

REFORMED

Perspective

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A MAGAZINE
FOR THE
CHRISTIAN
FAMILY

The Emergent Church Movement

What's inside?

America's War on
Terror

Putting Your Money
Where Your Mouth Is

Apologetics 101



FACEBOOK FRENZY

**It's Canada's most popular website and our churches' youth love it too.
But does their love of God come out on their Facebook pages?**

Editorial

by Jon Dykstra



Things sure are different. Back in my day you'd have to pull on your shoes, grab a good jacket and warm gloves, find your keys, head out the door and, if your friend lived close by, walk through the deep snow, or, if he lived further away, drive on the treacherous icy roads, and then knock on his front door and just wait for him to open it. Then and only then could you give him a good jab. That's what it took to poke a friend in the old days.

Nowadays these young'uns have it so easy – they just log onto Facebook and poke away.

I don't know though. The Facebook "poke" – a quick "thinking of you" greeting – may be easy to do, and this website may make other things easier to do too, but I'm just not sure that easier is always better. Not sure at all.

What is Facebook?

If you haven't heard of Facebook don't feel bad. It's new, created back in 2004 as a "social networking" website. That means it's a place where people can go online to leave updates about themselves, and read updates written by and about their friends.

That's the bare bones of it, and if you want to find out more you can ask anyone in their twenties. In the US 75% of youth 18-24 have Facebook accounts. Up north it's even bigger – 6 million Canadians (1 in 5 of us) have accounts.

Why is it so popular?

So why are so many people Facebooking?

Well, the website does have hundreds of applications – add-ons that allow users to adopt "fluff pets," give their friends virtual fish, dedicate songs to each other, see who's best at Scrabble, Pac man or even geography, and do countless other fun and goofy things.

But the real reason for the site's popularity is pretty simple: it's a great way to keep in touch with friends far and near. Whenever a friend posts new photos on their Facebook page, or types in a new "status update," all their friends receive notice of it on their own pages. So it makes it easy to keep track of what your friends are up to. It even alerts users to when any of their Facebook friends' birthdays are coming up!

Another positive aspect involves the way the website forces people to decide how they want to present themselves to the world. I've sometimes found myself acting one way around my Christian friends and quite another way around my non-Christian friends. On Facebook all of my friends see the exact same profile. They all get to read the notes I write, see the pictures I post, the books I add to my favorite's list, the groups I join and the applications I add. On Facebook I can't get away with being two-faced – I have to decide, am I going to be godly or worldly?

Concerns

Facebook is popular for good reason but this phenomenon has a darker side.

One of the more obvious concerns is about privacy. Any website that asks people to post personal information about themselves should be evaluated carefully, especially when children are involved. This site does offer a level of privacy that isn't available on similar sites like MySpace and Orkut – on Facebook only people you designate as your friends can see the information you post on your page. That's how it works in theory but, of course, information posted online is never truly private. So parents and children need to talk about what sort of information kids should and shouldn't post online.

Other concerns are more specific to Facebook:

1. *Addictive* – A common complaint is that the site is just too addictive. It's not unusual for users (especially new users) to check their Facebook page a dozen or more times a day. It's easy to blow 10 or 15 minutes at a time, and those numbers can really add up. Some people are so addicted they're even stealing time from their employer, logging in while they're at work. It's a great website but how much time does it deserve?
2. *A friendship farce* – Everyone likes to be popular and on Facebook friends can be collected by the dozens and even the hundreds, with little or no effort. That's disturbing because it's so different from the way real friendships function. Friendships on Facebook are a matter of quantity over quality, or as *Relevant* magazine writer Brett McCracken put it,

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"cheap abundance over invaluable scarcity." Real friendships are so much harder – they take effort, vulnerability, and a huge investment of time. So we need to keep things balanced – clearly our time on Facebook with Facebook friends shouldn't cut into our time with real friends in the real world.

3. *Vulgar ads* – This is a very practical concern. A month back Facebook ran advertisements that included pictures of near-naked women. A flurry of complaints to flyers@facebook.com seemed to fix this problem. . . for now. But if our favorite website takes a permanent vulgar turn will we have the resolve to quit? What would make us quit?
4. *Pagan profiles* – Finally, the biggest cause for concern is how some Christian young people's pages show no evidence of their faith. Quite the contrary even: they include drunken self-portraits, they post dirty jokes, insert vulgar videos, pass on vicious gossip, add troubling applications and join even more troubling groups. Sometimes the only Christian part of their page is where they list their religion: *Reformed*. We take the Lord's name in vain when we claim to be his followers but present ourselves to the world looking worse than pagans.

Conclusion

This last concern is the most troubling but it shouldn't be overblown. If parents sign up for their own Facebook accounts they can become Facebook friends with their children and see what their offspring are up to. Reformed parents should know that our children, born and conceived in sin, will often do sinful things when they are left on their own. So they need our supervision, on Facebook just as much as in the real world.

But used properly, Facebook can be an awesome resource. It can be a means to witness to our non-Christian friends and can be a way for far-flung friends and family to keep in touch. This is an amazing tool. It even makes keeping track of birthdays much easier.

Sometimes though, easier isn't better. That's why I'm planning on spending a little less time on Facebook and a little more time visiting friends in the real world. And I think I'm still going to stick to the tried and true, old-fashioned way the next time I want to "poke" a friend.

Jon Dykstra is a frequent Facebook user, and loves to use the site to dedicate mushy songs to his lady love.



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BITING OFF MORE THAN THEY CAN CHEW:

America's War on Terror

by Michael Wagner

The Christian position on foreign policy and international issues can be difficult to determine. National issues are far simpler – a careful study of Scripture can often sort things out. For example, there can be little question about the Christian position on abortion and same-sex marriage.

But when it comes to international issues, quite often different groups will try to pass off their position as the “Christian” one even though their positions diametrically oppose each other. Of course, biblical principles can be applied to international policy but these principles are often harder to discern and harder to apply in this arena. Relations between nations can be highly complex – there is rarely an obvious Christian answer to foreign policy questions.

The War on Terror

The War on Terror is one of these highly complex foreign policy issues. But this debate is often simplistically divided into “pro-war” right-wing vs. “anti-war” left-wing camps. This categorization obscures some of the reality – in the United States (the main combatant) there is a large body of conservative right-wing opinion opposed to the War on Terrorism and opposed to the worldwide use of American military power to seek out perceived terrorist threats.

One of the most articulate exponents of this view is the conservative political scientist Claes Ryn. His recent book *America the Virtuous: The Crisis of Democracy and the Quest for Empire* warns about the danger of current American military action around the world. A couple of his main

points could be helpful for Christians in thinking through the use of military force overseas, especially with respect to the United States.

More than self-defense

Every country, like every person, has a right to self-defense. Thus when the US was attacked on September 11, 2001, it had a moral right to strike back to prevent further attacks. However, Ryn argues that American foreign and military policy following the attacks went much further than simply self-defense. Instead, American policy became one of worldwide military dominance, to make the world a better place. “The attack on America could have elicited a strong but surgical and limited response; it became instead the occasion and justification for launching a drive for something grandiose.”

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***A country's primary
duty is to conduct its
own affairs and repair
its own flaws***

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Making the world a better place is, of course, a laudable goal. But it's not a goal that can be achieved by the military might of a superpower. Ryn suggests that many Americans see their country as morally good in a special sense and therefore tasked with spreading the benefits of the American way of life to countries through-

out the world. But because this “ideology of virtuous empire envisions not only American world dominance but the re-making of the world in its image, it is a recipe for conflict and perpetual war.” There will always be nasty regimes and groups capable of terrorism, so trying to eliminate these kinds of potential threats will be a never-ending task.

In short, trying to make a better world through the use of American power is a utopian dream and cannot realistically be achieved. Utopian thinking is “fairly innocuous perhaps if restricted to isolated dreamers and theoreticians but dangerous to the extent that it inspires action in the real world.” No doubt the desire to create a better world on the part of American policy makers is motivated by the best of intentions. But as the saying goes, “the road to Hell is paved with good intentions.”

America has a log in its own eye

The other relevant point made by Ryn is the foreign policy equivalent of Matthew 7:5 which reads: “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (ESV).

Like individuals, governments should focus on the problems in their own backyards before trying to solve the problems of others. “The assumption that much needs improving here before turning attention elsewhere has shaped a corresponding attitude toward international relations: a country's primary duty is to conduct its own affairs and repair its own flaws.”

Has the United States cleaned itself up such that it has the moral authority to impose the American way of life on other countries? Far from it. The American way of life is not very pretty these days.

"Falling standards and fading self-discipline are prominent in all aspects of social life. Drug abuse is rampant. Sexual promiscuity is so common as to be widely considered no longer aberrant behavior. It causes epidemics of venereal disease, including AIDS, whose spread is limited only by a fear of illness. Abortions are performed in staggering numbers as a form of birth control. The family has lost much of its stability and cohesion and plays a much-reduced role as transmitter of civilized tastes.

Standards of personal behavior and deportment continue to fall. Old-fashioned honesty and integrity yield to greed and opportunism."

This list actually goes on.

The point is that countries, like individuals, should exercise humility. The United States has many domestic problems that urgently need to be addressed. "To set out instead to try to remake the world according to an ideological blueprint represents not only moral arrogance but a flight from responsibilities at home that are large and pressing."

Conclusion

The United States is currently the world's only superpower, and according to Ryn it has fallen for the temptation to

use its power to make the world a better place. But since that task is unachievable, it is really a recipe for never ending war. America may have bitten off more than it can chew. As well, it has not yet set its own house in order, such that it can be a good example to other nations. Humility is a potential solution to both of these problems. This may be one way to analyze current foreign policy issues from a Christian perspective.

Michael Wagner is writing a book about political Christians in Canada called On Guard For Thee: the Past, Present and Future of Canada's Christian Right. It will be published in November by Freedom Press Canada (www.freedompress.ca).



U.S. soldiers hand out clothing to village children in Mosul, Iraq.

(DoD photo by Pfc. Bradley J. Clark, U.S. Army.)

Should Christians support Income Splitting?

by John Boersema

The recent federal government tax change to introduce income splitting for seniors has generated increased debate about the topic of tax income splitting in general. Is this a change that Christians should favour?

From a Christian perspective, the basic right of a government to tax its citizens is readily accepted based on Matt. 22:21 and Rom. 13:6-7. These texts, however, say nothing about the details of those taxes. Nevertheless, we can use some biblical principles to derive a preference for certain tax policies. This article develops that preference for income splitting.

Family is core unit of society

Income splitting is not merely a tax issue but involves a major philosophical difference between its proponents and opponents. One side believes that taxes should be levied on the individual without any regard to marital status whatsoever. On the other hand most tax systems, such as those in Canada and the US, do recognize family circumstances to some extent. Feminist thinking, however, decries this tendency as is evident in the following quote from Maureen Maloney:

The tax system, as it stands, is unfair. It reveals a governmental preference for women to stay in the home and thereby plays an important ideological role as well as a fiscal one. Formal equality alone demands that women be treated not as appendages of partners, be they male or female. . . Women who work only in the household economy should not be given preferential treatment by the tax system – especially not by credits granted to their husbands.

A Christian perspective, however, will recognize that God has instituted marriage and family as a basic relationship. In Gen. 2:18 God noted that, “It is not good for the man to be alone” and in Gen. 1:26, “male and female He created them” in the very image of God. Consequently, tax policy that supports marriage and the family should be advocated. Income splitting is one way to do so.

Anti-marriage bias

In Canada – unlike in the U.S. where spouses may file joint tax returns – income tax is assessed on an individual’s income rather than a family’s income. In a progressive tax system, tax assessment on an individual basis results in a bias against marriage. To illustrate this bias, consider two couples who both have a family income of \$65,000. Mary and Jack both work – each earning \$32,500 per year. Consider, the following under the illustrative progressive tax regime.

Income Level	Amount of Tax	Plus % on Excess
Up to \$8,500	0	0
\$8,500 - 35,000	0	22
35,001 - 60,000	\$5,830	31
60,001 - 70,000	13,580	33
70,001 - 115,000	16,880	41
115,001 and over	35,330	45

Under this progressive tax system, Mary and Jack would both have a top marginal tax rate of 22% and would each pay \$5,280 in income tax for a total of \$10,560.

In another family, Nick and Brenda, Nick earns the total family income of \$65,000 while Brenda stays home to look after the children. With a top marginal tax rate of 33%, Nick’s total tax bill comes to \$15,080. Nick and Brenda pay \$4,520 more income tax on the same family income as Mary and Jack because most of it is taxed at higher individual tax rates.

But what if...

