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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Christ-centred. Creative. Canadian.



Aerial view of an open pit mine in Le Mormont, Switzerland.

COAL AND THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Our collective calling to follow Jesus, even – especially – in a warming world.

Kyle Meyaard-Schaap

LARRY WAS THE LAST HOLDOUT. Years ago, the local coal company had purchased mineral rights from the inhabitants of Kayford mountain to blow it apart – to tap the coal seams and bleed the mountain of its precious payload. One by one, Larry's neighbours had sold their rights and moved – driven away in some cases by intimidation campaigns organised by the coal company itself. Larry's cabin had bullet holes from his decades-long fight.

Everyone in that area has ties to coal. "If you ask any of these kids what they want to do when they grow up," a teacher said, "each one of them will tell you the same thing: mine coal. It's all they know." Neighbours had stories about inoperable tumours – a reality for countless people downwind and downriver from mining operations in coal country. One pastor of a small local church sympathized with Larry's plight but saw it as the unfortunate yet necessary cost of business. "After all," the pastor told me, "God gave the coal to bless us. He wants us to use it!"

But the practice of mountaintop removal has the feeling of a drug user working harder and harder to get a fix. These last remaining coal seams are marginal. Before technology advanced to the point where they could be

Continued on page 2

FINDING THE FAKES

How AI is making it harder to tell the truth.

Meghan Kort

"COMPUTERS: ARE THEY CONQUERING OUR WORLD?"

THAT WAS THE TITLE of an article published in *Christian Courier (CC)* more than 40 years ago. "The possibilities for manipulation of people," columnist and labour expert Harry Antonides wrote in 1982, "by controlling and slanting information and news via the new systems of communication are staggering." He was right.

These days artificial intelligence (AI) software is able to create unique images, text and video with no more than a few prompting sentences. A chatbot engine called ChatGPT might be the most popular AI content creator at the moment, but there are many more available for free online. Some of the blog posts you're reading these days were generated by Jasper or SEO.ai. Some writers are using Quillbot to paraphrase quotes, or StoryLab to outline articles. Tweets that sound authentic might have been created by a program like TweetMe that reads a user's past one-liners and creates more of the same. The easily accessible un-human content creation tools are endless.

FAKE SCIENCE

The Eurasia Group, a U.S.-based

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COAL CONTINUED



iStock.

Most of Canada's coal is acquired through surface mining – either strip or open pit, like this mine in Alberta.

harvested, they would simply be left alone. Our collective addiction to fossil fuels has driven us to ever more extreme behaviour. And as with other addictions, the collateral damage of our singular drive to score is profound.

When I met Larry Gibson in Kayford, West Virginia in the spring of 2012, the consequences of our addiction to cheap coal were everywhere. Mountaintop removal had already scarred thousands of square miles of Appalachian landscape, displaced neighbours who had called now-buried Appalachian hollers home for generations, and poisoned countless neighbours living downstream.

CREATIVE RESISTANCE

In the Gospels, Jesus is asked, "What is the greatest commandment?" The question is dripping with cultural, social and political baggage. Jesus' questioner is essentially forcing him to take a side, guaranteeing that he will alienate at least one faction of his listeners.

It isn't hard to recognize the same kind of binary thinking at play in our own context today. Wherever we turn, we hear similar questions put to us when it comes to climate change. Which camp are you in? Skeptic or believer? Liberal or conservative?

Tragically, this kind of dualistic thinking seems just as prevalent in the church as anywhere else in society. An ingrained sense of moral certitude in a complicated world seems to be the inheritance for those of us who grew up in late-twentieth-century evangelical culture indelibly shaped by the religious right. Moral nuance was flattened into clear-cut answers of right and wrong. For some Christians, ambiguity is not merely a nuisance but a threat to a worldview that asserts that the Bible and its intentions are straightforward and that moral behaviour is self-evident.

