on our own weal and woe, we realize that the stories of wars and calamities tell us a tale of judgment. Our sense of accomplishment is a mere footnote in the battle between the Seed of Woman and the serpent. Our world is condemned. The power of evil has infiltrated all parts of the creation. It opposes anything that is good. It sows discord. It destroys faith in our Provider. It maims God's people in their walk of faith. Its ultimate goal is the annihilation of life to make room for eternal death.

Seated on his holy throne our Lord judged the world's surrender to the evil one. The verdict was swift: guilty. The sentence sharp: demolition.

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***People assume that
things will get better
with time.***

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The consequence of this judgment are with us every day of our lives. Things will not get better, but worse. Very much worse. If the Lord did not spare his good creation, why should he save our imperfect attempts at building a cathedral or constructing a six-lane bridge across a wide river mouth? What lasting value is there in a carefully plotted career or luxurious lifestyle? Are there eternal dividends to our financial assets?

It befits us to realize and accept that our world is not perfect. Whatever we do, it will fall apart.

At the same time, the Lord holds us to task concerning our mandate. We feel

that in our souls. It is not right to waste the world's resources, to be lazy, to deliver poor workmanship, to ignore one's talents, to have unhealthy habits. This sense of proper maintenance is given to believers and unbelievers alike. Deep down people know that they are accountable for their share in managing the created world. God's breath still leaves its mark on every human soul.

God's people understand that man's inborn sense of dignity and productivity is a gift from the Creator. They also know that the pending punishment has not preempted the mandate to manage the earth. God wants the treasures of the earth to be discovered, channeled and enjoyed. He wants individual talents to be nurtured and shared.

These two prongs – mandate and judgment – hold man in place. They keep him on task and prevent him from becoming boastful. Humbly God's people go to work in the awareness that they live in an imperfect world which can only be renewed after it is purified by fire.

This sobering view helps us to keep things in perspective when we become frustrated and discouraged with the imperfections of everyday life. Examples of such aggravations abound.

To start with the mundane, there is no perfect computer. Initially we, at least the people of my generation, might have been inclined to think that computers were flawless fruits of modern technology that would eliminate many hours of laborious manual labor, preserve incredible amounts of information on a miniscule chip and open the virtual doors to massive amounts of facts and images. We erred in our assumption. These marvels of

technology were not flawless. Even if they would not have been outdated at an exponential rate, they would not have lasted. Our motherboards fried and our monitors died.

There are no perfect performances. It would readily be admitted that an amateur orchestra or choir would not put on a perfect show. We do not expect such perfection or need it for our enjoyment. The audience of a school play is often equally charmed by the blunders as by the highlights of the production. But our expectations are much higher and our tolerance of flaws is smaller when we attend a professional performance for which we purchased tickets. And even if the audience considers a performance brilliant, it is likely that the performers have a slightly different take on the issue. They know from experience that there is no perfect performance.

Perfect health, if attainable for a moment, will not last. It seems that some people subconsciously expect that eventually all illness and consequently also death can be eradicated as medical and biochemical research forays into the deepest secrets of life. But that will not happen. Exercise, diet and medical care are means which we must employ to lead a life which is as healthy as the circumstances permit. They may even help to ease the process of transition from life to physical death. But they will not succeed in giving us perfect health. It is our task to adjust to the restrictions which the Lord places on our well-being as he prepares us for the life eternal.

Perfect relationships are impossible. Even if we thought we had found the perfect friend or the perfect partner, it remains a fact that all people are still riddled with imperfections. Thankfully it is not the perfection that creates a bond between people. It is the shared learning experience, the common struggle, and an acknowledgment of wrongdoing that brings people together in a relationship that lasts and bears the fruit of growing together.

There is no perfect sermon. This is not only somewhat frustrating to the hearers, but also to the preachers. Every humble preacher knows his limitations. He can never show the whole picture with all the perspectives, and he can never articulate the message flawlessly. Apart from the occasional grammatical error, he may make errors in interpretation or in a detail of dogma. But in spite of these imperfections the Spirit can work faith in the heart of the hearers. The Lord knows that in our present time the truth is presented as a poor reflection from a broken mirror. And even if it were presented perfectly, we still only know in part. Yet, by faith we are certain that one day we will be able to know fully.

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***Things will not get
better, but worse.
Very much worse***

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As the balance between mandate and judgment helps us to accept the reality of imperfection, it also sets the tone for our response to living in an imperfect world. We do not have to get angry or frustrated, neither should we become indifferent or inactive. Every setback, from a missed appointment to a serious illness to a destructive hurricane, calls for a confession of sin. We do not honor God wholeheartedly. We do not fully serve our neighbor. We fall short of all the commandments. Lord, have mercy on us. Forgive us our stubbornness when we kicked against the pricks. Help us bear your judgment, even before we understand what good it would do.

Our confession of sin removes our blind spots which hide the Lord's purpose for our lives. By taking responsibility for our shortcomings we start to see where

the Lord is leading us. He uses our mistakes and our pain to mold our heart and will. Under his guiding hand we learn to adjust our plans. He opens our eyes to see which roads are blocked and which detours are necessary to reach our eternal destiny.

Our call of anguish turns into a song of gratitude. Lord, your ways are too marvelous for me. I was set on a path of self-destruction, but you turned me around and led me to the path of righteousness. Lord, please forgive us our imperfections.

There will always be unanswered questions. The Lord does not reveal his entire plan to us. The unexplained burdens are a test of faith. If we would have all the answers, we did not need to trust anymore and would likely fall again into pride. We have to accept the adverse circumstances in faith, without complaining. Complaints keep us nearsighted and wear us down. Surrender to the Lord's plan helps us bear our load. Not all the burdens are lifted, but they become so manageable that sometimes we do not even feel them.

Having confessed our sins and leaving our complaints behind, we are wide open for God's grace. His protection surrounds us and his blessings astound us.

Our Lord Jesus took all our imperfections upon himself and nailed them to the cross. Through his perfect obedience he obtained our perfection. We still carry the marks of imperfection on our heart, body and mind. But one day our imperfections will be laid to rest in the grave, an imperfect seed in imperfect soil. There the breath of the Spirit will renew our soul. And we will be harvested to a life of perfect love and perfect service.

"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, but it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, but it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, but it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, but it is raised a spiritual body." 1 Corinthians 15:42-44



Dying with Dignity

Christians know how to do it – the world needs to know

by Mark Penninga

Words can pack a punch. As such, they can be used for both noble and crafty purposes. Advertisers, political spin-docs, and even Supreme Court judges know this well and take full advantage of the power of words. One example is the concept of dignity. Because dignity seems to be such a favorable word it is being used, and exploited, for purposes as far ranging as Hilary Duff's latest pop album to the push for legalized abortion in third world countries.

But the movement that has most exploited the concept of dignity is the political effort to legalize euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. The term "death with dignity" is being used by right-to-die advocacy groups because they know that associating dignity with euthanasia will soften the public perception of what they are really demanding – state condoned suicide.

As Christians, we are called to be a light in this dark world. The darkness is especially evident when our culture is demanding the right to die, even at the hands of the state. Being a light involves more than lobbying the government to consider the pro-life perspective (see September's article "Euthanasia on the Horizon" for more information on how we can respond politically). It also means that we show our culture what it means to value life, even if our lives are subject to disease, loneliness, and frailty. In short, we must show our culture what true dignity is and how it can be best upheld without euthanasia, suicide,

mercy killing, or any human attempt to end life's difficulties through death.

This is no simple calling. Just because we value life at all stages does not mean that we have certain answers to many difficult questions about what we can and cannot do to prolong life or speed up death. In this article, I will examine two very different views on what it means to die with dignity – the prevailing secular view contrasted with the Christian account.