Income splitting would allow Nick to transfer half of his income to Brenda. They would then both pay tax at the lower 22% rate instead of partly at the higher rates of 31% and 33%. After “splitting” the income in this way, Nick and Brenda would pay the same tax as Mary and Jack. The result would have the effect of taxing the family rather than the individual. Moreover, as William Gairdner suggest in his book *War Against the Family*, income splitting “confers a recognized income value to wife’s work in the home. She can say, ‘I earned the money’ and feel her work is valued by both society and the State.”

The anti-marriage bias of the Canadian tax system can be seen as particularly blatant when it is recognized that support payments to divorced or separated spouses are tax deductible for the spouse paying them and taxable for the one receiving them. The effect of this provision is that on the same income, the tax paid by the couple after separation will be less than when they were married!



Income splitting “confers a recognized income value to wife’s work in the home.”

The introduction of income splitting for seniors has, therefore, been a first step towards making the tax system friendlier to God-instituted families. Given that a large proportion of seniors live on modest income, this extension is also consistent with exercising neighbourly love. Christians should support the expansion of income splitting to all families. Of course, that would be a costly change (estimates run between \$1.5 billion and \$5 billion a year) that may need to be phased in. Income splitting for families with very small children might, for example, be introduced as the next step – with gradual extension to families with older children. In this way the tax benefit would be extended first to those families where in-home care is most necessary.

Would it matter in a flat tax system?

The above has assumed that we continue with our current progressive tax regime. Readers might well wonder whether income splitting is also an issue in a flat tax regime. Income splitting is, in essence, an issue only in a progressive tax regime. Only under a progressive system do we have different tax rates with different levels of income being taxed at different tax rates.

On the other hand, in a flat rate system with a personal exemption a bias against marriage still occurs. To illustrate, let us consider a flat tax system with a 30% tax rate and a \$10,000 annual exemption. Mary and Jack, who each earn \$32,500, will each have a taxable income of \$22,500 and, therefore, each pay tax of \$6,750 for a total of \$13,500. In the second family, Nick who earns the total family income of \$65,000 will have a taxable income of \$55,000 for a total family tax of \$16,500. They will pay \$3,000 more in tax because they, in essence, only get the benefit of one \$10,000 exemption while Mary and Jack get the benefit from two.

Christians should monitor the tax system

Income splitting would also solve this problem. However, a more likely alternative would be to permit transferring of Brenda’s unused personal exemption to her spouse, Nick. In that way, both families would also pay the same taxes.

In any case, Christians should monitor the tax system to ensure that it is not biased against the family. Income splitting is one way to make our system more family friendly.





Bearing Each Other's Burdens

by Jane deGlint

In God's wonderful plan for the fallen world there is a special place and a special task for every person. One of man's main assignments is the discovery of all the treasures that the earth holds. As the men and women of old applied their minds and souls to the task of providing food and shelter for their families they discovered a multitude of wonders and perfected an impressive array of inventions. Having found copper, they designed ways to extract and use it. Working the fields, they learned to increase their crops. Exploring their territories, they invented vehicles to transport themselves and their wares. In the drive for discovery, mankind continues to push for ongoing exploration, from the tiny cell to the vast universe.

This picture of ongoing progress, however, is not perfect. Brokenness faces man at every turn in the road. The overbearing impact of negative influences makes everything seem utterly pointless. This sense of negativism has been expressed from days of old to the present time. We have heard it described by the Old Testament Preacher, "Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" and expressed by contemporary philosophers and artists, "Why in the world are we here?" But the Lord did not surrender the reins of the world to the father of lies. His plan was not fazed by the interference of evil. To the contrary. In the all-powerful hands of our heavenly Father all things work together for good for those who fear him – see Romans 8:28.

Fixing their eyes on this perspective, the believers learn to deal with the effects of sin in their lives. And miserable these

effects are! Our car breaks down and our roof starts leaking. Our hearing grows dim and our bones become brittle. The stock market collapses and our employer closes down our branch. We bury our spouse, a child, a friend. Our move to another part of the world turns out much more invasive than we had thought. Living with a severely handicapped child/sibling becomes increasingly difficult. Indeed, there is no end to the list of sorrows. Yet, our heavenly Father uses all these things for our good.

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***Our troubles may be
severe, but our neighbor
in the congregation
faces many challenges
as well***

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When the Lord has our good in mind, he does not only consider our convenience and comfort on this earth, but foremost our spiritual growth with a view to our eternal well-being. Our troubles and mishaps are the Lord's teaching tools. Through them we learn to trust him, rather than depend on our own insights. From questioning the Lord, "Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished for ever?" we come to experience his peace during trials before the solutions have presented themselves, if they do. We can claim the track record of our King, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right

hand of the Most High. I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on your mighty deeds" (Psalm 77). The Lord has proven his dependability over and over again. We can blindly trust him to do so still for those who fear him and acknowledge him as Lord.

Having accepted God's trials in trust, we are ready for the next level in the Lord's training for eternity. We start to understand that dealing with our own troubles in trust does not sufficiently reflect the fact that we are children of the Most High. As members of one body we must also bear each other's burden. We must look out for the well-being of our brothers and sisters in faith. Being our brother's keeper is an integral part of belonging to the communion of saints. When one member suffers, the whole body feels the pain.

Observing the suffering of a fellow believer has the immediate effect of placing our own disadvantages in a different light. Our troubles may be inconvenient, or even severe, but our neighbor in the congregation faces many challenges as well, maybe even bigger ones than we do. The discovery of his severe trials has a deep effect on us. Our physical and emotional suffering on his behalf awakens in us a sincere desire to help him bear his burden.

As we set out to alleviate the suffering of our brother or sister, we do well not to proceed on our own. Certainly, individually we must be willing to do our share, even if that would require personal sacrifices, but in many cases we must act

congregationally. The Lord has spread his gifts throughout the communion of saints. Someone may have the gift of advice, but others have the gift to comfort. Someone may be in a position to offer employment, but others are able to provide financial support. Someone may have the inclination to look after children, but others are cut out to paint, fix and clean. When we combine our talents towards helping the hurting neighbor, unexpected bonds are created between the helpers and the helped, resulting in a healthier, stronger body. Moreover, when we take on the burden congregationally, it will present itself as a meaningful part of the communal prayer during the worship services.

In fact, prayer is the most elementary part of bearing each other's burdens. It is the first reaction to the discovery of someone's needs and in many cases it is the only thing we can do to help our hurting brothers and sisters. But the prayer of a believer for a member of the body is powerful and effective (James 5:16). Through prayer and under the guidance of the Spirit it will become clear if there are practical solutions to alleviate the problem. Having started by bringing the need before the throne of God, both those who are burdened and those who assist will remember to thank the Lord for the sharing of the burden and for the solutions that prove beneficial.

It will prevent disappointment if from the start we realize that there are no perfect solutions to most of our problems. As soon as one burden is removed, the Lord might send another load to test our faith in him. Often the solutions have flaws or negative repercussions that we did not foresee. But that does not matter. At every turn the Lord will guide us. Though we might be discouraged for the moment, in the end we will marvel about the wonderful ways of our heavenly Father.

In our preoccupation with the helping process it is sometimes overlooked that those whom we help are mature believers, who function normally and who give generously. There is no superiority of the giver over the receiver. Giving and receiving are reciprocal. The disadvantaged

brother or sister receives our help, but the helping believers receive the opportunity to share their gifts. Moreover, those who receive help will naturally enrich the helper with their hard-won insights, skills and experiences. Their patience and trust are often a source of encouragement and inspiration. Any help between members of the body is a two-way street.

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***There is no superiority
of the giver over the
receiver***

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For that reason help within the communion of saints is never a clinical affair, where one gives professionally and distantly. Even office bearers do not always have to keep their own troubles to themselves as they reach out to others. Often the helper's ability to concede that he is in need of help as well broadens the perspective and stimulates original, spiritual solutions with the result of mutual growth in faith.

Carrying each other's burden is not an optional pastime for the passionate and for those with a large social conscience. It is a command. "Carry each other's burden, and in this way you fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). The willingness to help others for the sake of Christ is a fruit of the Spirit, who molds our hearts into doing God's will and showing God's love.



It is our Lord Jesus Christ himself who is at the centre of bearing each other's burden. It is he who took on our human nature in order to bear the brunt of God's wrath which was directed at us. He did so effectively when he nailed our sins to the cross. With his death he unburdened us from the load of guilt. He freed us to serve after his example.

Our Lord Jesus showed us how to keep the law perfectly. The sacrifice of Jesus did not undo the law, but lifted the requirement of keeping the law for obtaining salvation. The law will never be undone. It is the perfect way to serve our Lord, now and for ever. Through the work of the Spirit the law is being written on our heart. More and more we will consolidate the essence of the commandments in our walk of life as we learn to love our Lord and serve our neighbor.

The perspective broadens when we realize that our task is wider than our family, wider than the local congregation, wider than the church as it is spread out over the earth. Foremost we have to look after the family of believers, but we are also called to do good to all people (Galatians 6:10). Our attitude of service will have to be applied to the communities in which we live. But it does not even stop there. As much as possible we have to concern ourselves with the spiritual and physical needs of all human beings. We have not received the light to hide it in our family home and in our church building. We have to let it shine into the world, so others may see it and be drawn to it.

Carrying each other's burden after the example of our Savior is a joyous task. It opens endless perspectives. It places our entire lives into the service of our King. We do not live our lives for self-fulfillment or for leaving a legacy of wealth and fame. It is our sole purpose to glorify the Lord with our talents and to apply our gifts to the well-being of our neighbor. Blessings abound when the King's people live according to this divine law.

"For if you keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right" (James 2:8).



The Emergent Church Movement

*Its theology is queer and often unclear. . .
but is it something to fear?*

by Johan D. Tangelder

One of the latest innovations in theology is the “emerging” or “emergent” church movement (ECM). . . and it’s not something we can afford to ignore. The ECM is sparking considerable discussion in evangelical churches and it exerts an astonishingly broad influence. The movement’s leaders publish bestselling books – some Christian bookstores have entire sections devoted to Emergent Church material – lead conferences, and teach popular courses in evangelism. They are young, current and understand how to use the latest technologies. If you haven’t heard of them yet you can be sure you will very soon.

Calling for a new reformation

The ECM’s leaders are calling for a radical change in the church – they’re all calling for a “new reformation,” though each leader’s motivations for change is not the same:

- Some feel stifled and alienated from existing churches and want churches that are more open to creativity and the arts.
- Others think the culture of the church is so different from popular culture that those they want to reach for Jesus cannot adapt to today’s church with her traditions and confessions. So they want to find new ways to reach our postmodern culture.
- Still others feel that there are aspects of modern culture that hinder exist-

ing churches from faithfully following Jesus.

The common thread that binds them is the claim that if the church is to survive it must acknowledge and adapt to the major changes taking place in North America’s postmodern-cultural shift.

The church, they say, must change.

Some prominent Emergent leaders

1. Brian D. McLaren

Brian McLaren is the biggest name in the ECM, and probably its most articulate spokesman. He is the author of *Generous Orthodoxy* with the bizarre subtitle *Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Angli-can, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN*. He is also the founding pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church, a nondenominational church in the Baltimore-Washington region. McLaren believes that the emerging church has the potential of being to North American Christianity what the Reformation was to European Christianity.

2. Rob Bell

Rev. Rob Bell is the founding pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church, one of the largest emergent churches in the United States, located in a former Grandville, Mich. shopping mall. He is the author of

the bestseller *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* and helped create the *NOOMA* series of short films.

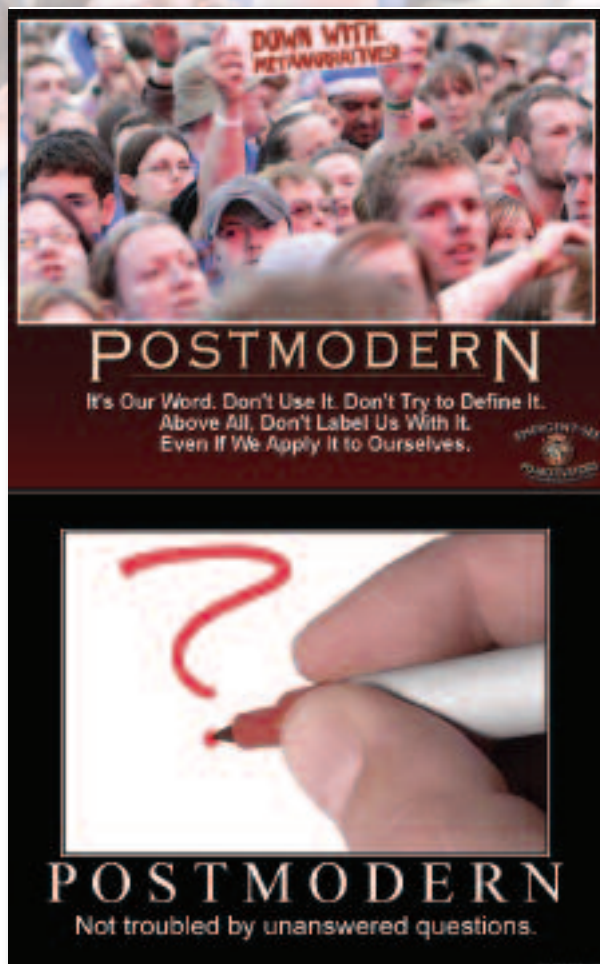
3. Leonard Sweet

Dr. Leonard Sweet, founder and president of Spirit Venture Ministries and Professor of Evangelism in Madison, New Jersey, is the author of the newly published *The Gospel According to Starbucks*. The title of one of his earlier books gives insight into his theology – *Jesus Drives Me Crazy! Lose Your Mind, Find Your Soul*.