That's why Jesus' answer to this question is such a gift. He refuses to take the bait. He refuses to accept the binary terms of the question and instead offers something that is at once simple and deeply profound: love God and love your neighbour. That's it. A radically faithful distillation of discipleship. Love God with everything you've got, and love your neighbour as if their present circumstance and future prospects were your own.

How refreshing it is for us as followers of Jesus living in a polarized age to see this kind of creative resistance from Jesus. When it comes to climate change (and any other pressing social, economic or political issue), we can feel enormous pressure to choose a side. There is pressure to flatten out the complexity and nuance of climate action by mashing it together with a whole host of other policy positions privileged by one political party or the other. Jesus' answer is a clarifying lens that frees our imaginations from the shackles of zero-sum politics and reminds us that love is our highest calling.

After all, how can we love our neighbours well if we remain silent in the face of circumstances that threaten their livelihoods and poison their bodies? How can we tell our brothers and sisters in Christ, "I believe you," when they describe ways that climate change is harming them and their families, and then do nothing to change their circumstances? The Bible has a word for the kind of faith that sees the suffering of its neighbours and does nothing to respond: dead (James 2:17).

EACH STORY IS A SACRAMENT

The people I met in West Virginia that spring complicated my perspective. My time with Larry and the stories of pre-teens losing their hair from chemotherapy had confirmed my belief. I had been ready for that.

What I hadn't been ready for was the pride with which people spoke about coal mining and their role in powering America. I hadn't been ready for the sparkle in the eyes of the school kids who spoke animatedly about the day they would be old enough to join their parents in the mines. My strident certitude about the immorality of fossil fuel had been chastened. It was complicated. People's lives were wrapped up in fossil fuel extraction, transportation and distribution. Human faces now swam across my vision when I considered concepts such as mountaintop removal, environmental justice and a just transition away from fossil fuels toward cleaner alternatives.

Yet as empathy began to soften my outlook, my moral clarity was being hardened. It is possible to honour the contributions that fossil fuels have made to North American prosperity and well-being without giving fossil fuels a free pass in perpetuity. We can recognize that coal has put food on millions of North American tables and poisoned the drinking water. Both can be true at the same time.

And, most importantly, underneath the partisan rancour, the esoteric legislative jargon and the impenetrable technological minutiae that make up the constellation of actions necessary to stave off climate catastrophe are people. Normal people. People who are living, breathing image-bearers of God doing their best to stay alive, to stay healthy, and to keep safe the ones they love.

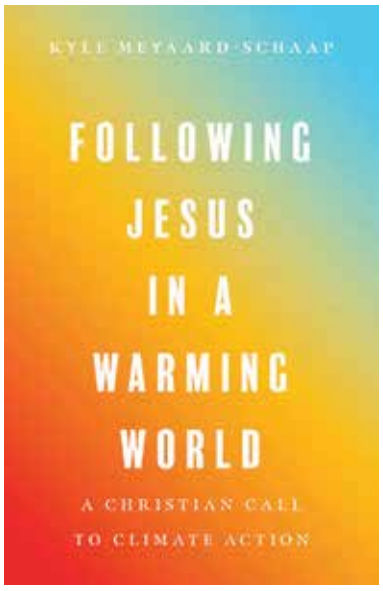
THE LENS OF LOVE

Larry Gibson died of a heart attack in 2012, mere months after our visit. He died with his beloved mountain still in desperate danger. And I can't help wondering: Could love have done more for Larry? If the creative, third-way love of Jesus were our ethical lens, I think Larry might have died differently. Rather than isolated and alone, he might have been assured that his fight for the mountain would carry on without him. Maybe the theology of the pastor I met would have been shaped less by the prevailing economic and political forces benefitting from the abuse of the land around him and more by a vision of love and protection for God's creation.

What if Christians in North America were a people who saw the created world not as inert raw material meant for nothing more than powering our industrial machines but as the Creator's masterpiece, shot through with the glory of God, with a destiny of its own in God's coming good future? What if we were formed to love God's world and to love the people who are harmed most by its degradation?