The secular struggle with dying

Our Western world has struggled with death and dying, especially since it abandoned its religious grounding in the age known as modernity (18th – early 20th Century). Modernity changed the sciences to Science (as if it alone carried authority) and relied on Science as the new god in which to put hope and to deal with the fear of death.

Humans have intrinsic worth because of God

Although the Western world is now considered postmodern, not much has changed in our feelings about dying and death. Billions of dollars are being spent on research in the hopes of finding life-preserving cures to combat disease. Reproductive technologies are leading the pack

when it comes to pushing for new ways of finding eternal life without God. For years now we have been constantly reminded of its "ground breaking" discoveries with the human genome project, stem cell research, and cloning. But despite the hype, there is little to show for all the effort. The average lifespan may be slowly increasing but the "extra" time on earth seems to get increasingly more miserable.

Delaying death does not make life better. A good example of this is the public awareness campaign that has been launched recently with advertisements warning the public about elder neglect. Our individualistic society is focused on preserving our own lives, at the expense of looking at how we can enrich the lives around us. Those who cannot look after themselves (especially the elderly, the unborn, and the disabled) are quickly marginalized and neglected. I don't know how an ad at the corner bus stop is going to combat this. It is a problem with much deeper roots.

Secular security

A relatively recent Supreme Court case can help us understand what is causing our society to neglect the old, unborn, and infirm. If you read the article in last month's *Reformed Perspective* titled "Euthanasia on the Horizon" you may remember how I described the Supreme Court of Canada's ruling on physician-assisted suicide in the case of *Rodriguez v. British Columbia*. This case involved a lady named



Christians must cherish the gift of life, but don't need to fear the pall of death.

Sue Rodriguez who suffered from Lou Gehrig's disease and wanted the legal right to have a doctor end her life. What is worth repeating in this article is that the Supreme Court bought into her argument that her disease was robbing her of her dignity. That is because they agreed that dignity is essentially the same thing as autonomy – the ability to make decisions for ourselves. Rodriguez believed that dying with dignity meant that she should be able to control the timing of her own death rather than be controlled by it.

Our secular world fears death because it is an unknown. Controlling the timing of our death is one answer to controlling death itself. As a result, the world has chosen to call euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide “death with dignity.” In reality, there is little dignity evident. There is no courage to brave the difficult life, no support from loved ones to be by their side through thick and thin, and no hope for a better future. “Death with dignity” is a politically correct way of giving up on life and taking away the responsibility of others to care for those who are suffering.

A biblical view of dying

Even Christians, comforted with the realization that death is the beginning of an eternal life with God, often still fear death. After all, it seems to put an end to all that we love and care for, and replaces it with what is largely unknown. And even if we don't struggle with the reality of death itself, we still face many questions about dying. For example, how much effort should be directed towards keeping a person alive, even if they would be happy to be with the LORD? Does it make a difference whether this person is old or young? Is there ever a time to “pull the plug”?

The Bible is clear that humans have intrinsic worth because of God's special relationship with us. Genesis 1 explains that He made us in His image which means that we reflect many of the attributes of God through our dominion over creation, our creativity, intellect, righteousness, and holiness (having been set apart from the rest of creation), to name but a few distinctions. In short, our dignity cannot be

lost because of a disease which takes away our ability to make decisions for ourselves. Regardless of whether we are young or old, disabled or healthy, we must all be treated with dignity because we were all made by God. Even after the fall into sin and before the sixth commandment was given on Mount Sinai, God warned Noah, “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”

A Biblical view of human dignity realizes that we do not possess dignity because of our own worthiness. Our depravity is evident in everything we do and would surely have removed any dignity that we possessed. But even after the fall into sin we still possess the image of God, as made clear in the text just quoted. We have dignity only because God continues to have a special relationship with humanity. Christians should stand out from all others by reflecting who God really is to a world that is lost in darkness.

Application

Applying this to death and dying, we can conclude that true death with dignity is a death that is in accordance with God's will, including God's timing. Being light-bearers, we don't focus on a right to death, we instead focus on living rightly. This includes living in thankfulness and righteousness even while our bodies may be terminally ill and approaching death. A terminally ill person can live a dignified life that glorifies God no less than a healthy person. The breakdown of our bodies is a difficult burden to live under. But it is a burden that God has given to us, and He comforts us with His promise that He will never give us a burden too heavy to carry. Our Lord Jesus Christ also encouraged us: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you

will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Glorifying God with our whole life does not mean that we make every effort to extend life as long as it is technologically possible. Doing so can be making an idol out of technology – only accepting its answers, rather than God’s. With the powers of technology comes the responsibility to use it wisely. This applies just as much, whether we choose to use technology or to turn it off. When we make these decisions we must realize that we are accountable to God with both our motivations and actions. It won’t be very helpful for me to provide specific directives for hypothetical situations because every instance is different. Instead, it will be more helpful to apply Biblical principles which we have to keep in mind in every situation:

1. Compassion – Galatians 6:2 urges us to “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” What are we doing to help those who are suffering? As family and friends, are we visiting the dying regularly and attending to their needs? We must be careful not to put burdens on others that they were not meant to carry, such as insisting on medical intervention when they are not physically or mentally able to go on.
2. Value – The doctrine of the image of God in man is meant to be lived out. How are we communicating to those who are terminally ill or who suffer from disabilities that they are valued by God and us? Do the terminally ill really want to die or do they feel like they are a burden and would rather end their life than make it difficult for others? We can show people that they are valued by spending time with them, learning from them, and thanking them for their lives.
3. Perseverance – Regardless of age, we are all called to accept the lot God has given us in life. We cannot look to technology to escape hardships by speeding up our death. Note that this is very different from using technol-

ogy to make life more bearable, which is about compassion rather than giving up.

4. Hope – Many who are dying have no hope. We know the Good News that gives real hope. What are we doing to spread this good news to the sick and infirm who do not believe in Christ? How many of us visit strangers in senior’s homes or hospitals? Are we too comfortable in our own lives that we fail to reach out to others with the most important message that can be delivered?

***We can show people
that they are valued
by spending time
with them***

5. Consideration – Although we would rather not consider how we want to be treated in the event of an accident,

serious medical situation, or even death, we are being inconsiderate of our loved ones if we do not talk about it with them before something serious happens. Discuss specifics, such as what extent of medical intervention should be applied to you.

When applying these principles, we must remember to do so from a distinctly Christian perspective. Concepts like compassion are easily twisted to make the case that euthanasia is a compassionate response to suffering. That is a humanist interpretation. A biblical perspective of compassion is self-denying and demonstrates love for our neighbor over love for ourselves.

Conclusion

Those who are calling for “death with dignity” are really looking for public approval for giving up on life. Since we have been given the Gospel of hope and its assurance that we are all valuable regardless of our physical state, we must combat the attitude that death is the compassionate response to those who suffer. The best way to combat it is to be a light. Let us show the world that we value life because we love the Giver of life.



Then I Saw

... a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 20:I-4

by Christine Farenhorst

When I was a little girl, my father used to take us to an island in the North Sea for summer holidays – the island of Schiermonnikoog. The night before we were to leave, I was always in such a state of excitement that I would be unable to sleep. Crawling to the foot of my bed, I would stand on my head out of pure joy at the prospect of several weeks of sea and dunes. We took a ferry across the sea. My mother packed “broodjes” – buns with cheese and meat which we ate out of our fist while sitting on the deck. My sister, Joke, would point out the purpose of the various buoys stationed in the churning waters we passed. I found it an altogether glorious day.

Island memories also include a town crier who, with the aid of a megaphone, shouted out events that would take place. As well, there were the long hikes into the fields, woods and beaches of the island. After stopping at the local bakery for “koek,” cake, and other snacks, we would follow father as he, at the head of the family, tramped off down some winding path that inevitably led to fences we had to climb and cows we had to skirt. Eventually settling down into some dune pan, or a

knoll in the woods, father would take out a book, (as, for example, *The Adventures of Pa Pinkelman*), and read to us for hours on end. Then we would play games, eat and march back. It was a good holiday – a good one for me, at any rate. Perhaps it was more of a chore for my mother than I knew, as we had no indoor plumbing and it must have taken some ingenuity on her part, and hard work, to care for six children and a husband day after day. But I never heard her complain.