ECM’s theology

The titles of the works by ECM leaders McLaren, Bell, and Sweet reveal their view of the Scripture and the mission of the church. McLaren believes we need to get over our hang-up with absolute truth and become more sensitive to the plurality of truth perspectives.

Sweet agrees. In his *The Gospel According to Starbucks* Sweet argues that modern Christianity is simply too rational, too coldly logical. He claims that in most churches today the mind has taken control over the soul and spirit. So today, Sweet says, churches have made the aim of modern faith about acquiring knowledge, especially scientific rational knowledge: “Christians in the West became more interested in beliefs about prayer than prayer experiences and practices. This also explains why the nation that most embodied Enlightenment and rational values



POSTER WARS – POSTMODERN:

It all started on the Pyromaniacs blogsite (www.teampyro.blogspot.com) – dozens of posters meant to expose the flaws in ECM theology were uploaded to the Internet. But things got really interesting when an ECM blogsite (www.emerginggrace.blogspot.com) responded with their own posters. We're including a few of the poster sets – with the original critique on top and the ECM response below.

became the nation of fascism and genocide." And he exhorts that "if Christianity really wanted to get radical, the first thing it could do would be to stop privileging Western rationalism."

Judging therefore by the literature of the emergent thinkers, the movement is not shaped by Scripture but by what they judge will grab the unconverted's attention in our postmodern world. The emphasis is not on knowing doctrine but on "doing faith." Their teaching focuses on narrative presentations of faith and the Bible – on telling stories – rather than on expository preaching.

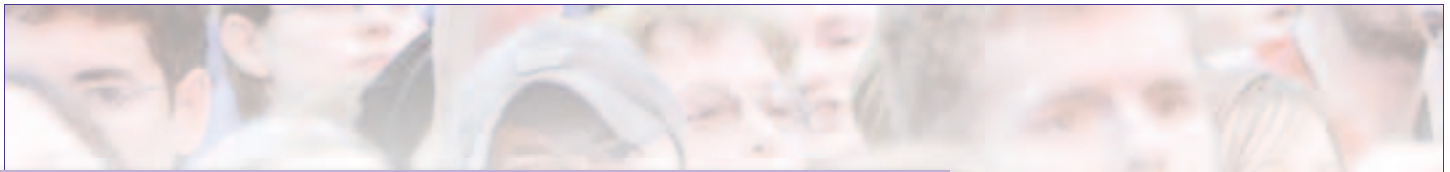
And there is a great emphasis on knowing Jesus, but not on knowing Scripture. In his book *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* the evangelical theologian Dr. D.A. Carson comments that in ECM's literature, Scripture's importance is hardly considered. They may emphasize knowing Christ but our understanding of Jesus Christ – who He is and what He has taught and what He has done – has been preserved in the Scriptures! In other words, how can you know the Christ, if you neglect God's infallible Word?

Experience – the key to "Starbucks" theology

For ECM leaders experience comes before doctrine. They argue that people in our postmodern culture prefer to seek real and authentic experiences rather than scripted or artificial experiences. McLaren claims he has become convinced that "a generous orthodoxy appropriate for our postmodern world will have to grow out of the experience of the post-Christian, post-secular people of the cities of the twenty-first century."

Sweet claims that, "the stuff of divine revelation is experience – experiences that form themselves into story and story into theology." He says that we should examine the Starbucks experience not simply so we can talk about the four million coffee drinks that Starbucks sells daily in the US, but so we can learn what Starbucks has come close to perfecting – life that is meant to be lived with passion, and that passion is found and practiced through experiences, connections, symbols and images, and the full participation of every part of your being. He says, "When you start living with Epic (Experiential, Participatory, Image-rich, Connective) passion your life takes on the aroma of God, the taste and the feel of God, and it invites others to experience God for themselves."

When I was reading Sweet's book, I began to wonder whether he has shares in Starbucks or whether it is located somewhere near heaven. *The Gospel According to Starbucks* teaches readers a great deal about coffee with all its varieties and tastes, but little about historic Christian orthodoxy. Sweet even talks about "Starbucksization" of spirituality. For example, he says that "your local Starbucks, on an admittedly limited scale, is the business world equivalent of the irresistible experience that God invites you to enjoy. You can drink in the life of God and immerse yourself fully in what God is doing on



Modernism, Postmodernism and the ECM

by Rebecca Kruyswijk

One of the defining concerns for several groups within the Emergent Church Movement (ECM) is that Christianity has become entangled with modernism. The ECM rejects modernism and associates itself with many of the ideas of postmodernism so they can try to make Christianity more “relevant” in a postmodern world. It is important then, to understand these two worldviews in order to gain insight into the ECM’s motivations.

What is modernism?

In his book, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, D.A. Carson explains the shift from modernism to postmodernism to be a matter of “epistemology,” or how we know things, or think we know things.”

Carson presents a picture of modernity that includes “the pursuit of truth, absolutism, linear thinking, rationalism, and certainty. The ideals of the Enlightenment, triumphing man’s reason as the basis of all authority, still triumphed over this age. And the ideal of Progress, assisted by science, technology, and the undying human spirit, man could improve his world and create a new world.”

In a nutshell modernism believes that the world is understandable and that eventually we may just be able to understand it all.

So what is postmodernism?

Pinning down postmodernism is an even more difficult task, because like the ECM, it seems to aptly deflect generalizations. As a reaction to the arrogance of modernism, postmodernism argues that the way we view the world is influenced by many factors, including our culture, our emotions, and our heritage, to name just a few. So instead of all things being knowable, postmodernists believe that these factors cloud our ability to get at the truth. They believe the truth may even be unknowable. Postmodernism also denies that there is an overarching story or “meta-narrative” running throughout history, over culture, times, and people.

For the ECM to associate with this claim is to directly contradict what has been revealed in Scripture – the Bible is the Story, and the Meta-narrative. For the postmodern readers, everything is dependent on culture and perspective, and for them, the Bible, rather than being the inspiration Word of God is reduced to a collection of stories, to be understood in the cultural contexts of their community.

Mark Driscoll, a reformed pastor in the ECM, separates himself from others in the ECM on this point, emphasizing that in a postmodern reading of the Bible “the interpreter is elevated in authority over the text of Scripture, no longer humbly coming under Scripture, but instead rising up arrogantly over it.”

earth. God offers arresting experiences that move you from obligation to passion, spilling over to benefit the lives of those who will see God become visible in your life.”

The ECM’s view of Jesus Christ

When you want to find out what people really believe the key question is always: “What do you think of Jesus Christ?”

The ECM leaders send mixed messages. McLaren expresses a legitimate concern when he says, “The more one respects Jesus, the more one must be broken-hearted, embarrassed, furious, or some combination thereof when one considers what we Christians have done with Jesus.” He feels surrounded by Christians who very much like the idea of “an American God and a middle-class Republican Jesus, first and foremost concerned about Our National Security and Our Way of Life. ‘The Lord is My Shepherd’ becomes ‘the Lord is Our President.’”

But McLaren’s questioning knows no bounds, and he goes so far as to question the atonement, Christ’s death on our behalf. He wants to know how a Father can punish his Son for other people’s sins – how can punishing an innocent person make things better? He says, “That sounds like divine child abuse. You know?”

McLaren confesses: “For me the ‘fundamentals of the faith’ boil down to those given by Jesus: *to love God and to love our neighbors.*” D.A. Carson comments: “I think that this is among the shallowest and most distorted readings of Mark 12:28-34 now on offer. Jesus presents these commandments as the two that are most important in the law, not as fundamentals of the faith.”

Emergent church leaders also question whether Jesus is the only way to the Father.

McLaren says that the biblical witness to Jesus Christ as the unique Savior and hope of the world does not “demand a restrictive posture concerning salvation for those who have never heard the gospel or those in other faith traditions.” He argues

Jesus did not come to make some people saved and condemn others. "He came to save the world. His gospel, and therefore the church's message, is Good News for the whole world. . . universally good for Christians and non-Christians alike."

Bell also denies that Jesus is the only way to the Father. He argues that Jesus was not making claims about one religion being better than all other religions. "Rather, he was telling those who were following him that his way is the way to the depth of reality." Bell argues that we need a fresh take on Jesus, and what it means to live the kind of life He teaches us how to live, a faith that fights poverty, injustice and suffering – to make this world the kind of place God can come to. "For Jesus," Bells says, "the question wasn't, 'how do I get into heaven?' But 'how do I bring heaven here?'"

ECM's view of the Church

So what then does ECM think of the church? They have very little good to say about it. For example, Sweet is very critical: "To see how far we have traveled down the rational path, look at your church. Don't focus on what it believes or its original statement of faith; rather, consider how much time your church expends in creating beauty." And he charges: "Most of the church literature I read tastes overripe and stale. Overripe and stale makes God sick."

For ECM's leaders Scripture has only a relative role in the deconstruction and reconstruction of church practices. Instead of an emphasis on the death of Christ, repentance, forgiveness of sin, and eternal life, they focus instead on inviting people to follow Jesus and be on mission with him in the world. They want to be innovative in their outreach. They are always looking for a new expression of the church, and seeking to create communities of followers of Jesus, who "express the kingdom in all they do." They preach a "gospel of relationships," and mission living, which for them means that if Christians want to



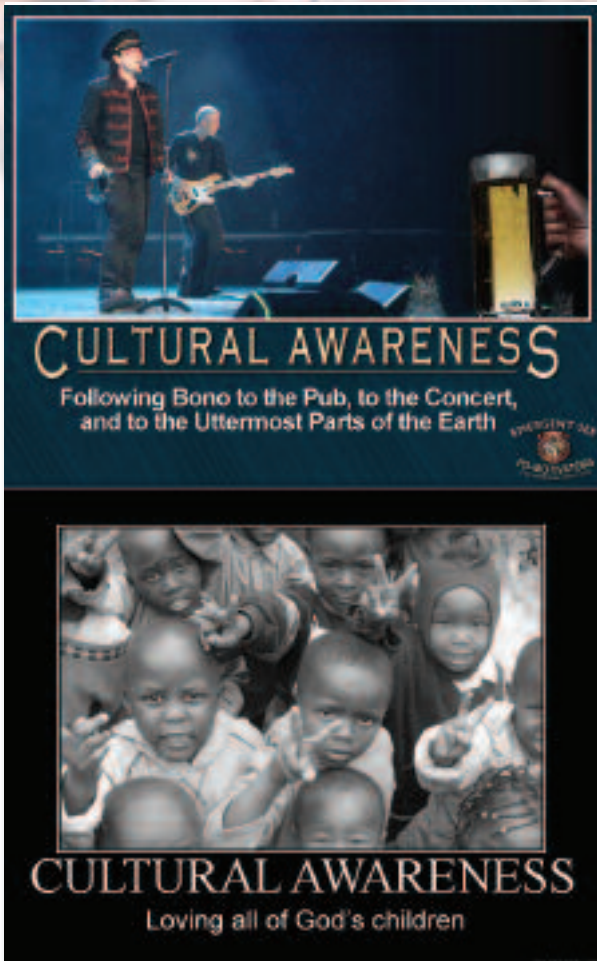
Just a few of the dozens of ECM books and DVDs you can find at your local Christian bookstores

What is often missing from the ECM's critique is a critique of postmodernism. In his book, *A New Kind of Christian*, Brian McLaren acknowledges that there are problems with postmodernism, just as there are with modernity. "Give us a century or two of postmodernism, and we'll see its fatal flaws as clearly as those of modernity are to us now." Although his response fails to assess or elaborate the possible sources of error one might encounter, many concerned with the movement have pointed out fatal flaws of postmodernism.

Conclusion

How should we assess these cultural shifts and what part should we play? We should be aware of the cultural ideals that exist in every paradigm. The scientific rationalism that would lead to "truth" through the practice of reason and the ideal of the ultimate goodness of man is no better the postmodernism that critiques it, but offers no meaningful overarching metanarrative. Although cultural shifts can reveal fallen cultural ideals of a previous age, should our catalyst for change be a cultural shift? "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2.8). The claims of leaders in the ECM should be heard, but their proposals should emerge from, and be judged by the Scriptures.