Then maybe local churches surrounding Larry's mountain would have protected him from the harassment he suffered. Maybe Christians across the continent would have known Larry's story and would have marched in the streets demanding a stop to the abuse. Maybe even today, years after Larry's death, Christians would be exerting persistent pressure on corporations to find alternative means of energy production that treat humans like Larry and the rest of creation with dignity and respect. Maybe we would be leading the charge to transform all of humanity's relationship to the created world by protecting endangered species, eliminating dangerous pollutants and stopping climate change in its tracks.

If the North American church had been formed by this kind of interpretation of Jesus' command to love God and our neighbours alike, maybe Larry could have died differently. He could have known that his kinship with a mountain was not an isolated relationship but was shared by Christians the world over in all their varied, wild and beautiful places.





Kyle Meyaard-Schaap

Kyle serves as the VP of the Evangelical Environmental Network and is ordained in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. His forthcoming book, Following Jesus in a Warming World: A Christian Call to Climate Action, *is set to be published by InterVarsity Press on February 21, 2023.*

Adapted from *Following Jesus in a Warming World* by Kyle Meyaard-Schaap. Copyright (c) 2023 by Kyle Meyaard-Schaap. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press. www.ivpress.com

AI CONTINUED

international business consulting group, lists artificial intelligence as one of the three biggest risks our world faces in 2023. Their report predicts that within the next year, programs like ChatGPT will be able to reliably pass the Turing test, meaning that humans won't be able to tell the difference between AI generated text and human writing.

These predictions are supported by a Northwestern University study released last month. In the experiment, scientists were asked to review abstracts for academic papers and determine which ones were written by AI and which were real. The study participants could only spot the fakes 68 percent of the time, partly because ChatGPT was very good at giving the correct fabricated sample sizes for each type of study. For instance a fake study on hypertension had a much bigger participant pool than a report on monkeypox, which is a rarer illness.

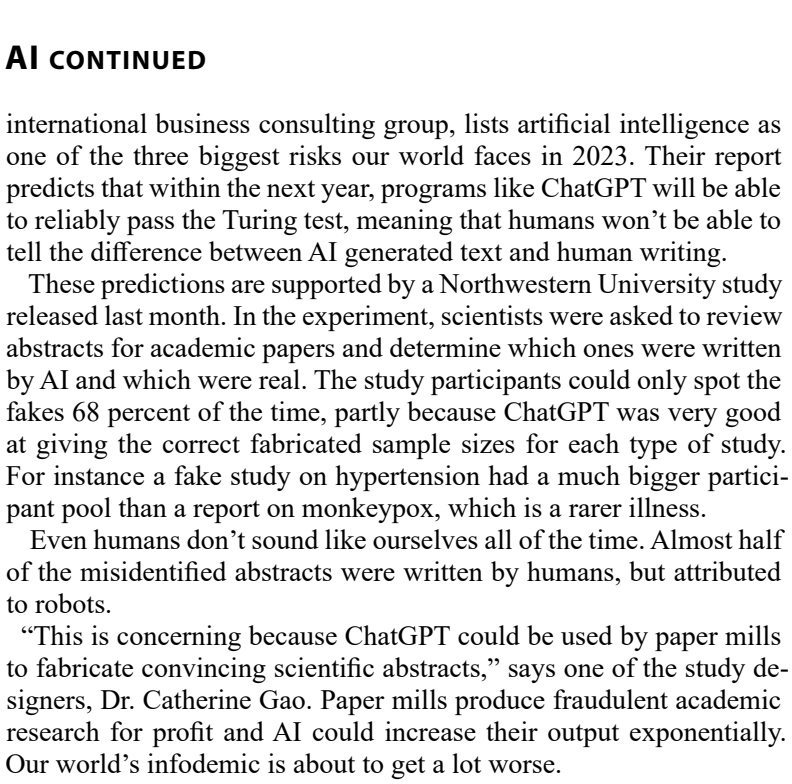
Even humans don't sound like ourselves all of the time. Almost half of the misidentified abstracts were written by humans, but attributed to robots.