Especially dear to my heart are the times I recall going for walks with my father after supper and just prior to my bedtime. He would take me to look at the local chicken coops in neighboring backyards, lifting me up so that I could see them better. Or he would sit with me in a field, telling me to be very quiet so that the rabbits would not know that we were there. And usually one or two or more would eventually come out and nibble grass in front of us, much to my delight.

Looking back

Thinking back now, some one half century later, I wonder what it was exactly that

so made me look forward to savor this time. There were none of the amenities that children have today as they holiday with their families – no motorboats, water skis, walkmans, video games, or fast-food restaurants. I think most of the joy was the fact that I could spend plain, sweet time with my parents, time in which I had their undivided attention.

For many years, when our children were young, we have taken them up north for the summer holidays. We’ve played games, watched wildlife, read stories and relished God’s nature together. This past summer we had the pleasure of the company of our oldest son, Christopher, and his wife, Melissa and their baby daughter, Eleanor. During the winter months we look forward with great intensity to our weeks up at Dog Lake in Missanabie, Ontario. The beauty and grandeur of the magnificent skyline, the vast expanse of heaven, and the stillness and peace away from the noise of city and traffic, is balm for our hearts and minds. Each day this summer holiday once again brought new fishing stories, new champions of cribbage and horse-shoes, and fresh delight in the plaintive call

of the loon. Friendly chipmunks ate peanuts out of our hands, and the bald eagle soared over the trees across from our cottage. The continual lap of the water on the shore of the sandy beach where we sat, reiterated God's power over creation. (. . . *Who shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth from the womb; when I made clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed?"* Job 38:8-11)

Mrs. Guillaume knew

We had a friend, an old lady, a Mrs. Guillaume, who also relished a time to which she looked forward – a time that she knew for certain would be hers. Her husband had been a pastor – a man of incredible faith and devotion to the Lord. I saw him weep on several occasions when he preached because his desire to impart God's love and grace to the congregation was so intense. Mrs. Guillaume was a faithful helpmeet for her husband and she put his calling above her own desires and needs. When he passed away, she moved into a senior citizen home and was a source of joy and comfort to all who knew her. Now Mrs. Guillaume's particular delight was in looking forward to heaven and she shared this anticipation with anyone with whom she spoke.

"I pray each night," she told me, "that I will wake up in heaven and see the blessed face of my Lord and Savior. Do you pray that too?"

I had to confess that I did not. Mrs. Guillaume smiled at me. I have rarely seen anyone whose face has shone with as much love as Mrs. Guillaume's face did.

"Ah, but Christine," she said, "just think of it. No more pain, no more sorrow and so much love. And our dear Savior will be there always."

Mrs. Guillaume was a dear friend of my mother. When my mother, who was ill with cancer, was in the last days of her life,



**"I pray each night,"
she told me,
"that I will wake up in heaven."**

Mrs. Guillaume visited her daily, reading the Bible with her, singing with her and praying with her. My mother was at least ten years younger than Mrs. Guillaume and so was like a younger sister. When she was hospitalized and it became obvious that she would probably not live through the night, Mrs. Guillaume knocked on the hospital door and asked the family's permission to please say goodbye to her dear friend. She came in, her rather large and unwieldy arthritic body leaning heavily on her cane.

"My dear friend, Nelly," she said, wasting no time on niceties. "My dear, dear friend. Now you are going to see the Lord before I am after all."

My mother, her eyes fixed on Mrs. Guillaume, nodded almost imperceptibly.

"Please let me pray with you one more time," Mrs. Guillaume went on.

And then she knelt. Painfully and slowly her knees went down on the floor in front of the hospital bed. My mother's right hand crept over and Mrs. Guillaume took it between her own two large hands.

"Dear Lord," she prayed, "please take my dear friend Nelly home to you today so that her suffering will be over and that she may see your face and be joyful forever. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

Then she got up. She smiled at my mother, bent over and kissed her on the cheek.

"Goodbye, dear friend," she whispered, "until I see you again in heaven."

My mother died that night. Mrs. Guillaume also died, albeit a few years later. She had lived each day in anticipation of and preparation for that time when she would close her eyes and open them in glory. Her anticipation and preparation were evident to all who knew her.

Preparation

Summer holidays offer joy, but that joy is mixed with the knowledge that holidays are temporal. But our time in heaven will be eternal – without end. Surely worth much more anticipation than anything this earth offers; surely worth a vast amount of preparation.

To be prepared for heaven is one of the most effectual means of obtaining joy, also in this life. Remember Jesus . . . the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. . . (Hebrews 12:2).



POP CULTURE:

*Most Christians either avoid it, or embrace it.
The first approach denies that we are in the world;
the second acts as if we are of the world.
We need a third option.*

by Johan D. Tangelder

Why should Christians be concerned with culture? Aren't we merely passing through this world as strangers and pilgrims?

Well, culture is not simply about reading the right books, being familiar with Bach, Beethoven, Mozart or Rembrandt's great art works. Author William D. Romanowski argues that it has much to do with faith; it is part of being "fearfully and wonderfully made" in the image of God (Ps. 139:14). He states that culture represents human responses to God's first and foundational command: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). God entrusts ordinary human beings with developing and maintaining His creation. That's culture.

The collapse of western culture

But what has happened to our Western culture? The world has changed in the last six decades. Since the Second World War, moral concepts have largely vanished, and the dance-your-troubles-away mood of the 1920s and 30s has been superseded by the notion of "doing your own thing." Increasingly we see ourselves living in a post-Christian and even a neo-pagan world that is bland, shallow, careless, nihilistic, and witnessing the loss of the Christian ethical tradition "of self-discipline, self-denial, and sacrifice." We may even call it a homeless culture, without a

lodestar to guide it, experiencing the loss of love for the true and the beautiful – a culture without God.

As I see it, popular culture is a symptom of the cultural collapse of our society and the general spirit of the age. Whether we like it or not, it is our world, the world of our children, and the world of our non-Christian friends and neighbors. And given its pervasive influence, we should be willing to try to understand it. Professor Stanley Grenz argues that we must understand popular culture just because it is our world;

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***The leading evangelists
in America are those
people who make the
TV programs***

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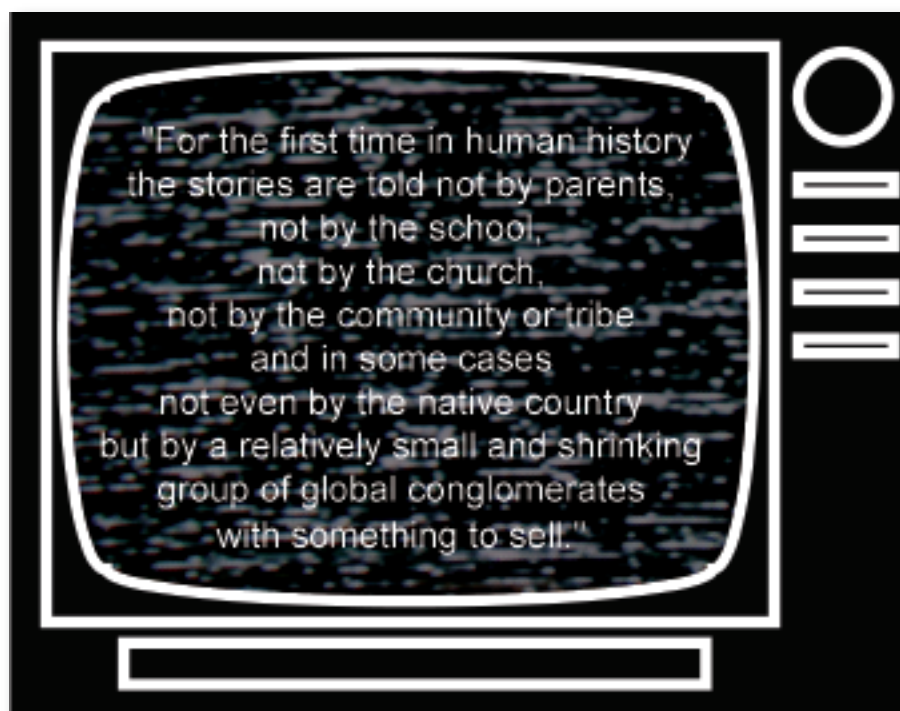
it is the world we are trying to reach with the Gospel. More and more academics are aware of the need to grasp the meaning of the culture that surrounds them. For example, in 1998 the American Academy of Religion held its conference at Walt Disney World and focused the lectures and seminars on popular culture.