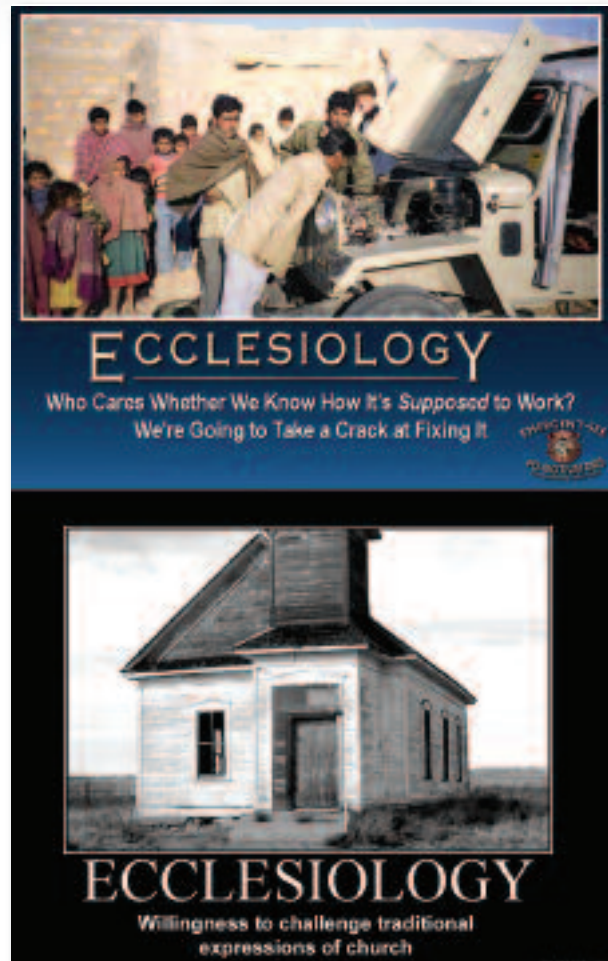
EMERGENT CHURCH



POSTER WARS – CULTURAL AWARENESS:

Bono is hip, Bono is cool, and Bono cares about African kids. Does he understand what he believes? Does it matter? The Pyromaniacs poster on top, and the ECM response below together capture the truth about the ECM's attitude towards cultural awareness – the ECM is trendy and shallow (top poster) and also caring and earnest (bottom).

POSTER WARS – ECCLESIOLOGY:
How should we “do” church? The two posters together – critic on top and response below – give a pretty good idea of the ECM view. They don’t know how things should be done; they just know they don’t like things the way they are.



serve God they need to go out into the world rather than isolate themselves within churches made up of like-minded individuals.

What then should churches look like? ECM argues that churches should be communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures.

For Sweet, Starbucks is a model for “doing church.” It is a coffee franchise that is invested in building community. Coffee is a hospitality drink, a sign of welcome and openness to sharing. Sweet tells us, of course, that we must learn from

Starbucks’ method of marketing by building relationships over coffee. And he says, “That’s one reason some of my friends and I refer to it as St.Arbucks.” And he asks, “Can the church take a humble, redemptive lesson from Starbucks’ success in turning placard-waving critics into card-carrying customers?”

McLaren says the church exists for the world. Just as Jesus welcomed the outcast, hosted the stranger, and challenged the political authorities by creating alternative communities, so too should the church.

Dr. John Bolt, comments in his essay, *An Emerging Critique of the Postmodern, Evangelical Church*, “For Bell as well as for McLaren, the emphasis is on a strongly experiential, socially activist, inclusive, pluralistic, pilgrims-on-the-way, this world affirming community.”

Evaluation of ECM

The ECM is a recipe for failure. By assuming that for churches to survive, they must accommodate to our postmodern culture, the seed of destruction for the evangelical faith is sown. By insisting that

the focus of ECM leaders should be the restoration of one's relationship with God *rather than* salvation from God's judgment, they are abandoning the Gospel. They seem to neglect personal salvation in favor of social transformation, while the Gospel includes both. The Gospel, after all, is more than loving one's neighbors and meeting their needs. The Bible speaks of the wrath of God in terms every bit as personal as it speaks of the love of God. Carson comments: "Rightly understood, God's love is all the more deeply cherished when the nature of Christ's sin-bearing act on the cross is understood in biblical terms."

ECM leaders base their theology on experience, but the path of experience leads nowhere but to absolute uncertainty. When one reads their literature, you soon notice that for them the Bible that God gave has lost its authority. This means that experience, rather than Scriptural teaching, now has authority. However our theology does not come from subjective experiences but from God, who reveals the way of salvation through His Word.

The ECM movement links itself too closely to postmodernism. Instead of adapting to postmodern culture, we should be *counter-cultural*, reminding ourselves that the practices and beliefs of the church should be grounded in Scripture. The phrase *sola scriptura* "by Scripture alone," summarizes this principle. The ECM cares about Jesus, but the Christ we confess as our Savior and Lord is the Christ of the Scriptures. After a careful study of Jesus' views of the Old Testament and his anticipation of the New Testament John W. Wenham concluded in *Christ and the Bible*: "To Christ the Bible is true, authoritative, inspired. To him the God of the Bible is the living God, and the teaching of the Bible is the teaching of the living God. To him, what Scripture says, God says."

Obviously, I have my questions about the ECM, but there is one thing we can learn from it – we need to reach out to the lost. Over the years the immigrant Reformed churches have become middle class with nice church buildings etc. I hope, however, we all agree that to be a Christian is not just a matter of assent to doctrinal truths; it is also to become a participant in the ongoing drama of the Gospel. We are called to live the Gospel, confess our Confessions in word and deed, speak and do the truth, reach out the lost outside of Christ, to the outcasts, the homeless, and the down-and-outers in our society. In order to be a counter cultural church seeking to obey our Lord's Great Commission – with the help of the Holy Spirit – we should work on strengthening the communion of saints, the local fellowships of God's covenant people, and thus become beacons of light and hope in our dark world, ready to welcome converts to Christ from every sector of society. In other words, put in practice Lord's Day 21:55 of *The Heidelberg Catechism*, which asks: "What do you understand by the 'communion of saints'? First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it duty to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and welfare of the other members."

We should not feel threatened by the ECM or any other fad that will arise on the theological scene. We are called to be faithful and not to be successful. But interestingly, statistics show that churches which grow most rapidly are those that set believers at odds with the surrounding culture. They are conservative churches faithful to the Gospel in word and deed, a haven of stability in an age of rapid change.

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Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

by Christine Farenhorst

The *Compact Dictionary of Doctrinal Words*, written by Terry Miethe, defines the word “hypocrite” as: One who pretends to possess virtues or qualities he does not have, from the Greek hupocrites, a stage or play actor, which is in turn from the Greek Hupokrinein, “to play a part.”

The dictionary goes on to say Greek and Roman actors used large masks with mechanical devices that increased the volume of the voice, hence the idea they portrayed something they did not actually possess. In his condemnation of the Pharisees, Jesus makes the point that while on the outside hypocrites seem religious, on the inside and in the sight of God they are profane and ungodly people. When Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, he quoted Isaiah 29:13 which says: “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me.”

Looking for a wartime adventure

During the Great War, also known as the First World War, many men served in the trenches from 1914-1918. It was a horrible way to fight. Day in, day out they faced the dirt, the fear, the waiting, the bullets and the boredom. In the end there were the countless dead; there were the fields littered with bodies and with graves; and there were those who returned battle-scarred, wounded and blind.

There is a story about an English regiment during the Great War – a regiment

called the Worcester Regiment. The colonel in charge of this particular regiment, which was situated in the front-line trenches, had a rather unique sense of humor. He was informed one day that two members of Parliament were coming to “visit” his company. He was also told that these two men were in search of some bravado, some tales which they could relay home. In other words, they wanted to watch some action in which they themselves would not take a dangerous part, but which would titillate their senses and make them heroes of some sort.



During the Great War, also known as the First World War, many men served in the trenches.

Initially the colonel was extremely miffed to be saddled with such a request. That he was extremely miffed was probably an understatement because in actuality he was outraged that such a request could be made. He saw the slime, the dirt, the danger and the fear which his men had to contend with on a daily basis and he was disgusted. But then he had an idea.

“Show them something interesting?” he laughed, “Fine. I’ll do that. Just bring those two fellows down to see me.”

When the two Members of Parliament arrived at the front-line trenches where the Worcester Regiment was situated, they were told by the colonel that they had arrived at a very crucial and dangerous moment in time.

“There has just been an attack,” the colonel informed them in a graveyard voice, “and we are defending our position vigorously. However, we are heavily outnumbered. The odds are against us and I should be very surprised if we, and that includes yourselves, escape with our lives.”

The two men blanched visibly and asked what they should do.

“Sit here,” the colonel told them, pointing to the ground, “against the wall of the trench and do not move. Whatever you do, don’t move. Make no noise whatsoever and be very, very quiet.”

The two men immediately dropped down. They literally slid to the floor in their good clothes. They said nothing but

were very pale and silent. A great racket had erupted even as the colonel was speaking to them. Things were exploding and the line of regiment men who were standing in front of them began firing their guns and throwing hand-grenades with tremendous zeal. Every few moments a man to either their right or to their left fell down, only to be picked up immediately by stretcher-bearers who appeared out of nowhere. These men were carried away down the trench to a dressing-station. Much to the Members of Parliament's amazement, the stretcher-bearers as well as the wounded men were uncommonly cheerful, often whistling as they were carried past them. And as the men fell, others quickly took their place. It was an altogether most heroic and gratifying, if not fearsome, sight.

The entire battle lasted some twenty minutes, although to the two silent and inept spectators it seemed interminably longer. At the end, when the fire was dying down, the colonel came back to the two men.

"It's all right, gentlemen," he said, "You may stand up now. The attack has been repulsed and we have overcome."

They stood up, tremendously relieved, wiped off their pants and commented on the valor and cheerfulness of the soldiers.

"What impressed me the most," said one, as he dusted off his pants, "was the singing and the joy of the men as they were carried off on the stretchers, although," he added, "I believe that I should have done the same. Yes, indeed, I feel that I was part of them and that I did do it."

The colonel smiled, looked at the well-dressed men in front of him, and stifled a grin behind his hand.

"Ah," he answered, "to be sure the wounded men are glad to be going home even as you are going home."

"Yes," said the other, "that's it."

The two Members of Parliament went back to London determined to speak of their own bravery as well as the bravery of the men in the trenches. They had, in retrospect, thoroughly enjoyed their perceived stint of danger, and were about to bask in the glory of "having been there."

The Members of Parliament, however, hadn't enjoyed themselves quite as much as the Worcester Regiment whose men had fought a mock battle for the benefit of their smooth-tongued spectators. The battle had been fought, not in the front-line trenches as the two had supposed, but in the support trenches some two miles back. The soldiers chuckled over it for a good month after the visit.

Dr. Jack Kevorkian, also known as Dr. Death, is ailing somewhat

Laughter was a good way for the soldiers to relieve some of their tension. The two MPs, however, were charlatans of a sort. They were imposters, posing as people they were not, acting a part and exuding bravery and enthusiasm which they had not really exhibited.

A different sort of charlatan

The June 9, 2007 edition of the *World* magazine, has a small paragraph written by Mindy Belz, which tells its readers that Dr. Jack Kevorkian, also known as Dr. Death, is ailing somewhat. Jack Kevorkian, just to trigger your memory, was "... that man who helped over 130 people to their deaths and who championed euthanasia via push-button mechanics that allowed patients to take their own lives using poison gas or lethal drugs." The doctor was due to be released from prison this summer where he was serving a 10-25 year term for one "assisted suicide." He continually maintained that he was helping people, that he was merciful and doing what ought to be done for those who became feeble and unable to cope with disease.

The interesting news is that Jack Kevorkian, who is now almost four score years old, 79 to be exact, is suffering from several malfunctions of his earthly body. He has high blood pressure, hepatitis C, as well as heart and lung disease – all of

which are conditions for which he has helped others into the grave. In spite of the fact that he termed these malfunctions as conditions which made life unbearable there is no evidence that he will be taking a lethal dose himself.

Although it's not to be advocated that Jack Kevorkian end his life, as he encourages other people to end theirs, it is interesting to note that usually those who shout the loudest are not always those who put their money where their mouth is.

Conclusion

The point is that when we say something, or advocate something with gusto, we should be sure that we stand behind it with our behavior. People are quick to note hypocrisy, whether that hypocrisy is in a Christian or a non-Christian. Although it is true that people's opinions are not crucial in the long run, there is Someone whose opinion of hypocrisy is crucial. That Person is Jesus Christ.

"Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites. . . that they may be praised by men. . ."

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. . ."

"And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. . ."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are the whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Matt. 6:2,5,16 and Matt. 23:27-28).

We can learn precious truths from the attitudes of the two Members of Parliament as well as the attitude of Jack Kevorkian. And we should take these truths to heart. The kingdom of heaven, you see, is shut against those who harbor such attitudes.



Sneaking in Blasphemy

Philip Pullman's "children's" books are spiritual pornography

by Jan Bredenhof

I am an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy literature. I love stories which delve deeply into my imagination, which make me think in different ways, which make me wonder "what if. . ." and which make me look more deeply at the ordinary, after imagining the fantastical. And so, I sought out *The Golden Compass*, after finding out that a major motion picture will be coming out December 2007 based on that book.

Starts dark, gets darker

The *Compass* is the first in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy – the next two are *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*. These books certainly do deliver everything one could hope for in a fantasy novel: imaginative ideas, fascinating characters, and fast-paced excitement. But there is a dark undertone which begins in the first book and becomes painfully and cruelly clear as the trilogy progresses – a major theme of the books which is so frighteningly, rabidly anti-Church, anti-Christian, and anti-God, that I shivered to read it. I did carry on through the end of the books, because I knew that the books and the movie will become more and more popular in the months ahead, and as Christians, we need to know what we are facing.

The storyline, about children who go on adventures to help their friends and ultimately to battle evil, is richly patterned

Reformed Perspective does not normally print negative book reviews – we like to focus on the positive side of things and highlight the very best books instead. But once in a while a book or series appears that is so bad, and yet so popular, Christians should know more about it.

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy is just such a series. The first book won the 1995 Carnegie Medal, UK's top prize for children's fiction, and has been made into a play, a video game and now a \$150 million film. While the first book does give some warning of what is coming later, for the most part it seems a fairly normal fantasy novel – young readers cheer on the heroic Lyra as she fights against an unknown evil. It is only in the second and third book that children find out this "evil" Lyra and her friends have been fighting is actually God.

and complex, so I won't go into a synopsis here. But the idea which the author gradually reveals is as follows.

We know the Biblical account of the angels who rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven. Now imagine this – imagine if the winner of that battle was not the benevolent, loving, creating, Father God that he made himself out to be. Imagine that he was actually a despotic, power-lusting, decrepit, false being who lied about who he is and what he has done, and who sets up a church whose main purposes are to suppress wisdom and individuality and keep people from enjoying all that is good and joyful in life. Wouldn't that be something to fight against? Wouldn't you travel through all sorts of adventures and hardships in order overthrow such a kingdom? Wouldn't it be better to fight against the Kingdom of Heaven, in order to set up a "Republic of Heaven"? That is the great thrust of the plot of these three books – worked out gradually, powerfully, and with great subtlety.

Why shouldn't we read these books or watch these movies? It could be argued that we ought to become familiar with these works so that we can know the kind of ideas which exist in our society. I often feel confident to look anti-Christian ideas and arguments in the face, because I have always been able to find a good answer to



their railings through logic, common sense, and – most of all – the Word of God. And, having looked closely at those who scorn my God and my faith, I come away strengthened and confident – not in myself, but in God who is Himself the best answer.

Spiritual pornography

I can argue with an atheist. I can find holes in agnosticism. But these books are something different altogether. They are the work of someone who hates the idea of

God and even more, His church, and the novels powerfully weave beautiful and blasphemous ideas into your head. We would never watch pornography in order to find out what is wrong with adultery, because watching pornography changes us: it puts ideas and images into our minds which would never have been there otherwise. These books felt like spiritual pornography to me. There can be no benefit to allowing our children to read them or watch the movies.

Philip Pullman has said outright that he is “delighted” that the Church hates his books. As for whether or not he believes in God, he said this, “Actually, if [God] is keeping out of sight, it’s because he’s ashamed of his followers and all the cruelty and ignorance they’re responsible for promoting in his name. If I were him, I’d want nothing to do with them.” Pullman is not the only one to think along this vein. If we want to discuss the ideas of these books with our children, his quotation may be good place to start, since it is the basis of much of the anti-Christian vitriol which poisons the media. Our children do need a foundation from where they can begin to feel strong in their Church, their faith, and their God, but it is not necessary to bathe them in dangerous, blasphemous ideas in order to do it.



***Philip Pullman
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For that reason, I do believe that there can, in certain circumstances, be a place for becoming familiar with books and movies that challenge our faith, and for using them as the basis for important discussions with our children. *The Golden Compass* is not that book; it will not be that movie.

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Moving beyond a “Doom and Gloom” message

by Mark Penninga

In the past few years Christians have had good reason to be disappointed with our governments and the courts – Canada has condoned everything from swinger’s clubs, to homosexual marriage, to having three legal parents for one child. Our disappointments are causing many Christians to become cynical about the whole realm of politics and that is unfortunate. We aren’t allowed to just give up; the Bible tells us to be a salt and a light in this world, regardless of how dark it is.

.....

***The Bible is not a book
of doom and gloom.
It is a message of
hope, even for our
political lives***

.....

Our cynicism isn’t limited to the government and the courts – we also know that any time Christians speak, the media will portray us as ignorant and intolerant. The media has pigeon-holed Christian political action as “right-winged fundamentalism.” Unless we take the United Church approach of only getting involved with politically correct issues like poverty and sexual rights, religion is seen as interfering with everything that is good about this country.

CPJ, ECP or the CFAC?

So how do we respond? How do we go beyond cynicism? Do we change our message to get on the good side of our secular society? Or should we ditch the conservatism altogether and emphasize only compassion and care?

This last approach seems to be the option that groups like Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ) have adopted. This, primarily Christian Reformed, political action group has focussed on issues such as homelessness, refugees, and the environment. All of these issues are important and we would agree with much of CPJ’s perspective on them. But why is there little discussion about abortion, the breakdown of marriage, and other issues that bring a foul odour to our secular society? How can we be silent about these injustices, which our Parliament and courts celebrate?

Another option is to be bold about our beliefs and confront our government and culture with its mistakes. This response is generally associated with the “Christian Right” or “Social Conservatism.” Groups like Equipping Christians for the Public-square (ECP) and the Canada Family Action Coalition (CFAC) make no apologies about challenging secularism. This perspective is a refreshing change in our politically correct culture. Most members of Reformed churches in Canada admire the courage that these groups demonstrate when standing up against the evils in society. After all, nobody else seems willing to do it.

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Unfortunately, many social conservative groups never get past complaining about the problems of society. Instead of defining the Christian perspective by stating what our vision is for Canada, these groups define who we are simply by stating our opposition to everything else. This type of political action can get tiresome, as it seems to be a never-ending rant about the problems of this world. If even we get tired of this approach, surely our country will refuse to listen to this “doom and gloom” message.

It does not help that we seem to be fixated on issues that relate to sexuality, homosexual marriage, and civil liberties (our rights and freedoms). We’ve begun to sound like just another lobby group that wants to assert its rights. Don’t Christians have a message for our country that goes beyond sexuality and religious freedom?

Holding out a message of hope

I am not suggesting that we ignore issues that deal with sexuality or civil liberties. That would be tantamount to condoning the lies and immorality that are so widespread. But social conservatives need to stop being fixated with so few issues and need to start applying the Biblical message as a whole to our society. The Bible is not a book of doom and gloom. It is a message of hope, even for our political lives. We must remember the Apostle Paul's encouragement in Philippians 2: "Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. . . ."

Shining like stars requires that we be an encouragement, a voice of hope, to our country. What example are we setting when we only talk about the gloom and doom of our society? Instead we must explain to our Christian community and society at large how the Bible is an answer to all of our lives, including the political/legal dimensions of life. For example, if we want to be pro-life our message should not be restricted to fighting abortion or euthanasia. We must go beyond that and explain why a Biblical perspective teaches that life is valuable at all stages. We are being hypocrites if we fight abortion in the name of being pro-life but then treat the homeless and refugees as if their lives do not matter. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan speaks loudly to this.

Going further than gloom

Both the so-called Christian Right and Left need to stop defining themselves according to the political paradigm of this world – we need to start measuring ourselves up against the Bible. Politics should be another avenue of spreading the good news of the Gospel, no less so than other social actions that we are involved with (such as evangelism committees, Christian relief efforts to third world countries, etc.). This means that we should be doing our politics the same way we are called to ap-

Ways that We Can Be a Positive Political Witness

- Get active with a local Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) group, or start a new one if there isn't one in your city.
- Convey a positive attitude about politics to your families and friends. Cynicism spreads quickly and will only turn more Christians away from fulfilling their political calling.
- Call your elected representative just to thank him or her for the work they do to represent your riding/constituency. Let them know that you are praying for them.
- When writing a letter or email to our Members of Parliament, try to go beyond just disagreeing with an issue. Also explain what you think is a good (i.e. Biblical) solution to the problem.
- Be proactive – don't let the secular media control the agenda of what matters politically. If we are always reacting to the news we end up often having a negative message because we disagree with many decisions by our governments and courts. We need to think proactively and talk about the issues that we want our governments to be dealing with. This gives us an opportunity to explain some encouraging Biblical ideas.
- When financially supporting social conservative political groups, encourage them to think broader than some of the issues that they have traditionally been active with.
- Pray that our leader's eyes are opened to the sin and injustice of this world. But also pray that they discover the answer and truth in Jesus Christ.

proach all of life. We have to apply the entire Gospel message to our political action.

We will have to talk about sin. We have to be honest about the evil of abortion, perverted sexuality, and any political issue that our world does not want to hear about. But the key is, we can't stop there! The Gospel goes beyond that and offers a message of hope. So our political message to society also has to go beyond pointing out evil. We need to be shining stars and we need to explain to our society what a blessing it is to live God's way. God has made his will clear on things like family structure and how to live in relation to others (even in a multicultural society). When we promote this message we are setting an example for our society to follow. What a refreshing contrast to simply condemning our country's political and legal decisions!

Conclusion

Being a political witness is no simple task. We need to go beyond the doom and gloom message, and beyond topics like homosexuality and religious freedom. Let us look beyond the traditional norms of the "Christian Right" and apply the good news of the Bible to our society. This does not require a major lobby campaign or a revival in our Parliament or Supreme Court. Rather, it is about how you and I interact with our society one-on-one. Our political witness to this world should be simply another part of being a Christian light in a dark country. The Lord willing, this will make others realize not just that they are wrong but that there is a right way that can be found in God's Word.



Always Be Prepared – Three Ways

A Primer on Apologetics

by Wes Bredenhof

Apologetics has a lengthy and respectable pedigree in the history of the church. In the early church, Justin Martyr (100-165) wrote an apology or defense of the Christian faith. *The City of God* by Augustine (354-430) may also be considered an early example of a variety of apologetics; in this work, Augustine addressed those who claimed that Christianity was responsible for the downfall of the Roman Empire.

Through the centuries, numerous authors have set out to defend the Christian faith to its detractors. While a short article provides no space for even a cursory review of the history of apologetics, I can provide a brief overview of the three basic schools of apologetics that have emerged out of this lengthy history.

But before I do that, why should anybody care to read the rest of this article?

The answer comes from 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” The Greek word for “an answer” (*apologia*) is related to our English word “apologetics.” So we could paraphrase Peter as saying, “Always be prepared to do apologetics. . . .”

In other words, all believers have the responsibility to be able to explain why they believe what they do, or better: why they believe in whom they do.

That brings us to consider three main schools of Christian apologetics. It should be noted that not every author or apologist is going to fall neatly into one of these three categories. Some people are eclectic in their approach and use whatever seems best at the time. Moreover, there are certain things

on which all three schools agree. For instance, all three agree that there is a place for Scripture, reason and evidences. Where they differ is with respect to the emphasis placed on each of these. Also, at their best, all these schools would agree that apologetical arguments, by themselves, do not save anyone. Rather, it is the proclamation of Christ in the gospel through which sinners are saved.

1. Classical Apologetics

With its roots in the medieval Catholic Church, this system of apologetics has a history that goes very far back. Finding its chief influences in theologians such as Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, the emphasis of this school is on reason and its right use. Those in this school insist that the truth can be found via sound reason. Consequently, classical apologists believe that it is possible to prove the existence of God and the reasonableness of the Christian faith with rational arguments.

.....

***We could paraphrase
Peter as saying,
“Always be prepared to
do apologetics. . . .”***

.....

While I don’t have space to outline all of the arguments that have been developed by this school, I can briefly mention two: the ontological and the teleological arguments.

Originating with Anselm (c.1033-1109), the ontological argument is rather

technical and not easy to understand. Now there are logical problems with this argument (as well as the teleological), but my point here is not to critique any school of apologetics or its arguments. When broken down into its most basic form the argument looks like this:

Premise 1: God has all perfections.
Premise 2: Existence is a perfection.
Conclusion: Therefore, God exists.