"This is concerning because ChatGPT could be used by paper mills to fabricate convincing scientific abstracts," says one of the study designers, Dr. Catherine Gao. Paper mills produce fraudulent academic research for profit and AI could increase their output exponentially. Our world's infodemic is about to get a lot worse.

DEFINING INTELLIGENCE

To address these concerns, the study authors recommend that publication editors start using AI output detectors to weed out fabricated data. Even if humans can't find the fake, researchers noticed that free online programs like gptzero.me are able to catch AI-generated text without fail.

"There are already several systems designed to detect whether a passage was written by ChatGPT3," explains Allen Plug, a Canadian philosopher working in the AI industry. "The fact that these have appeared so quickly suggests that ChatGPT-produced-prose contains identifying features." For this reason, Plug says he doesn't think that ChatGPT passes the Turing Test. But he also says that we need to come up with a better way to determine whether or not an artificial system is actually intelligent.



Koichi Wakata, a Japanese engineer, with Nasa's Robonaut 2.



deanlong.io.

"Mimicking how a human would respond is different than demonstrating that the system actually understands," Plug told *CC*. "A good test of intelligence isn't that a system produced the same answer that a human would; rather, a good test would examine why and how the system arrived at that answer."

DIGITAL HALLUCINATIONS

Even though AI is better at detecting fraudulent articles than humans are, we're still the only ones who know what to do next. Programs like ChatGPT spit out absolutely incorrect information all the time, especially when we're asking for specific information that goes beyond the AI's training.

"It's not for everyone," explains Michael Krakowiak, a web developer who works for Citizens for Public Justice. "As long as you know what's missing or incorrect, ChatGPT can usually improve upon its answer."

For example, when asked to write a poem about Lionel Messi, ChatGPT strung together several beautiful verses about soccer and then slipped up referring to the Argentinian's "golden wrist." But with a quick human-made edit, swapping "wrist" for "foot," the poem was perfect.

Hallucinations like this are common in AI generated content, and Google knows it. Websites that churn our spammy AI generated content don't show up at the top of google searches and their traffic usually plummets.

GLARING ERRORS

But when well-established websites like CNET started relying on AI generated articles it's harder for Google to isolate and penalize the unreliable data. In November 2022, this popular tech and business platform started using AI to write dozens of articles.The fine print at the bottom of the robot-written text said: "This article was generated using automation technology and thoroughly edited and fact-checked by an editor on our editorial staff." But that didn't stop them from publishing a misleading article about how compound interest works. It's since been fixed after another publication called them out. Editor-in-Chief Connie Guglielmo published an explanation calling the platform's new use of AI an "experiment" with "pragmatic" motivations. Certainly more publications are going to start looking to AI as a solution to tight budgets and overworked writers.

As for *Christian Courier*, you can rest assured that this paper is still entirely human-written. We like writing too much to outsource it. But while we watch what's happening in our industry, we ponder the same things that Harry Antonides did more than 40 years ago: "The question is not whether the computer can be used for good. It obviously can. But what becomes man's role; what is the purpose of his life?" Gendered language aside, this is what we're still asking. Thank God for philosophers, web developers, engineers and educators who are asking these questions right along with us.



Michael Krakowiak.



Meghan Kort

Meghan is Assistant Editor of CC and lives in Terrace, BC.

Turn to page 8 for more Christian perspectives on new AI technologies.

THE ROBOTS ARE COMING



Meghan Kort | Assistant Editor

Meghan is Assistant Editor of CC and lives in Terrace, BC.

COULD YOU TELL IF THIS EDITORIAL WAS WRITTEN BY A ROBOT? I started asking this question in mid-December right around the time my husband, Jakob was spending his evenings talking to something (someone?) who wasn't human at all. He had discovered ChatGPT, a large language model developed by OpenAI, a company co-founded by Elon Musk.

"Have you seen this? This is going to change everything," he shouted across the living room. "We won't even need writers anymore!"

"Do you even know what I do for work?" I snapped back.