Pop culture

What is popular culture? It is by nature trivial. Its greatest influence is the way it shapes *how* we think and feel, and even the way we worship. It specializes in instant gratification. But like most instant things, it may spoil your taste for something better. It appeals to greed and laziness. The art products in popular culture are primarily commercial, based on profit making. "Much of the popular art that is produced is geared to market forces," observes William D. Romanowski. "Success and achievement are gauged solely in terms of commercial viability, which translates into 'popular.'"

The late George Gerbner, a media analyst, observed, "For the first time in human history the stories are told not by parents, not by the school, not by the church, not by the community or tribe and in some cases not even by the native country but by a relatively small and shrinking group of global conglomerates with something to sell." And as Gerbner indicated, it is clear that in contemporary society the producers of popular art inform our understanding of culture as much as any single factor.

Popular art works do not challenge but affirm the beliefs and values of patrons. For most people evaluation of popular artwork is left almost completely to personal taste and whim.



Technology

Our popular culture cannot be separated from the phenomenal development of technology. What is new today becomes quickly obsolete, to be replaced by the latest and newest gadget. This rapid technological change doomed the fight for decency in American popular culture, as every successive innovation weakened the power of regulators, moral and otherwise, while expanding the venues where human weakness could be exploited for fun and profit (mainly the latter). The result is the unrestrainable popular culture of today, where every concept, no matter how low-brow or how vile, can find a platform and an audience.

Many young people and the not-so-young in our Western world have been raised on digital technology. By day they may sit in front of a computer screen in an office cubicle. By night they either search the Internet or sit in front of the TV. Thanks to cable television, our news, weather, sports, movies, and even buying online are all instantly available. The contest for people's hearts and minds exists in our media-saturated society. "You may think that Billy Graham is the leading

evangelist in America, but he's not," Rev. Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association said. "The leading evangelists in America are those people who make the TV programs."

Television

For a large segment of the population television has so refashioned and reshaped their lives that it is hard to imagine what life was like before it.

Seldom does anyone ask, "What have you read lately?" One is more likely to hear the question, "What have you seen lately?" We have become, for better or worse, a visually oriented society.

And TV is brainwashing the public. The job of programmers is to be new and up-to-the minute, which means that are compelled to follow the latest trends and insights and ideas, often without any attempt to come to grips with their underlying principles. I have often been told, "I have 'seen' such and such a report on TV, therefore it must be true." But Francis Schaeffer rightly points out: "TV manipulates viewers by its normal way of operating. Many viewers seem to assume that when they have seen something on TV, they have seen it with their own eyes. But

this is not so, for one must never forget that every television minute has been edited. The viewer does not see the event. He sees. . . an *edited* event or an *edited image* of that event."

Television, in the course of one or two decades, has changed the habits, knowledge and whole outlook on the world of a large majority of the people. In *Modern Art* and *Death of A Culture* Hans Rookmaaker observes that today things can be shown in TV programs that would have impossible even five years ago. "Protesters are right when they say that capitalistic society is prostituting women for the sake of profits."

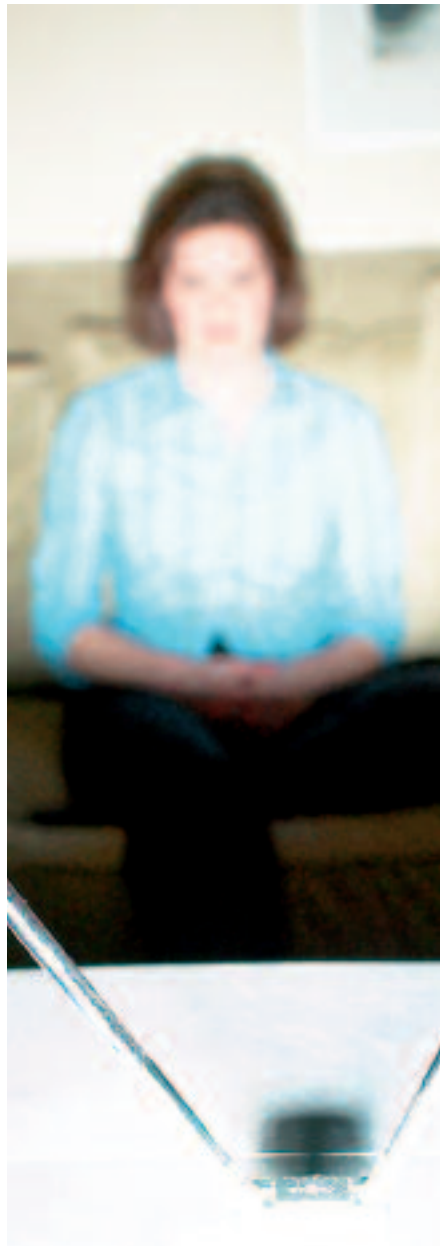
Commercial messages are omnipresent. Advertising dollars can influence the content of TV programs. A TV sitcom has to adhere to a strict time limit with breaks in the narrative to accommodate commercials. A widely reported study by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2005 revealed a trend in television programming toward more sexual subject matter. Another survey reported that 51 per cent of the teenagers are getting their information about sex from movies and TV shows.

In *Truth Decay*, Douglas Groothuis points out that on TV amusement trumps all other values and takes captive every topic. Every subject – whether war, religion, business, law or education – must be presented in a lively, amusing or stimulating manner. Images appear and disappear and reappear without a proper rational context. An attempt at a sobering news story about slavery in the Sudan is followed by a lively advertising for soap or automobiles. Even news broadcasters manage to inform their viewers about greatest tragedies with a smile. A few evening hours spent with the offerings of television, shows a sit-com dilemma solved in less than half an hour, upset stomachs relieved in less than thirty seconds, and political candidates accepted or

rejected based upon paid political announcement. Consequently, TV contributes to the lack of responsible politics and diminished democracy.

The dependency on commercials has results in the loss of restrictions, economic or otherwise. Viewers are occasionally warned to that the “following program contains adult material. . . etc.” The latter only serves to ensure that more, not fewer children will watch. Taboos continue to be broken in the pursuit of audiences. It seems little can shock viewers anymore, least of all intimate revelations about personal lives. Some shows do not hesitate to parade the most outlandish perversions, the most degraded appetites. I also strongly believe that by watching a constant diet of violence on TV our society has become systematically desensitized to the pain and suffering of others. While movies and television desensitize viewers against inflicting suffering on other human beings, video games should also concern parents. In some of them life-like figures pop up, the player has to respond automatically by aiming and pulling the trigger. It seems these games are a factor contributing to the increasing number of senseless and cruel murders of younger children.

But there is always someone somewhere who can find something uplifting and inspiring in the impossible. In *Everyday Apocalypse: The Sacred Revealed in Radiohead, the Simpsons and other Pop Culture Icons* David Dark manages to see something redemptive even in *The Simpsons*. He argues that viewing *The Simpsons* can be an intensely liberating experience. “We’re called to recognize and be confronted by our own absurdity.” He says that when viewed generously, *The Simpsons* constitutes an exception. “In their loud impotence, bumping through their stories like a bewildered bunch of open wounds, we find them dear.”