The argument hinges on two assumptions: 1) by definition, God (Anselm: “that than which nothing greater can be conceived”) is absolutely perfect; 2) absolute perfection includes existence.

Through the influence of the Intelligent Design movement, the teleological argument has become very popular today. “Teleological” refers to something having a purpose or goal. This argument asserts that the world and/or its parts (including human beings) have the appearance of having been designed, therefore there must be a Designer. That Designer must be God, therefore God exists.

Most of the modern (and older) proponents of this system have been Roman Catholic. Despite criticisms that this school minimizes the effects of sin upon the fallen mind, it has been embraced by a select number of Reformed apologists, including (most notably) R.C. Sproul of Ligonier Ministries. However, as Sproul himself has noted, this school of apologetics has been lacking in vitality in the last decades. The recent popularity of the Intelligent Design movement (with men such as Michael Behe, Phillip Johnson and William Dembski) may be interpreted as a resurgence of this school.

2. Evidential Apologetics

This system can be considered as an outgrowth of the previous one. It really finds its roots in the scientific revolution and the rise of empiricism. The dominant way of thinking was that if we can't test it, if we can't touch it and see it, then it does not exist. This thinking fueled a system of apologetics which put the emphasis on finding concrete empirical data to prove the Christian faith, especially its historical claims, not least of which is the resurrection of Christ.

One of its most well known proponents was an Anglican clergyman, Joseph Butler (1692-1752). In a book entitled *Analogy of Religion: Natural and Revealed* Butler argued for God's existence by attempting to prove that there was an analogy between the natural world and what is revealed in Scripture.

The main emphasis of this system is on the reliability of empirical, scientific methods and their capacity to lead us to the truth, or to at least a fairly good probability of the truth. The arguments in this school

are primarily drawn from history and science. It should be emphasized that this often includes a scientific and historical treatment of the Bible.

Historically speaking, evidential apologetics has been the favored school of Arminian theologians (which is not to say that everyone of this school is an Arminian). Its view of man is most consistent with the views rejected by the Synod of Dort in 1618/19. Consequently, it should not be surprising that this has been the school of choice for many North American Christians. Josh McDowell's popular books *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* are prime examples of this variety of apologetics. A more recent example, especially focusing on the historical veracity of the resurrection, is N.T. Wright's thick volume entitled, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. Other authors in this school include Ravi Zacharias, Lee Strobel and Norman Geisler.

3. Presuppositional Apologetics

In the 20th century, there was what some have called "a Copernican revolution"

in apologetics. A Dutch-American theologian, Cornelius VanTil (1895-1987), made a self-conscious effort to build a system of apologetics on the foundation of Reformed theology. Strangely, this had never been attempted prior to VanTil. He provided a viable alternative to those disillusioned with Classical Apologetics (with its affinities to Roman Catholicism) and Evidential Apologetics (with its affinities to Arminianism).

Presuppositional apologetics asserts that the discipline of apologetics needs to be built entirely on the presupposition or assumption that the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God. The method of apologetics needs to be drawn out from what the Bible teaches, rather than from philosophy or from science. It is built on the belief that Reformed theology is the most faithful expression of what the Bible teaches.

When it comes to the existence of God, this school primarily relies upon what is known as the Transcendental Argument for the Existence of God (TAG). This argument summarizes the Biblical position that

Apologetics 101

reviewed by Wes Bredenhof

Popular and intelligible treatments of Reformed apologetics are difficult to find. Fortunately, this book by Dr. Greg Bahnsen is a helpful treatise on a subject sometimes made out to be more difficult than it really should be. The author was known for his ability to make difficult subjects come alive for those not academically inclined. Unlike his mentor, Dr. Cornelius VanTil (1895-1987), Bahnsen had a gift for popularizing the defense of the faith and nowhere does that gift shine through more clearly than in this book.

The first four sections of this book carefully outline the Biblical basis for apologetics and provide the theoretical foundations. Biblical references abound and everything is supported with Scripture. The author also responds to some criticisms leveled at Reformed apologetics, such as the argument that according to the Reformed system, unbelievers (because they do not presuppose the authority of the Bible) cannot know

anything. Bahnsen cogently responds to these arguments and demonstrates that only Reformed apologetics can claim to be consistently Scriptural.

The last section of *Always Ready* deals with several practical issues in defending the faith. Bahnsen outlines what the issues are and then gives solid helpful advice on how to deal with these issues. The problems dealt with include: evil (how can a good God allow evil?), faith (isn't faith irrational or non-rational?) and miracles (miracles are not permitted within a modernistic worldview). Bahnsen shows at a practical level how Christians can be humble and effective tools of the Spirit in arguing against unbelief.

Finally, there is an appendix providing an exposition of Acts 17. In that chapter, the Apostle Paul confronts the wisdom of the Greeks with the "foolishness" of the gospel. Bahnsen argues that the method employed by Paul in his famous Areopagus sermon is basically that of Reformed apologetics – a



**Always Ready:
Directions for
Defending the Faith**

by Greg L. Bahnsen
Covenant Media
Foundation, 1996
289 pp; Paperback,
\$15 US.

proclamation of carefully reasoned Scriptural truth. The thorough and balanced exegesis of this sermon is one of the highlights of this book and showcases Dr. Bahnsen's competence as a Biblical scholar.

Most adult readers should not encounter too much difficulty with this book. Difficult terms are usually explained and a summary at the end of each section ensures that readers do not miss the important points of the author. Short chapters in the introductory sections ensure that readers will not be intimidated by an overload of new ideas. The reasoning, as is usually the case with Bahnsen, is impeccable. If you buy only one book on this subject, make it this one!



everything in this world depends upon the existence and validity of the Christian worldview. As Paul said at the Areopagus, "...in him we live and move and have our being." Even the unbeliever's arguments against God, his use of logic and reason, demonstrate and prove the existence of God. Therefore, we argue for the existence of God and the truth of the Christian worldview from the impossibility of the contrary. Negatively, this includes challenging non-Christian presuppositions and demonstrating the inconsistencies of non-Christian worldviews.

Douglas Jones gave a fine illustration of that a number of years ago with an article entitled "Rethinking Milk Buying" (*Credenda/Agenda* Vol.7 No.1). Addressed to an unbeliever, Jones used the simple act of buying milk to challenge the non-Christian's worldview. Walking up to the grocery store indicates that, "you and the store are different things, not one, thus showing

your rejection of most Eastern and New Age religions." When one stands in line and expects others to respectfully do the same, "you reveal your rejection of moral relativism and your deep trust in absolute, ethical norms." After several more such examples, Jones concluded, "In fact, given the sum of what you assume and reject just when buying milk, you act like you believe that you live in the world described by Christianity. . . . You profess non-Christianity, but assume Christianity."

Cornelius VanTil died in 1987, but his shoes were ably filled by one of his most prodigious students, Greg Bahnsen (1948-1995). Bahnsen, an Orthodox Presbyterian minister, specialized in laying out the Biblical foundations of presuppositional apologetics. He not only wrote a number of books and articles in that vein, but also excelled at taking the principles into practice. He debated a number of atheists, including Gordon Stein in a well-known California

debate in 1985. After Bahnsen's unexpected death, men such as K. Scott Oliphint, John Frame, Lane Tipton, and Michael Horton have continued to promote and develop this school.

Conclusion

There have been fears that the advent of postmodernism might lead to the utter irrelevance of apologetics. If anything, quite the contrary appears to be the case. In the last year or two, a number of atheist diatribes have been published by secular presses, including *God Is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens which reached number 2 on the Canadian best-seller list. The arguments of Hitchens and others need to be answered. Indeed, as long as there are unbelievers, we will need to be always prepared.

In preparing this article, Rev. Bredenhof made grateful use of "A Summary of Apologetic Positions" in the March/April 2006 issue of Modern Reformation.



Advanced Apologetics

reviewed by Wes Bredenhof

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of reading the first volume of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*. Though this volume has long been available in Dutch (Bavinck lived from 1854-1921), the English translation has only been out for a couple of years. I was particularly interested in this because the "father of Reformed apologetics," Cornelius VanTil, always claimed that he was unoriginal in his formulations. His unique contribution rested in his application of Reformed theology to the defense of the faith.

VanTil built his apologetics on the foundation laid by others, especially by Herman Bavinck. It has to be emphasized that while VanTil himself didn't make this clear (and he recognized it as a fault), this foundation consisted of the teachings of the Word of God. One of the aims of this useful book of essays is to clarify the relationship between Reformed apologetics and the Bible.

To that end, Part 1 features five essays dealing with "exegetical considerations." For

instance, Richard Gaffin reflects carefully on 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, while Lane Tipton works through Acts 17:30-31. The essays in this section establish the Biblical foundations of Reformed apologetics and also the guiding ground principle (*principium*) for the discipline of apologetics: the Word of God. Tipton writes, "...biblical theology requires that we regulate apologetics in light of exegesis, so that the discipline of apologetics depends ultimately on the theology contained in the inscripturated text. . . ."

In Part 2, the contributors explore the "Theological Foundations" of Reformed apologetics. John Frame helpfully explores the notion of divine aseity (God's self-sufficiency) and what it means for the defense of the faith. Michael Horton contributes a thought-provoking essay on the "Creator-Creature distinction" and its relevance for VanTil and us. In another unique contribution, Jeffrey Jue provides a critical take on VanTil's interpretation of natural theology



Revelation and Reason:
New Essays in
Reformed Apologetics
edited by K. Scott
Oliphint &
Lane G. Tipton
P&R Publishing, 2007
336 pp; Paperback
\$17 US.

based on more recent assessments of Protestant scholasticism.

I found Part 3 to be the most challenging section. It deals with the "methodological implications" of Reformed apologetics and it tends to be quite technical and philosophical. However, the book concludes with a great essay by Oliphint on "Cornelius VanTil and the Reformation of Christian Apologetics."

This would not be a good book to recommend for those looking for an introduction to apologetics. However, it is worthwhile as a volume for those who have some knowledge of theology and/or philosophy. It deals with many of the deeper issues and tends to be technical in some sections. I would especially recommend it to those who are searching for a more detailed explanation of the Biblical basis for Reformed apologetics.





Tidbits relevant, and not so, to Christian life

by Jon Dykstra

Christian common sense

Dr. Leonard Sax is a rude and daring man. He's daring because he's willing to highlight the differences between the genders. And rude because he not only points out areas where girls outpace boys but also highlights ways in which boys outperform girls.

In his book *Why Gender Matters* one of the most interesting parts deals with the big differences that exist between how boys and girls view danger, how they deal with stress, and how they regard sex. For example, he notes that educational ads that stress the harm drugs do to brain cells will affect boys and girls very differently: "Girls don't want to ruin their brains. But risk-taking boys – who are exactly the boys who are most at risk for using drugs – will see an ad like that and think 'Way cool! Drugs fry your brain! Where can I get some?'"

Girls and boys also have premarital sex for very different reasons: "High self-esteem *decreases* the odds of a teenage girl having sex, but *increases* the odds of a teenage boy having sex. Participation in competitive sports such as soccer and basketball *decreases* the odds of a girl having sex, but *increases* the odds of a boy having sex."

The Bible makes it clear that God gave men and women different roles, so it shouldn't be a surprise to us that He made men and women quite different. As Sax has found out, boys and girls really are different. In the world that's a controversial idea, but to us it should be just a matter of common sense – Christian common sense.

SOURCE: *National Post* February 24, 2005

Joke of the month

The chaplain at Marquette Prison was passing through the work area one morning when he noticed a prisoner sitting cross-legged, sewing a burlap covering on a bale of overalls.

"Good morning," said the chaplain, "Sewing, eh?"

"No, Chaplain," replied the prisoner with a grim smile. "Reaping."

SOURCE: *Fun Fare – a treasury of Reader's Digest wit and humor*

Cheap tricks

Through the last few years *Reformed Perspective* has been asking its readers to send in their cheap tricks – the different ways they've used the resources God has given them in a particularly inventive and stewardly way. Though the response has been rather sad, it seems a true Dutchman or two do still exist. Here's a true (but anonymous) tale that I hope will inspire more submissions.

"It was Sunday afternoon just before the service. Our minister looked for his equipment to amplify his voice. Everything was in the box except the clip to tie his tiny mic in place. It was near starting time for the service. A desperate search yielded nothing. It was then that I remembered finding a paperclip a few days earlier beside my parked car and putting it in my coat pocket. This 'found' paperclip did the trick to hold the mic in its place. Only a born Dutchman would stoop for such a lowly find. Providential? I believe so."

Incidentally, though this story is some months old already, that "tie clip" is still in use.