My curiosity eventually overcame my annoyance and I peered over Jakob's laptop screen. In the dialogue box was a prompt that went something like this: "Give me a biblically based argument for full inclusion of LGBTQ people in the church. Respond to common arguments and include Bible references." Unfolding below were five well-organized paragraphs presenting a logical argument as requested. Threading between clearly articulated points were words of empathy and pastoral care. There was far more detail, accuracy and compassion than I expected from a robot theologian. I was amazed. I was angry. I stomped up to my desk to try to write something with my regular old human brain.

AT CAPACITY

It turns out that ChatGPT can write almost anything: a shopping list, a functioning piece of code, a resignation letter, a theologically sound sermon, a friendly cover letter, a grade seven lesson plan on volcanoes, a university entrance essay. The options are endless, even if the AI's capacity is not. Just five days after launching at the end of November 2022, ChatGPT crashed under the weight of more than a million early adapters trying to use the website. Since then, almost every time I've tried to check it out, ChatGPT says it's "at capacity."

I'm sure these limits are frustrating for the people who've already incorporated this AI technology into their workflow. Jakob uses ChatGPT to write texts, emails and marketing material for his food delivery business. The text doesn't need to be award-winning; it just needs to be clear and personable. Neither Jakob nor the three others in his office are words people. So ChatGPT is a perfect solution for them.

RAISING THE BAR

As hard as it is for me to admit it, I think writing as a profession will never be the same. I know that teachers and professors are scrambling to find tools to weed out ChatGPT submissions this semester (and they do exist), but that might be short-sighted. I think in five years' time, educators will assume that students are using AI for grammar, sentence construction and even some research.

"The rudiments of writing will be considered a given," writes high school English teacher Erik Carter in *The Atlantic*. Carter thinks it might level the playing field a bit. Students who get good marks will be the ones who put in the time to work with their chosen AI to get a piece of work to a more creative and cohesive standard than we currently expect from students.

He imagines a world in which cover letters are unnecessary because



A free AI image generation made this graphic with the prompt of "At a Christmas party, each person reads a poem. Two people use ChatGPT to write their poems to general amazement."

writing won't tell us as much about people as it once did and somehow, that makes sense to me. Why should a skilled biologist miss out on a dream job just because their sentences are lackluster? Maybe HR departments will be forced to get more creative and ask for videos, portfolios and in-person assessments.

ROBOT COACHES

Employers are also going to be looking for employees who know how to train AI. The handful of times I've tossed writing prompts into ChatGPT, I give it one attempt before I throw up my hands with a satisfied, "ha, I could do better!" Meanwhile I've seen Jakob show great patience to his new robot writing assistant. When he asked ChatGPT to write a 6-stanza rhyming poem to pair with a Christmas gift, he worked through five rounds of revisions.

"Certainly, here is a more heartfelt version of the poem for your brother-in-law," replied ChatGPT.

When the gift-giving night arrived, we were all surprised to find out that not only had my brother and my husband drawn each other's names, but they'd both employed ChatGPT's assistance



TechCrunch, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Sam Altman, CEO of ChatGPT.

for their poetry.

Now you may be wondering why I still haven't shown you any actual text created by this new robot genius writer. Maybe that's because I'm terrified of it and can barely bring myself to launch the OpenAI landing page. Life is about to change for writing folk, for the better and for the worse. Christian author Hannah Anderson says ChatGPT signals the exit for a lot of mediocre writers. Who needs to pay content creators anymore? "AI will force us to up our game and avoid the formulaic," tweeted Anderson. "We'll have to ask, 'Could a computer have written this?' If the answer is yes, then back to the keyboard you go!"

I hope I passed the test.