.....

51 percent of the teenagers are getting their information about sex from movies and TV shows

.....

Music

The messages of popular culture are perhaps voiced most strongly and clearly through music. Commercialism, the effective selling of products, governs every aspect of the popular music industry. The development of talent and technical virtuosity take time. But the ever-increasing demand for singers and a never-ending stream of fresh faces cannot wait for talent to emerge. A “budding artist” with a guitar and a song can have his/her fifteen minutes of fame.

Samuel Johnson (1789-84) said that, “music is the only sensual pleasure without vice.” But the idea that music was to be used for God’s glory has been greatly undermined. Many singers/songwriters frequently concern themselves specifically with the confusion and relativism of our age. Too many pop artists heavily emphasize the themes of sex, drugs, instant gratification, and violence. In the 1980s “heavy metal” rock performers openly admitted there were few moral restraints in either their music or behavior. This type “of music” and much of the music on MTV has become increasingly rebellious – rebelling against Biblical morality and values, and God Himself. In other words, one does not need to take classes in music appreciation to listen to the latest release from Madonna or the latest Rock band on the scene. Steve Lawhead remarks that the whole system feeds on the “new” – new faces, new gimmicks, new sounds. “Yesterday in pop music is not only dead; it is ancient history.”

The Christian’s challenge

Popular culture and its art forms feed the idols of individual or groups of audience members. Because of our fallen nature we need no enticement to idolatry because our hearts are “artesian wells of idolatry” (Mark 7:14-15,20-23). Rookmaaker said that, “God has given man such tremendous possibilities in the

creation He has made. Yet men have misused them, wrecked them, turned their backs on the God who made them." He also pointed out that too frequently Christians have not understood that art and literature, philosophy and even popular music were the agents of the spirit of the age, and have left these alone or optimistically assumed they were too remote to be of influence.

Whether we like it or not, the problem for Christians remains of how we have to deal with the culture around us, often the fruit of a non-Christian worldview. It is tempting to simply retreat from engagement of culture all together. Francis Schaeffer warned that most Christians are more concerned with personal peace and affluence than having an impact on their society. Of course, it is hard to keep to the right path; temptations are legion. It is much easier to pay lip service to the Lord than to live counter cultural lives. But too many Christians uncritically imbibe whatever popular culture feeds them. "The truth is, followers of Christ are everywhere and everyday folks," said Jonathan Black, Grace Hill Media consultant. "It would naturally follow that a large percentage of Christians are watching – and enjoying – *Desperate Housewives*, *The Amazing Race*, *American Idol* and even Red Sox/Yankee games." But these and similar programs are not harmless forms of entertainment that may be enjoyed without a second thought. The potential for cultural accommodation is real and Christians need to develop a critical awareness of the popular cultural landscape. Spending hours watching television each day says a great deal about our priorities and the use of our God-given abilities and spiritual gifts. If we as adults keep the mind exposed to a constant diet of secular programs based on a non-Christian worldview, how can we warn our children of the spiritual dangers of our time? How can we be a witness in our culture if we behave and act like the world around us?

Proper recognition of the surrounding world is necessary before we can address it properly. We need a biblical "lens" through

which we can see the culture – creation, fall, redemption, the second coming. Christians should "read" their culture in the light of the Bible. It emphasizes the sovereignty of God, the human sinfulness and inadequacy that demand dependence on God's grace alone, and the necessity of striving toward the goal of glorifying God.

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***Spending hours
watching television each
day says a great deal
about our priorities***

.....

Conclusion

In *All God's Children* and *Blue Suede Shoes: Christians & Popular Culture* Kenneth A. Myers warns, "It might seem an extreme assertion at first, but I believe that

the challenge of living with popular culture may well be as serious as persecution and plagues were for the saints of earlier centuries. Being thrown to the lions or living in the shadow of gruesome death are straightforward if unattractive threats. Enemies that come loudly and visible are usually much easier to fight than those that are undetectable. Physical affliction (even to the point of death) for the sake of Christ is a heavy cross, but at least it can be readily recognized at the time as a trial of faith." He is right. When we no longer approach our culture with a Biblical formed worldview, we allow the devil to walk into our lives on bedroom slippers. He often uses modern popular culture to lead us astray. He works so subtly that we believe nothing is happening to our souls. We won't hear him come, but he will work to erode character, spoil innocent pleasures, and cheapen life itself. If we are not watchful, we will become then homeless in God's world.



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**John Calvin
has
never
read
an
issue
he
didn't
like**

QUIET HEROES

ON THE RESCUE OF JEWS IN WARTIME HOLLAND

by F.G. Oosterhoff

I was eight years old when the Nazis marched into Budapest, Hungary. . . . With enthusiastic assistance from the Arrow Cross Party – the Hungarian Fascist party – they killed nearly sixty members of my family, including my mother. I was tortured and left for dead by three Arrow Cross thugs in the ghetto. My sister and I survived thanks to the self-denying determination and cunning of my aunt. Upon liberation my father came back from a forced labor camp, blind and broken in spirit. Without much optimism, the three of us succeeded in starting our lives over. Confusion about what had happened to us, however, stayed with me for forty years.

Why didn't most help?

This is how André Stein, Hungarian-born Jew and now a professor of communications at the University of Toronto, begins the concluding chapter of his book *Quiet Heroes*. It is his second account of Jewish history under the Nazis. The first one, *Broken Heroes*, was published in 1984, forty years after the German invasion of Hungary. In that book Stein confronted the world with the Nazi atrocities in Budapest, and struggled with the question why humanity had abandoned the Jews to their fate and evil had been victorious.

He did not find an answer to that question. In the fall of 1984, however, he was invited to a conference in Washington where recognition was given to a number of people who, while the rest of the world

Blast from the Past



To celebrate the completion of our 25th year of publication, Reformed Perspective is taking a look back at the more than 3,000 articles we've published over the past 275 issues and we're reprinting a handful as "Blasts from the Past."

Most readers of Dutch descent are familiar with the bravery of those Netherlanders who worked to save Jews. Fewer know just how many Jews in the Netherlands weren't rescued. This sobering article, first printed 19 years ago in the October 1988 issue, serves both as a tribute to those who did what they could, and as an indictment to those who should have done more.

It's hard to read this article and not think of the millions who are dying today because of abortion. Can we do more?

was either hunting down Jews or trying to ignore the atrocities, had refused to look the other way and instead risked their lives rescuing the fugitives and sheltering them. Stein's experience in Washington led to another quest: he wanted to get to know these rescuers and find out why they had risked their own lives and those of their children in order to save people who had, in most cases, previously been unknown to them. He wanted to hear their stories so that he might understand the phenomenon of "rescue in the context of killing." He wanted to hear them also because they would be "a balm to [the Jews'] sense of loss and a beacon in the dark history of mankind."

And why did these few?

Many of the rescuers who gathered in Washington were Dutchmen, mainly from the province of Friesland, and several of them had settled in Ontario. With the help of his wife, Stein interviewed five families, as well as two single persons, who had sheltered Jews, and it is their stories that comprise the larger part of his second book on the Holocaust.

The author tried, as far as possible, to preserve the style of those he interviewed, and the result is somewhat uneven – some chapters read more easily than others. But all in all, the book is spellbinding and moving. We meet here a cross section of predominantly rural

REMEMBRANCE DAY RESOURCE

HIDDEN HEROES

Dutch/WWII
50 min; 2001
DVD \$16 US



Students in all our Reformed schools should see this film this Remembrance Day – it tells the story of their grandparents and great grandparents who lived through WWII. The “hidden heroes” of the title were the thousands of Dutchmen who opened their homes to Jews and others who were hiding from the Nazis. They did this at great personal risk, and yet they did this in huge numbers. They were ordinary Dutchmen, but they displayed extraordinary courage. Where did this courage come from? As this film chronicles, in many, many cases it came from their Christian convictions.