Send your own cheap trick stories to editor@reformedperspective.ca.

Silly, smart and smashing

The web is a weird and wacky place and some Christians are making brilliant use of it.

Folks at the Discovery Institute, an Intelligent Design think tank, have created an on-line video game (www.pandaID.notlong.com) in which you are a tank shooting at pandas that come out of the sky yelling anti-Intelligent Design slogans. This is very weird. . . and very fun.

Have you heard of YouTube? You can find a Christian version at www.GodTube.com. There are very interesting videos here but also a lot of shoddy theology, so discernment, as always, is needed. Two similar but smaller sites are www.JesusClips.com and www.ChristClips.com.

Evangelist Ray Comfort's latest website (www.hollywoodandgod.com) tackles blasphemy in the movies by providing Christians with the contact info for the producers of all the current movies which contain blasphemy. But the real kicker on this website is a video in which Comfort hits the streets and asks people whether they would sit through a movie that took the Lord's name in vain. Then he asks them if they would sit through a movie that took their mother's name in vain. The answers provided seem to show that while we all love our mothers, God doesn't rate as highly.

Quote of the month

"By swallowing evil words unsaid, no one has ever harmed his stomach."

Winston Churchill



Why the World Covets India's Free Tree

by Margaret Helder

It may take years before ecologists, who conduct studies in nature, ever see any results from their work. Astronomers and medical researchers also understand that it may be years before their studies yield results. However chemistry does not seem to fit the long-term category. After all, how long can it take to mix reactants and collect the product?

Tree outsmarts technology

Well, it turns out that the chemical synthesis of some products can take a very, very long time. In August, a team from Cambridge University reported that it took them twenty-two years to produce a synthetic version of *azadirachtin*, a product which India's neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) effortlessly produces in large quantities.

There are a number of reasons why synthetic chemistry is sometimes hard pressed to reproduce natural products. The synthesis of *azadirachtin* required 64 steps. Much of the time was spent figuring out what the next step should be, one presumes, and how to bring about the appropriate transformation in what they already had.

Some chemists criticized the English team for pursuing this project for so long. Many chemists today recognize that it is impossible, or nearly so, to duplicate some natural products. It seems strange, however, that scientists who so confidently claim that they will create life in a test tube within the next few years, nev-

ertheless cannot duplicate some of the products of living cells. There is an obvious disconnect here. Can it be that technological man lacks many of the skills programmed into numerous organisms such as microbes or even plants like the neem tree?

Chemical complications

The problem the English chemists faced was that they lacked many of the skills and tools which living cells use to produce natural products. For a start, living cells are particular about what compounds they produce. All organic compounds are carbon based – that is, the molecules are built around a core of carbon. The possible number and arrangement of additions to this core are infinite as far as the synthetic chemist is concerned. Computers can design compounds which differ endlessly in small details.

Living cells, however, are far more particular. They produce only a few products (thousands compared to infinity) and many of these are much more unusual in their design than the computer generated products. Computers, after all, are not ingenious or original, but it seems that living cells (or at least the Designer of living cells) is/are highly original. Thus even the huge libraries of synthetic compounds available to chemists may not reflect the “rich chemical diversity of the much smaller numbers of natural products” (Christopher M. Dobson. *Nature* Dec. 16, 2004 p. 826).

Obviously chemists start out at a disadvantage when they undertake to duplicate in the laboratory a synthesis which is naturally carried out by a living organism. The disadvantages to the chemists are compounded by the fact that natural products tend to be much larger and more complicated than compounds designed in the laboratory. Natural products tend to have centers in their structure that allow for twisting so that the molecule can assume alternate shapes. This is not true of synthetic molecules. Also the arrangement of elements in natural products often produces elaborate, not easily described shapes (compared to the basic geometry in a chemist's designed products.) In addition, somehow and unexpectedly, the large natural products have greater solubility in water than synthetic designs.

Just as the end results of living processes in the cell are fancier than synthetic products, so too, the processes for producing natural products are much more sophisticated than in the laboratory. Most cells, for a start, package information controlling the manufacture of the assembly line machinery (in the form of certain proteins) next to information which ensures that the appropriate raw products are produced at the appropriate time and in suitable amounts (like an ideal factory). So the assembly line receives what it needs when it needs it. One interesting thing is that the raw products in cells are simple organic molecules in common use in the cell. Lastly a third cluster of

information brings about unusual modifications or tailoring to intermediate and final steps. It is the unusual modifications to the final product which make the product biologically active (able to carry out its designated task).

Irreducible complexity

The living cell has the ability to build into a molecule the ability to change quickly into a desired active form. For example, some products called enediynes have been isolated from certain microbes. These compounds include some of the most potent toxins known. For example, the concentration required to kill 50% of victims is so low that it works out to about one molecule per cell! One of these products, calicheamicin, has an unusual triple sulfur (-S-S-S-) bond. Another one, dynemicin has a modified benzene-like ring. These components of the molecules, allow for a rapid cascade of change when conditions in the cell are appropriate. This sequence of events results in molecules which are able to aggressively oxidize things like DNA. The genetic information breaks up and the cell dies.

Such chemical changes to a stored, seemingly innocent compound, show the finesse of organisms in producing fancy molecules. The process may require 20-40 steps to complete, including final processing, but 50 or more steps are not uncommon. Such lengthy manufacturing processes with unusual intermediate steps, indicate that these manufacturing procedures are not the result of randomly accumulating know how. The cells use assembly lines which are dedicated to the final product. The chemical steps in between are relevant to the cell only in that they represent stepping stones to the final product. There is no biological process, such as evolution, which could preserve a partly developed manufacturing process. What would be the point of conserving a product that does nothing? These metabolic pathways are clearly designed.

Chemists are not anywhere nearly as sophisticated as living cells in their approach to artificially synthesizing natural

products. Whereas organisms carry out late-stage modifications to the reactivity of these molecules, chemists try to build the reactive groups into the component parts which they then piece together. Thus they are forced to start with bigger, more elaborate initial components. Chemists thus need a much larger collection of possible component parts than the cell does. Nevertheless, because the

characteristics of some natural products are determined by the complex final three dimensional arrangement of parts, arrangements which cannot easily be produced by piecemeal processes, the synthetic chemist is at a distinct disadvantage. This is why some products appear nearly impossible to produce, and this is why azadirachtin took 22 years to produce.



azadirachta indica (neem tree)
© 2004 pictured by antonia van den bos
for ayorento.com



Indian farmers have been using extracts from the neem tree for over 2000 years but never thought to take a patent.

Better than Colonel Bob's Miracle Elixir

The question then arises as to why this compound was so interesting to the synthetic chemists. Let us shift gears to consider the natural source of this product. Hilarious stories abound from a time, some generations ago, when traveling salesmen offered miracle products promising cures for almost any malady. Modern society, of course, is a lot more skeptical about so called miracle products. The humor in this situation is that such a natural miracle product actually exists.

For 2000 or more years, people in India have exploited almost all parts of the neem tree. To people living in the shade of its ample canopy, this tree represents the cornucopia tree, the free tree, the blessed tree, or the village pharmacy tree. Indeed the Latin name for the tree, *Azadirachta indica*, comes from the Persian name Azad-Darakth, meaning "the free tree." Claims for the usefulness of products from the tree include uses as a pesticide (against 200 important insect pests), as a fungicide, and as treatments for malaria, leprosy, diabetes, ulcers, skin disorders and constipation! Moreover its wood is said to be resistant to termite damage.

One might well suspect that western man would assume a tolerantly skeptical attitude to these claims. Not any more! Since the early 1990s, western multinationals have aggressively tried to expropri-

ate major financial benefit from the tree for themselves. In this age when synthetic products have met with considerable disfavor, the multinationals have identified the neem tree as a natural source of wonder products that they can ill afford to ignore.

These metabolic pathways are clearly designed

Azadirachtin is a potent compound with a distant chemical resemblance to steroids. It is a naturally occurring substance which belongs to an organic molecule class called tetraortritenoids. This compound is found in all parts of the neem tree, but is most concentrated in the seed. At least 70 other unusual compounds are also produced by the neem tree. Until 2007, none had been artificially synthesized. Now, of course, azadirachtin has been synthesized in a program so long running and so expensive that no one would want to do it again.

Problematic patents

In 1971 a US timber importer began experimenting with neem seed because the wood seemed so resilient to pests. He carried out research on a pesticidal ex-

tract he called Margosan-0. In 1985 he was given clearance to sell it by the Environmental Protection Agency. Three years later he sold his rights to the product to the multinational chemical corporation W. R. Grace. This company set about obtaining US patents for neem tree products. In 1991 the multinational company secured rights to an emulsion from the neem tree's seeds to make a powerful pesticide. This company had not patented the tree, just the method of harvesting the azadirachtin from the seeds. This company soon began to sue Indian companies for making extracts of azadirachtin from neem seeds. The question then arose as to whether it was possible to exclude local citizens of India from free use of their own tree.

Native peoples in India have made pesticide emulsions from neem for over 2000 years. The process is not complicated. The farmer cracks or smashes the seeds, soaks them overnight in water, alcohol or other solvent, then skims off the emulsion, and shortly afterwards applies it to the desired crops. Of course this emulsion is not stable for too many days and it needs to be used soon after it is produced. The multinational corporations, for their part, have undertaken to enhance extraction techniques and improve stability of the product. It is these processes which have been patented. By 1996 40 patents had been issued worldwide on processes or products related to azadirachtin. By

2000, this number had risen to 90 patents. Indian society and governments however were philosophically opposed to patents, but the multinational companies did not care. "You snooze, you lose," was their basic response. But the question remained, how valid were those patents?

One of the factors contributing to the problem of patent rights is cultural differences between India and the western world. The Indian government has for many years insisted that it would not interfere in any way in the free use of natural products, by its citizens. Thus the Indian government has been reluctant to issue patents on agricultural or pharmaceutical products. Her citizens generally view life processes as sacred, not as commodities that may be bought and sold. Since the use of neem has continued for millennia, most people in India are reluctant to allocate rights to a restricted segment of the population.

Citizens of the western world, on the other hand, seem seldom to be burdened by qualms about exploiting natural processes for gain. Laws in the United States and Europe, moreover, do not recognize traditional knowledge and use as constituting proof of an "invention." Laws in these countries recognize only inventions described in technical or scientific publications. Thus, as far as patent law in developed countries is concerned, there was no previous exploitation or use of neem.

Indian farmers, who decided not to patent their own natural products, are now seeing foreigners claim control of these extraction processes and products. These people fear that they are being excluded from the benefits of their own products. They should not have to pay royalties to a foreign company for something they have always enjoyed.

Not surprisingly, Indians have begun to fight back. There have been court battles contesting the validity of some key

patents. For example a legal challenge by environmentalists from Europe and India was mounted in 1995 against a European patent issued to W. R. Grace on use of an extract of the neem tree as a fungicide.

.....

***Products from the tree
include treatments
for malaria, leprosy,
diabetes, ulcers,
skin disorders
and constipation!***

.....

After ten years of litigation, the European Patent Office upheld a decision to revoke this patent on the fungicidal product. Apparently the process was not really original after all. This is only one patent of many, but perhaps an important legal precedent has been established.

Another approach of the Indian government is to translate and publish an-

cient descriptions of traditional medical knowledge. A team in Delhi is compiling a 30 million page electronic encyclopedia based on ancient documents. The text, with the objective to stop people from claiming biological products as inventions which can be patented, will be published in five languages. Thus India yet hopes to allow her people to continue to benefit from natural riches like the products of the neem tree.

Conclusion

In all of this, few people perhaps reflect on how amazing the neem tree really is. Related to mahogany, this attractive evergreen tree produces chemical compounds that illustrate how poor our chemical expertise is compared to the synthesizing capabilities of this plant. Indeed the wonders of nature can only to serve to increase our awe at the amazing creation from which we all benefit. These wonders are something that should never be patented. The people of India are right on that score. Long may their free tree continue to be free!



Best of the Web

Top Ten

**We are now taking nominations for the best
Reformed websites on the Internet.**

**If you know of any contenders please send in the
web link and a few words as to why you think
this Reformed site is well worth checking out.**

You can nominate one site or even several.

**Send your nominations to
Top10@reformedperspective.ca**



Soup & Buns

No more excuses!

by Sharon L. Bratcher

There is a desire within me to get into better physical condition. But oh, the excuses! Among myself and family and friends, we have made them all:

I didn't go walking today because:

- a. I have too many other things to do (including 20 minutes on the phone or email griping to a friend about how I had no time to go for a walk).
- b. It's raining (and no doubt the five umbrellas in the bin are all broken).
- c. I need some new walking sneakers/clothes/walkman.
- d. I don't want to get all sweaty before I go to school.
- e. I'm too tired after a hard day at work/school.
- f. My leg/foot/stomach/head (name a part) hurts.
- g. I haven't had a turn on the computer all day.
- h. It's boring.
- i. Nobody will go walking with me.
- j. I think I'm getting a cold.