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EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF
Editor: Angela Reitsma Bick
editor@christiancourier.ca
Assistant Editor: Meghan Kort
meghan@christiancourier.ca
Features Editor: Angela Reitsma Bick
features@christiancourier.ca
Reviews Editor: Brian Bork
reviews@christiancourier.ca
Contributing Editor: Michael Buma
mike@christiancourier.ca
Contributing Editor: Peter Schuurman
eternalstudent@sympatico.ca
Circulation: Sarah Smith
subs@christiancourier.ca
Ads & Admin: Heather Snippe
admin@christiancourier.ca
Art & Poetry: Maaike VanderMeer
maaike@christiancourier.ca
Digital Editor: Jenna Boone
jenna@christiancourier.ca
Layout and design: Kevin Tamming
design@christiancourier.ca
Layout and Ad design: Naomi Francois
collidemedia.ca

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DISAPPOINTED IN CARTOON CHOICE

Thank you for the beautiful paper, *Christian Courier*!

We have been subscribers for over 50 years! This is the first time I am complaining. I do love jokes, but the one of the wisemen is in my eyes distasteful (Dec. 12, 2022, page 23).

I have no understanding that anyone can make fun of the event of the wise men visiting! I like to evangelize, but anyone, who is not a believer, have any respect for this cartoon?

Adriana Vanden Dool

'MY' *CHRISTIAN COURIER*

Sounds possessive, doesn't it? "My" *Christian Courier*. But that's how it feels to me. I'm talking about the December 12, 2022 edition.

First, there's the page about Cathedral Grove by Angela herself. Why, that "belongs" to Port Alberni, the town on central Vancouver Island where I spent my immigrant teens during the 50s. We were so proud of that luscious ancient forest with its giant Douglas firs. There were more of them then than now. We all have the same picture, clinging like Lilliputians to the giant where it meets the ground – again just like Angela.

Then there's that page about "The Traveling Letter" by Didy Prinzen. Interesting how old letters from the past can form new relationships, even friendships between total strangers. How they can bring alive personal histories almost forgotten. During our 30-year missionary journey in Nigeria, Fran (my wife) and I wrote our parents on a weekly basis – Fran more than I, I must confess – which we asked them to save. We ended up with over 1,400 letters, those famous aerograms of previous generations.

These were recently published as a 470-page memoir called *Every Square Inch: A Nigeria Missionary Memoir* (available at SocialTheology.com). Those letters all ended up in the Heritage Hall of the Calvin University library. Didy's letter is in the hands of a family and deservedly so. If you or your family own a collection of historical letters that have connections with the Christian Reformed constituency, consider donating them to preserve those intimate histories.

Didy's letter has strong reference to the Indonesian war of independence from their Dutch colonizers. Strange that the Dutch had just been liberated from the Nazis but they were determined to retain "their" colony. I was 9 or 10 years old when Dutch veterans began returning from the Indonesian front. Every one of them was welcomed home to our village of Lutjegast in Groningen like a hero. When, at a concert, everyone sang the national anthem, I could not sing along. Deep down I knew something was wrong, though I was too young to verbalize it. Didy has vividly brought all this back to me.

Finally, there is Maaike VanderMeer's article "Net Zero Ethics." This one hit home for me even closer, for it includes a section and even pictures about Dr. Wiebe Boer, the new Calvin University President. He's our son! This is an honour we never expected. Calvin may not be the largest of universities, but it is a very prominent one within the ranks of Christian universities in the USA. Over the years it has veered away from its pietistic background to the more robust Kuyperian tradition, so that I have moved from critic to admirer. You can read much of my earlier reaction to Calvin in the pre-Nigeria portion of our online memoirs. Which parents would not be proud of such a distinguished son?

So, there you have it – "My" *CC*! I have seldom felt closer and more appreciative of *CC* as I do of this issue. As a B.C. resident I have often thought of *CC* as Ontarion, but this one has come close to home for me.

Jan H. Boer
Vancouver, B.C.



Curt Gesch's photo-to-the-Editor in response to "Highway in the Wilderness" by Tom Wolthuis (Jan. 9, 2023).