This is truly an extraordinary documentary – it tells in short, compelling interviews and quick docudrama clips what the previous generation lived through and what they did to oppose the evil of the Nazis. It is an inspiring movie for anyone, but for those of Dutch descent it is a must see. It is available from www.visionvideo.com.

Frisian society: farmers, small businessmen, a ministerial couple, and an owner of a clinic for the mentally disturbed, who acted in accordance with the biblical injunction: “Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter” (Proverbs 24:11) and who were modest about what they did: in practically all cases they insisted on remaining anonymous.

The reading of this story does not answer every question. There is, first of all, Stein’s own: Why did these few people

do what they did while so many others refused to get involved? Was it their Christian faith that inspired them and gave them courage? The book’s subtitle – *True stories of the rescue of Jews by Christians in Nazi-occupied Holland* – might suggest that, and the forward to the book says that those interviewed were “explicitly Christian.” The accounts themselves do not seem to justify such a blanket statement, however. Several of the rescuers were believing Christians, but in the case of others their faith commitment is not so clear.

When They Ask Who
Freed Us ...”

Moving Good-bye to Canadians
from a Dutch Editor Who Speaks
From the Heart

Deventer, the 10th of March, '45.

Dear Sir: Enclosed I send you an open

One wonders if the noun “Christians” in the subtitle is perhaps to be understood in an ethnic, racial, rather than strictly religious sense: Christians or gentiles as opposed to Jews.

***When Holland
was liberated,
90 percent of its
Jewish population
had been
murdered.***

There is also the problem of the sheer magnitude of the Jewish massacre in the Netherlands. To quote a few statements: “Of the 140,000 Jews in Holland, 104,000 passed through [the transit camp of] Westerbork. At the war’s end, a total of 909 survivors were found in that camp. . . . The Dutch wartime record of the rescue of condemned Jews belongs mostly to a relatively tiny number of ordinary, and often isolated, citizens who risked their lives to save some 15,000 Jews.” And also: “The Dutch disaster can be compared only to the liquidation of Polish Jewry. When Holland was liberated in May 1945, 90 per cent of its Jewish population had been murdered.”

These are sobering statistics. And to see a comparison drawn between Poland and traditionally tolerant, anti-racist and hospitable Holland, is disheartening. All this does not detract, however, from the recognition due to the quiet heroes who did uphold the tradition and who did have compassion: the Frisian ones together with those from other provinces.



Checking up on Einstein

Patience, Precision and Imagination in Physics Research

by Margaret Helder

Scientists do not conduct their research in a vacuum, metaphorically speaking. They usually have a model or idea which guides them in their selection of experiments and in the questions that they want to see answered. Sometimes the questions are obscure, and then the answers are difficult and expensive to obtain.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the search for certain effects of gravity in space. Albert Einstein proposed his general theory of relativity in 1915. Since then, his theory has become foundational to modern views about the cosmos. According to his theory, the geometry of space acts on matter, controlling when and how fast matter moves. Moreover the presence of matter or energy in its turn, acts on space, controlling the nature of the curvature in which bodies move. Since 1915, the idea of a curvature in space-time has been successfully tested many times. This, however, is the only effect of general relativity which has been established. Other predicted effects, such as frame-dragging and gravitational ripples/waves, have yet to be measured or observed directly. It has been 90 years since the theory was first proposed, and the lack of confirmation is not for want of attempts to rectify the situation.

Frame-dragging

One of the more remarkable predictions of Einstein's theory of general relativity is that a rotating body in space should pull the very essence of space-time around with it. We might imagine a globe immersed in thick syrup. As the globe spins, the syrup is pulled around with it. This is the frame-dragging effect – the globe in our example *drags* with it some of the surrounding area that *frames* it.

Of course the predicted effect is not nearly that noticeable. It is actually incredibly small – only one part in a few trillion, which means to detect it you either have to watch something very big as it moves, like a planet, or you have to build an incredibly sensitive measuring tool.

This frame-dragging effect should be most noticeable close to a spinning planet. Some physicists at Stanford University (California) decided that it would be interesting to see if Earth exerts a frame-dragging effect on space. This was 1960. The tool that they would use in their experiment would be a gyroscope. Thus it was that NASA first undertook in November 1963 to provide support for this project. It has since gone on to become NASA's longest running astrophysical program. Yet by late 2007, no results have been forthcoming. Still, the story is an interesting one, if you like tales of adversity.

A gyroscope is basically a flywheel, something that spins freely around an axis. Once the wheel is set spinning, the axis of a gyroscope will keep pointed in the same direction as long as no other force comes along to shift its orientation. As those early physicists figured it, any measurement of frame-dragging would require a perfect gyroscope. Once the equipment was placed in space, the gyroscope would be set spinning with its axis pointing at a distant object of fixed position such as a star. If frame-dragging is a real phenomenon, the gyroscope would keep pointing in the same direction as far as Earth is concerned, but the alignment on the star would shift slightly. These physicists predicted that frame-dragging would shift the orientation of the gyroscope by 42

thousandths of an arc second per year. That represents the width of a human hair when viewed from 0.4 km away. It was obvious that some fancy equipment would be required: nearly perfect gyroscopes, a nearly perfect environment in which to spin them, and a nearly perfect telescope and guidance system to keep the telescope lined up on a suitable star.

With NASA's support and money, exceptionally precise rotors (the spinning part) were developed. They were polished so much that the deviations from a perfect sphere were almost unbelievably small. These quartz globes were coated with niobium. This metal was chosen because it is a superconductor when it is cooled to close to absolute zero. Thus an electric current, once begun, should run endlessly around the sphere. In reality however the system would be expected to run only for two years since by then the coolant would be exhausted.

The reason the spinning rotors needed a superconductor is that this system would develop its own magnetic field with a north-south axis. This orientation of the magnetic field could then be used as a marker for orientation of the gyroscope. It was not possible to put a mark on the sphere, because this could affect its spin. The orientation of the magnetic field however is difficult to detect. Thus fancy sensing devices would be required, one for each gyroscope. The whole system, including telescope, was then mounted in a solid quartz structure. This whole device was then placed in a nine-foot-long container like a big thermos – filled with 2,300 liters of liquid helium which would cool the device to 2 degrees above absolute zero.

The whole project was fraught with problems. Even the selection of a suitable guide star took astronomers several years. As the years passed and as expenses mounted, the project was canceled, and resuscitated seven times. Many astronomers failed to see why anyone would want to throw money at tests of general relativity. The theory is so well accepted today that alternative ideas have not even been proposed. Some astrophysicists have even suggested that nobody would believe negative results, those different from the predictions of general relativity, anyway, so why do the research?

Nevertheless the show did go on. Launch was scheduled for October 2000. It didn't happen. Finally in April 2004 the Gravity Probe-B, as it was dubbed, was deployed. More troubles however now appeared to plague the long running project whose price has by now increased to \$760 million. Electrostatic effects appeared on the spheres inside the four gyroscopes. These effects caused wobbles that varied unexpectedly. The scientists had been prepared to compensate for a wobble, but only one that was the same at all times. Moreover tiny electric fields between various components caused the telescope to occasionally slip its focus off the guide star. The team did not discover this effect until after the period of data collection was finished in September 2005. Another problem was that data collection was not continuous. Solar flares disrupted the system enough so that it had to be rebooted several times.

The scientific team has since 2005 tried to mathematically eliminate the effects of the glitches on their data. They initially promised an interim report on April 14, 2007 at the American Physical Society Meeting in Florida. The event however came and went with no report. The money for the project runs out at the end of 2007, so the team has promised a report by December, their last chance for the project. One NASA physicist was quoted in *Nature* as remarking "There's art involved – it's a slightly nebulous business; that's why they are being careful" (April 19/07 p. 837). If it's any consolation to the Gravity Probe-B team, other projects seeking gravitational effects in space have so far come up equally empty handed.