I admire the Nike advertisement that says, "Just do it." Sometimes it even inspires me.

There is a desire within me to talk with a person who said something that really made me angry. But oh, the excuses! Among myself and family and friends we have made them all:

I won't talk to her about it because:

- a. She's hard to talk to.
- b. She might get angry if I mention it.
- c. She should realize what she said wrong and initiate the conversation.
- d. She will ask why I didn't come to her sooner about this, and she'll make me feel bad for not doing so.

- e. Love overlooks a multitude of sins, so I should just overlook this. (But no, I'm not inviting her over anymore.)
- f. There's never a good time to bring it up (and she probably doesn't have a telephone).
- g. I'm probably just being too sensitive – she'll tell others I'm thin-skinned.
- h. It's just the way she is – no use trying to do anything about it.
- i. Last time I tried, it just made things worse.
- j. You don't have to be friends with everyone.

The Apostle Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:13b-15: "Live in peace with each other. . . encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else." It is not just a suggestion.

The amazing thing about excuses is that even when we know their true nature, we still let them validate our behavior. Every statement listed above *is* true. We repeat several of them and convince ourselves that we have good sound reasons for our behavior. It carries a lot of weight. But what we are really doing is avoiding righteous behavior.

We all like to think highly of ourselves and so we do not want to name what is really behind all of our excuses because it sounds too much like, well... sins. Pride. Fear. Hatred. Disobedience. Sloth. The definition of *rationalize* is: "to ascribe one's acts or opinions to causes that superficially seem reasonable and valid but that actually are unrelated to the true, possibly unconscious and often less creditable or agreeable causes. To invent plau-

sible explanations for acts, opinions, etc that are actually based on other causes." We rationalize.

We may repeat several of these excuses to ourselves, stroking our consciences and affirming their truth. We may repeat them to others, and when we hear their agreement, we become more solid in our stance. Christ tells us to go *past* the "truths" of the situation. He says, in effect, yes, that might be true, but I'm telling you to act *this* way instead, in my strength (Matthew 18).

God's Word is a two-edged sword that pierces and shows us our sin. Our desperately wicked hearts tell us, sometimes, that we are not sinful. And Jesus Christ came to show us a different way – a way of loving our enemies instead of gaining revenge. He and the Apostle Paul tell us to submit ourselves and to be servants to our fellow church members rather than masters of them.

God has placed a desire within all who love the Lord to do that which is right and best. If we do not rationalize the situation, then we will see it truthfully and we can learn to face facts. Then we can call upon the Lord for such attributes as courage, strength, and endurance and He will bless us with them as He has promised.

A "reality check" will erase our excuses.

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

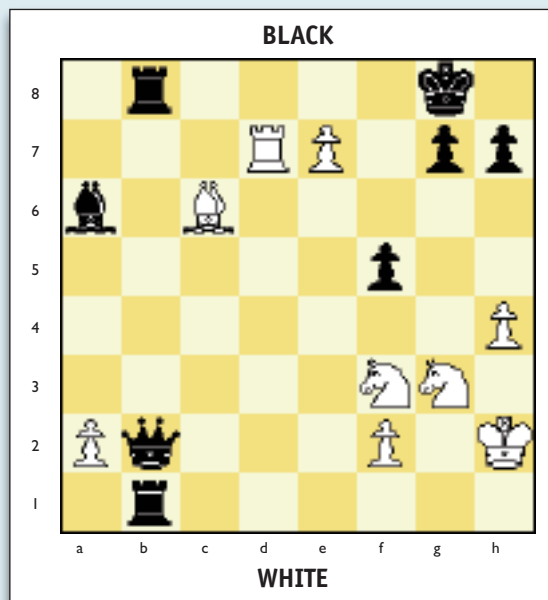
1 Peter 2:1-3



PUZZLE PAGE ENTICING ENIGMAS AND CEREBRAL CHALLENGES

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

Chess Puzzle # 138



WHITE to Mate in 3 (2 solutions)
Or, If it is BLACK's Move, **BLACK to Mate in 3**

NEW PUZZLES

Riddles for Punsters #138 – “Onerous Odours”

When using common _____ people will refrain from getting skunks
i n _____ e d . This is surely the _____ l e way to behave.

The skunks appreciate being shown some _____ i t y .

Problem to Ponder #138 – “The Grass Always Looks Greener on the Other Side of the Fence”

A rancher has 400 m of fencing that he will use to build a rectangular or square shaped grazing area.

- What is the largest area that he can enclose using all of the fencing?
- If a straight river is used for one side, what is the maximum area if all the fencing is used for the other three sides?
- If a straight ocean shore and a river (at a right angle to the shore) flowing into the ocean are used for two sides of the grazing area, what is the maximum fenced area possible?
- What is the maximum area if the fencing is very flexible and it is possible to make a circular fenced area?

SOLUTIONS TO THE PREVIOUS (OCTOBER) PUZZLE PAGE

Answer to Riddles for Punsters #137

If goldfish could play sports,
which sport would they feel most at home with?
b o w l i n g .

If horses could short firearms as a sport,
which gun would they prefer?
A **c o l t** revolver.



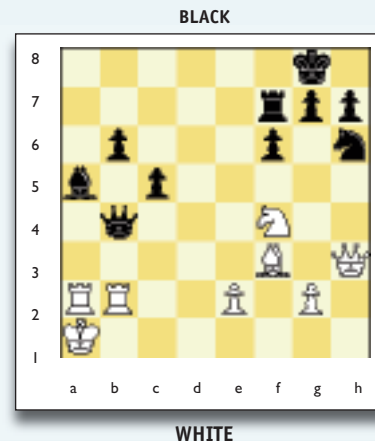
Answer to Problem to Ponder #137 – “Stewardly Spending”

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?

HINT: Do the opposite operations in opposite order to get back to the starting amount.

Note: spending 1/4 of the balance is like multiplying by 3/4 – the opposite will be dividing by 3/4, thus multiplying by 4/3
Thus, $1515 \times 4/3 = 2020$ then $2020 + 32 = 2052$
Next, removing 5% is like multiplying by 0.95 so to go backwards divide by 0.95 thus $2052/0.95 = 2160$ Similarly, next $2160/0.90 = 2400$
Therefore the original amount put into the account was **\$2400.00**

SOLUTION TO CHESS PUZZLE # 137



WHITE to Mate in 4 Descriptive Notation

1. Q-B8 ch R-B1
2. B-Q5 ch K-R1
3. QxR ch N-N1
4. QxN mate

OR, running to the corner

1. Q-B8 ch R-B1
2. B-Q5 ch K-R1
3. QxR ch N-N1
4. QxN mate

Algebraic Notation

1. Qh3-c8 + Rf7-f8
2. Bf3-d5 + Kg8-h8
3. Qc8xf8 + Nh6-g8
4. Qf8xg8 ++

OR, running to the corner

1. Qh3-c8 + Rf7-f8
2. Bf3-d5 + Kg8-h8
3. Qc8xf8 + Nh6-g8
4. Qf8xg8 ++

BLACK to Mate in 3 Descriptive Notation

1. ——— Q-K8 ch
2. R-N1 B-B6 ch
3. R-N2 R-R2 mate

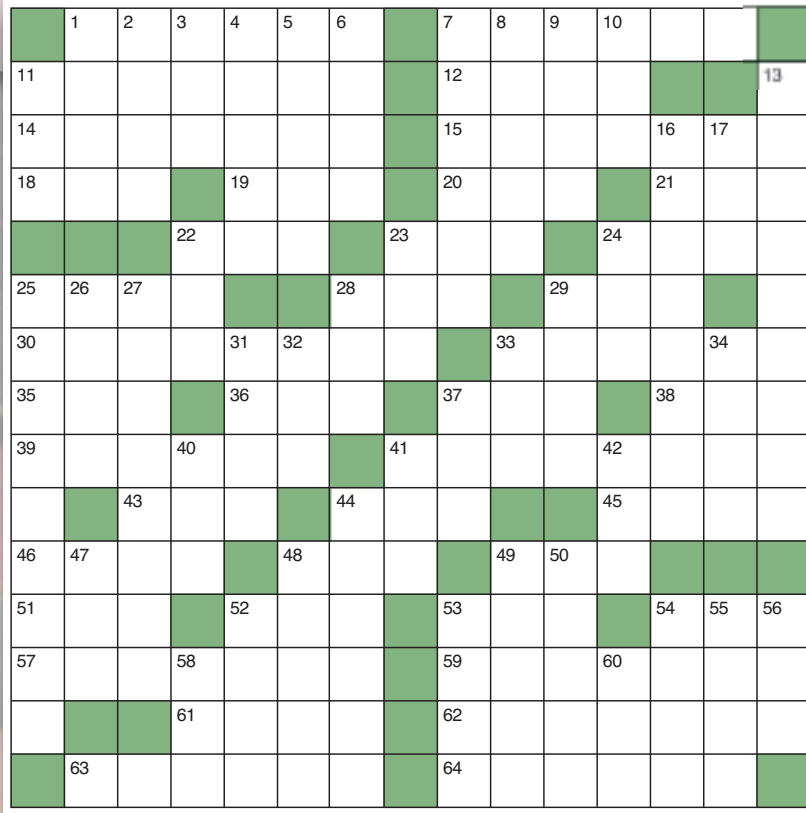
Algebraic Notation

1. ——— Qb4-e1 +
2. Rb2-b1 Ba5-c3 +
3. Ra2-b2 Rf7-a7 ++

Crossword Puzzle

Series 15 No 1

Last month's solution
Series 14 No 14



1	R	O	B	O	T	6	M	E	D	9	P	E	D	A	L
14	A	B	O	V	E	15	A	M	A	16	L	A	U	R	A
17	F	I	N	A	L	18	U	N	19	A	G	N	E	S	
	T	20	E	T	A	21	S	22	V	A	N	E			T
	24	A		E		25	R	I	V	E	R	26	R	A	C
29	A	R	T	30		31	R	I	O	32	R	E	T	34	S
36	T	R	I	O	37		E	N	E	38		39	A	S	L
41	T	I	G	R	E	42	S	S	43	C	O	M	M	A	N
45	A	V	E	R	T				46	R	A	M	47	A	N
48	R	E	R		49	A	P	E	50		R	A	Y	53	T
	54	S	S	T	55		E	A	R	T	H	57	S	D	
58	I			59	R	60	I	N	G	61	O	A	62	S	I
65	S	H	O	U	T	68	L	E	O	69		70	T	E	W
72	N	O	N	C	E	73	E	E	N	74	E	V	A	D	E
75	T	O	T	E	M	76	S	N	S	77	M	E	N	E	S

ACROSS:

1. One of the best countries in the world.
7. Garden pavilion
11. Decorate again
12. _____ Bator
14. Advance in rank
15. Work crew supervisors
18. Main Engine Start (abbr.)
19. Slang for a chest muscle
20. Small charge
21. Cereal grass
22. Magnetic tape recorder, for short
23. A foot or footlike part
24. Non-talking
25. Grand lady
28. Irresponsible fellow
29. Cooking utensil
30. Momentous
33. Walking very quietly
35. French neck
36. Boat pusher
37. Golf accessory
38. Austria (abbr.)
39. Existing in one since birth
41. Cartographer
43. Wrath
44. Spooky poet
45. Picnic spoilers
46. Eye part
48. Head covering
49. Cooking meas.
51. Over, to a poet
52. _____ Vegas
53. Farmyard sound
54. Body limb
57. Without any use
59. Canadian province
61. Poker term
62. These are used with pestles
63. Expires
64. Furtive

joyce

DOWN:

1. Bird beak part
2. Bible OT book
3. _____ de plume
4. Take as one's own
5. Prevent or discourage
6. A herring
7. Filled with air
8. Certain healing plants
9. Low-grade wood fibers from legs of sheep
10. A lonely number
11. Revs per minute
13. Hobbies
16. Big hill
17. Devour turkey
22. Grown boys
23. Good friend
24. Traveller's necessity
25. Type of tree with leaves that can fall
26. English river
27. Chef's frying term
28. Mongrel dog
29. Harbour sight
31. Carryall
32. Explosive device
33. Afternoon beverage
34. Eject or evict
37. Definite article
40. A constellation, a.k.a. The Altar
41. Policeman
42. Sink spout
44. Goes ahead of
47. Vessel (abbr.)
48. Social class in some countries
49. Eagle appendage
50. Sharp weapon
52. Camera part
53. Sudden loud noises
54. Asian alcoholic beverage
55. Rotary, for short
56. Mothers
58. Kid's seat of honour
60. Airport term