THE RAT RACE

I used my "mouse" to trace the rat race, trying to discover not only how to think but what we think, something that is so deeply ingrained in our Reformed theology (DNA) that it never fades away completely. "Human Neurons, Rat Brains," the interesting article by Rudy Eikelboom (Dec.12, 2022), raises an ethical question. When a defective part of one's body is replaced with animal parts, that may challenge our ethics. However when scientists are manipulating with ones "spiritual sanctuary of consciousness" – our awareness – then they are knocking on the door of our inner self that seeks union larger than itself.

George Lieuwen

CC FALL CAMPAIGN EXCEEDS GOAL . . . BY A *LOT*!



Board Chair Jim Dekker expresses his thanks.

WELL, WELL, WELL . . . you did it again. In our 2022 fall campaign, YOU folks – our dear and faithful readers – donated some $16,000 beyond our $35,000 goal to an incredible total of $51,000!

Last summer, *Christian Courier* staff and board waffled back and forth. "What shall we do about the annual end-of-year fund-rahes," we gulped and prayed (maybe even in that doubting order, btw).

We gulped, prayed and dared: "Let's set a goal of $35,000 and place that before our faithful community of readers." Donations rolled in slowly, but really took off in early December. Again you chipped in remarkably, your gifts alone coming in over $41,000. Add that to the $10,000 matching donation our generous donor offered this year, and you see you pushed the total beyond our ambitious target.

We can't say thank you enough. And, as always, thank you for the many notes and some phone calls that you made to let Angela or me to let us know that you keep reading *CC* with appreciation, if not always agreement. You say our scribes challenge you and sometimes make you smile. Your responses also affirm and encourage the efforts of *CC*'s grand staff and eight-person board scattered from Uganda to Abbotsford.

Keep reading, keep responding. Tell your friends, family and co-workers about this dear little 78-year-old rag trying to offer solid Reformed thought, opinion, reporting. With your help and good words, we pledge to keep persevering like the saints cheered on in The Canons of Dort (Fifth Main Point of Doctrine). Go ahead, read that hoary, deep Reformed confession, maybe for the first time in years or the first time ever. (Not kidding!)

With prayers of gratitude and for living under the shadow of God's wings in the vagaries of this and every year of our Lord, I am

Yours in Christ, on behalf of staff and board,



Jim Dekker | Board Chair

A GENERATIONAL PROJECT

Calling Canada's government to account.

Mike Hogeterp, Centre for Public Dialogue

LEAD TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION (TRC) Commissioner Murray Sinclair is known for speaking in memorable one-liners. Seven years after the TRC's release, two of these have stuck with me: "education got us into this mess and education will get us out" and "reconciliation is a generational project." Both of these zingers have inspired our long-term work in the CRC in Canada to advocate for the implementation of TRC Calls to Action seven, eight, nine and ten that focus on justice and equity in First Nation K-12 education.

When Parliament came back from its winter break on January 31, we communicated with legislators about the progress and challenges around achieving these four Calls to Action.

Generations of Indigenous communities have been calling for Indigenous leadership in education, community participation, provisions for culture and language learning, as well as stable and predictable funding.

In 2022, there was progress in the development of agreements that support education for-and-by Indigenous communities. Indigenous leadership for Indigenous education delivers excellent results in communities where these agreements are operating.

But there is more work to be done. In 2016, the government committed $2.6 billion to funding transformation in Indigenous education. But in 2018 the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General reported significant weaknesses in government information on the actual costs of First Nation education delivery and questioned the adequacy of funding for the fulfillment of Calls to Action seven and eight.

A key benchmark for Call to Action seven is Grade 12 graduation rates on reserve. The last three annual reports from Indigenous Services Canada, show that graduation rates are slipping – from 40.5 percent in 2018-19 to 36.8 percent in 2020-21. This compares to a national average of 84 percent in 2019-20 (Statistics Canada).

Education, in the context of residential schools, was a tool for oppression. It denied the dignity of Indigenous children and their families, resulting in intergenerational trauma. Only Indigenous leadership, justice and equity can right these wrongs. For this reason the Centre for Public Dialogue has been bearing witness to Indigenous perspectives on transformation in Education for the last decade and we will continue to do so in this coming session of Parliament.