This whole device was then placed in a nine-foot-long container like a big thermos.

Photo by Russ Underwood, Lockheed Martin Corporation

Gravitational waves

Whereas interest is low in frame-dragging as a test of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, much more attention is devoted to gravitational waves. These too are predicted by Einstein's theory. Gravitational waves are conceived as disturbances in the curvature of space-time. Like ripples on a pond, gravitational waves represent possible oscillations in the fabric of space-time. If such a phenomenon exists, and if there really was a stage of rapid inflation in an early expansion of the universe (two big ifs), then gravitational waves should have been generated. None has as yet been found. Also other events in space, such as supernovae and the merging of black holes, should generate other kinds of gravitational waves. This research for gravitational waves is seen not as a test of Einstein's theory, but as a search for information about cosmic events.

Elaborate new facilities have been built near Hanford in the state of Washington, and Livingston, Louisiana. These sites are 3,000 km apart but operate as a single facility. Completed in 1999, the facility has only recently begun to collect data. Called the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), each building is L shaped with arms 4 km long. Inside each arm lies a 120 cm in diameter (4 ft) vacuum pipe. Weights fitted with mirrors hang at the ends of each arm and at the vertex. The world's largest vacuum system (9,000 cubic meters per site) prevents stray gas molecules from deflecting the laser beams as they travel back and forth thousands of times between the mirrors. If there are gravitational waves, they should deflect the

mirrors slightly. In normal situations, split laser beams will optically interfere with each other, canceling the signal. If the length of one arm changes even minutely however, the recombined laser beams will produce an interference pattern. The expected shifts in position are on the order of 0.0000000000000001 cm.

Because the expected waves are so minute, several large facilities at widely spaced locations are needed to confirm the validity of any observation. Besides the LIGO facility in the US, and GEO600 in Hanover, Germany, a joint French/Italian facility called VIRGO is located at Pisa, Italy. This latter facility was expected to begin its first data collection in May 2007. LIGO, for its part, has already carried out four brief runs of data collection. Currently it is involved in a year long run. Thus far no gravitational waves have been detected. What scientists have discovered is an upper limit to any such phenomenon. They now know that the strength of such waves must be at least 13 times lower than previously predicted. Nobody is giving up hope of finding something, of course.

Conclusion

Such obscure and expensive studies would never be undertaken were it not for the conceptual models of today's physics. It can't hurt to ask questions and carry out research. Often, however, it is a matter of priorities what research is carried out and how much money governments are prepared to devote to these projects. We can't fault the physicists on patience, precise equipment and imagination however, can we?





Soup & Buns

Dealing with a Difficult Situation

by Sharon L. Bratcher

It was a providential conversation I had with my good friend one day. She was cutting my hair and we were talking about our children and the challenges that we were facing. She and her husband had recently faced a difficulty with a child, and as she shared it, my heart went out to her. I prayed for her child, and I asked her how they handled the situation.

She told me of nights when she couldn't sleep due to anguish and concern. She was overwhelmed. She went downstairs, got out her Bible and sat at the table and read, and cried and prayed. And read, and cried and prayed. God sent comfort to her, so that after some time she could finally go upstairs and sleep, knowing He had matters in control. It was good information to know.

Know how to suffer

A couple of years later, we received news that tore me apart. I wanted to scream. I wanted to break things. I wanted to go far away and not have to deal with the matter. I walked around the dining room totally overwhelmed, incapable of coping. And then I remembered my dear friend's words.

I took my box of tissues and my Bible to the table and opened to the book of Psalms. I read and cried and poured out my heart to God. It took a while, but as I read, God showed me that He had matters in hand, and particular verses were more precious than ever before. I held on to them tightly. Eventually, my soul had enough peace and my body enough weariness that I was able to sleep again. This happened several nights, and always, there was comfort and peace.

We all need to know how to suffer. For my friend and for me, it included a table and a box of tissues, some Psalms, and a lot of honest, earnest prayers, and tears. Knowing that God had comforted her that way was like having a manual for home improvement – it said, “Do this, it works.”

Comfort one another

Many years ago I asked another friend, one who had lost her son, which Scripture or Psalm had helped her the most. She was happy to share with me Psalm 27, stanza 6 from the Genevan Psalms in the *Book of Praise*:

How I would have despaired in my affliction
If I had not believed that in this life
The LORD would show His goodness,
His protection;
I would have perished in my tears
and strife.
Wait for the LORD; be strong and undismayed.
The LORD is faithful. Why then be afraid?
Take courage, for His steadfast love is sure.
Wait for the LORD; His mercy shall endure.

Since that time I have often been comforted by those words, and I have written them out and sent them to others who were grieving. My aunt told me that she taped them to a door in her house, so that she would see and read them frequently when my uncle was terribly ill. I truly believe that God brings a portion of Scripture to mind in one person that is just the right tonic for the next person.

Speak of the Lord's acts

It's all about community and fellowship. These women shared with me and I was comforted and I passed it along to others. We give one another strength when we ask what God has taught someone recently from His Word. We speak of the wondrous works of God when we begin a conversation with, “Hey, can I tell you what the Lord showed me in His Word the other day?” We strengthen one another when we sit down, two by two and pray together over the matters of our hearts.

It is much easier to talk about the weather and sports and school and the children's antics. It is what we are used to, and perhaps how we were raised. For some it may seem awkward to talk about spiritual matters. But why? Is it wrong to do so? Can we use the fact that we weren't brought up that way to excuse ourselves for the rest of our lives?

The Psalms declare that we are to speak of God's mighty acts and meditate on His Word all day long. We are often told to encourage one another in His Word and to pray together. It is not only the works of God in Israel that were mighty, or those in the early church. It was a mighty work of comfort He did in me and in my friends.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” James 5:16



PUZZLE PAGE ENTICING ENIGMAS AND CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

Send Puzzles, Solutions, Ideas to PUZZLE PAGE, 43 Summerhill Place, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4V4 [OR robgleach@gmail.com](mailto:robgleach@gmail.com)

NEW PUZZLES

Riddles for Punsters #137

If goldfish could play sports, which sport would they feel most at home with?

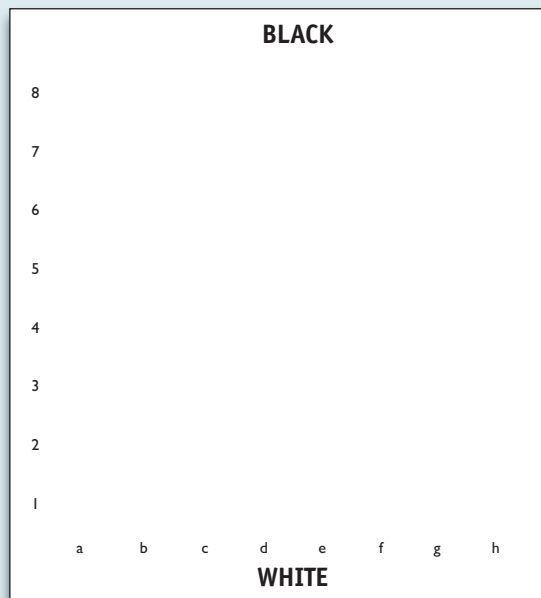
_____ i n g .



If horses could shoot firearms as a sport, which gun would they prefer?

A _____ revolver.

Chess Puzzle # 137
"Similar, but Different, Attacks"



WHITE to Mate in 4

[HINT: Try BLACK to Mate in 3 first]

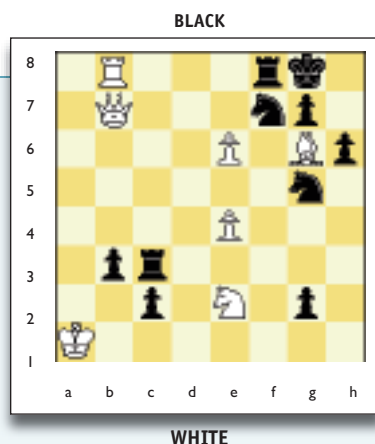
Or, If it is BLACK's Move, **BLACK to Mate in 3**

Problem to Ponder #137 – "Stewardly Spending"

Tabitha took all the money that she had earned at her summer job and put it into a new bank account. She then donated 10% of that money to her church. Next she wrote a cheque to her favourite charity for 5% of the remaining money. Then she used \$32.00 for school supplies. Finally, she spent 1/4 of the account balance on new clothes for school. If she ended up with \$1515 in the account, what was the amount of total earnings from her summer job that she deposited into the account?

SOLUTIONS TO THE PREVIOUS (SEPTEMBER) PUZZLE PAGE

SOLUTION TO CHESS PUZZLE # 136



WHITE to Mate in 3

Descriptive Notation

1. QxN ch NxQ
2. PxN ch K-R1
3. RxR mate

OR

1. PxN ch NxP
2. RxR ch KxR
3. QxN mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Qb7xf7 + Ng5xf7
2. e6xf7 + Kg8-h8
3. Rb8xf8 ++

OR

1. e6xf7 + Ng5xf7
2. Rb8xf8 + Kg8xf8
3. Qb7xf7 ++

BLACK to Mate in 3 Descriptive Notation

1. _____ P-N8=Q ch
2. K-N2 P-B8=Q ch
3. NxQ QxN mate

Algebraic Notation

1. _____ g2-g1=Q +
2. Ka1-b2 c2-c1=Q +
3. Ne2xc1 Qg1xc1 ++

Answer to Riddles for Punsters #136

Using poor grammar, what warning was given by the goldfinch to its feathered friends? "I s e e d a hungry cat watching the bird feeder!" What did the poetic sparrow say in response? "I have a h u n c h it's looking for l u n c h!"

Answers to Problem to Ponder #136 – "Speed in the Sand"

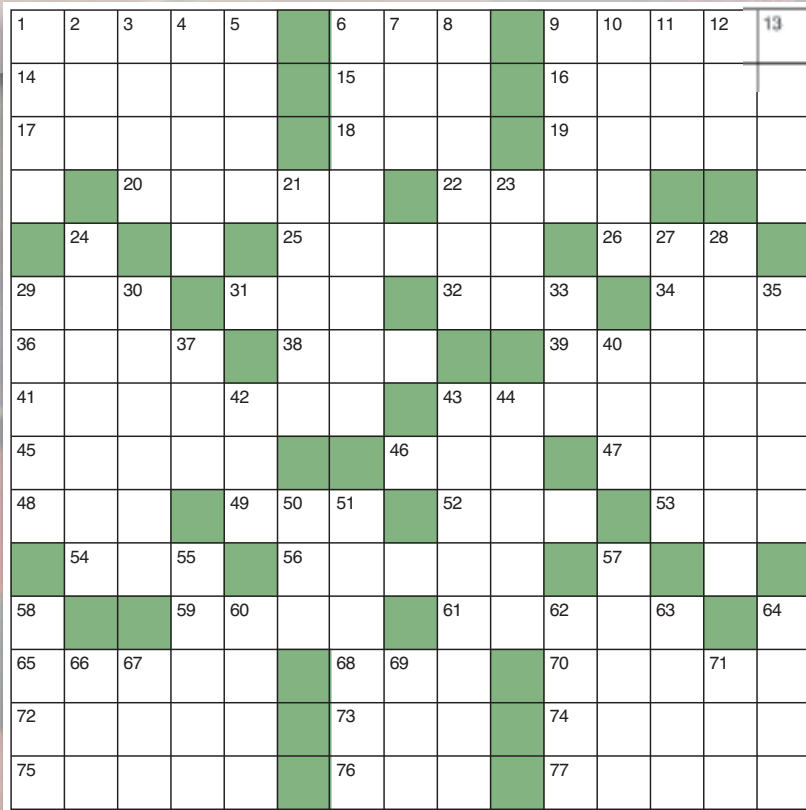
A red ferrari and a silver camero are headed toward each other on a long, straight highway in a desert (where there are no speed limits). When they are 99 km apart, the ferarri has reached a speed of 180 km/h and the camero a speed of 150 km/h. If they maintain those speeds,

- a) how long will it take them to meet on the highway?
 - b) How far will each car have travelled by the time they meet?
 - c) How far apart will they be 10 minutes after they pass each other?
- a) The speed of either car relative to the other is $180 + 150 = 330$ km/h (They approach each other at the same rate as if one stood still and the other was moving toward it at 330 km/h.) Thus the time to meet is given by time = separation distance / relative speed = $99/330 = 3/10$ hour = $3/10$ of 60 minutes = **18 minutes for the cars to meet**. The answer could also be found by the equation: ferrari distance travelled + camero distance travelled = 99 km so $180t + 150t = 99$ so $330t = 99$ so $t = 99/330 = 0.3$ h.
- b) distance = speed x time so **the ferrari will have travelled $d = vt = 180(0.3) = 54$ km and the camero will have travelled $d = vt = 150(0.3) = 45$ km**. (CHECK: $54 + 45 = 99$ km, the total distance to be travelled.)
- c) 10 minutes = $1/6$ hour later, the ferarri has travelled $d = vt = 180(1/6) = 30$ km and the camero will have travelled $d = vt = 150(1/6) = 25$ km. $30 + 25 = 55$ so after 10 minutes **they will be 55 km apart**.

Crossword Puzzle

Series 14 No 14

Last month's solution
Series 14 No 13



ACROSS:

1. Automaton
6. Kind of school, for short
9. Bike part
14. Higher than
15. Japanese pearl diver
16. Girl's name
17. Ultimate
18. Woman who wears a habit
19. Lady's name
20. _____-Unis
22. Walking aid
25. Stream of water
26. Royal Armoured Corps
29. Eye entertainment
31. _____ de Janeiro
32. Soak flax
34. Her
36. Group of three
38. Wind direction
39. Main character from Narnia
41. Female cat
43. Order
45. Turn away

46. Animal caught in bushes for Abraham's sacrifice
47. Poker stake
48. Respiratory Exchange Ratio
49. Imitate
52. Beam of light
53. Spread hay out to dry
54. Fast jet
56. Soil
59. Phone tone
61. Green fertile area of desert
65. Loud cry
68. Man's name meaning "lion" in Greek
70. Tribe of American Indian including Pueblos
72. The present occasion, archaically speaking
73. Even, to a poet
74. Avoid doing
75. Clan emblem
76. Sympathetic nervous system
77. 1st king of Egypt; founder of the 1st Dynasty

DOWN:

1. Floater
2. Japanese sash
3. Meat remnant
4. Egg-shaped
5. Thin weblike structure
6. Big houses
7. Big bird
8. A ballerina
9. Formal program
10. Showing keen interest
11. Dull, grayish brown
12. Metric unit of area equaling 100 square metres
13. Endure
21. Attempts
23. Exist
24. Reaches the destination
27. Obliquely
28. Intoned a song
29. Rose perfume
30. Carnivorous felines
33. Hat
35. Put a stop to

37. Famous Canadian hockey player, born 1948
40. Sgt. major of the army
42. Airport abbr.
43. Saturday morning TV entertainment
44. Native American people of Nebraska
50. Write
51. Large birds of prey
55. Suspension of hostilities
57. Strainer
58. Is not, for short
60. Separate article
62. Flower part
63. Bird, or song?
64. Employs
66. Exclamation
67. Cdn. province
69. "I", in Dutch
71. Drink

Joye