DO NO HARM

A commitment to preserving human dignity in the church.

Amanda W. Benckhuysen, Safe Church advisor

I RECENTLY WALKED INTO a doctor's office where I saw a sign that read, "This is a place of healing – no forms of aggressive behavior will be tolerated." While I grieve the fact that the sign was needed, what impressed me was the clear recognition on the part of the medical establishment of why they exist, and the commitment to protect the integrity of this mission.

The church is not a doctor's office. It is a community made up of sinners in need of forgiveness, a place where people gather to hear the gospel preached, to grow in their life with Christ, and to join a community of faith in living out God's mission in the world. But church is also a place where people come seeking healing and wholeness. Beaten up and battered by the sin and evils of the world, people are drawn to church with the hopes of seeing Jesus and touching his cloak (Mk. 5:28). They seek Jesus' compassion and want to be seen, heard, loved and in some small way restored to what God created them to be.

Some people certainly experience the church this way, but too many others experience the church as a place of harm, a place where they have felt diminished, harassed, abused or invisible. According to one Barna study, nearly four out of ten non-churchgoing adults in America said they avoid churches because of past negative experiences. That number increases among populations who are not well represented in a congregation or church leadership – people of different ethnicities, races, abilities, sexual orientations and genders. These populations tend to be more vulnerable to harm because they are often not seen, heard, or understood. Too often their love for the community of faith and their desire to worship God is compromised by the harm they experience from racism, sexism and ableism in the church.

We all know that this is not the way it is supposed to be. One of the most fundamental testimonies in Scripture is that we are all created in the image of God and as such, endowed with dignity and worth. When we treat others badly, or when we allow misconduct to go unchecked, we scorn the image of God, which some theologians have noted is akin to scorning God himself.

It is precisely for this reason that the Christian Reformed Church has commissioned a Dignity Team to promote the value and dignity of all persons throughout the various assemblies of the denomination (local congregations, classes and Synod). The Dignity Team does this work primarily by addressing situations where a person or group of people, in their participation in the church, has experienced harm. The team then works to promote reconciliation, healing and restoration.

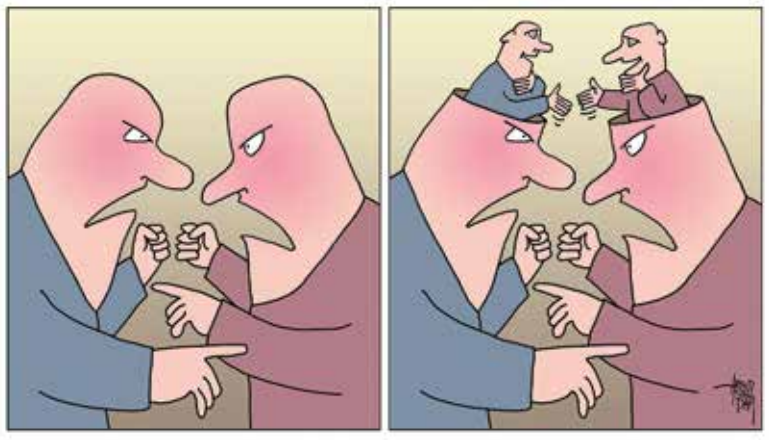
As a denomination, we want to do better. We want our churches to be places where people can worship God, grow in faith, and actively participate without experiencing aggressive behavior, discrimination or prejudice. We want our churches to be places where all people encounter the love, welcome and grace that God extends to us in Christ Jesus. May this be our prayer and our commitment for the year to come!

If you have experienced harm in the church, reach out to Safe Church at safechurchministry@crcna.org or the Dignity Team at dignityteam@crcna.org.

This page is made possible through a partnership with CRC Ministries within Canada.

NOW THAT WE KNOW WE DISAGREE

Peter Slofstra



IF ANYTHING HAS KEPT ME UP AT NIGHT in my life, it's unresolved conflict. Lying in bed after a strong disagreement, I find myself wondering how an innocent conversation turned into a stressful debate and then an argument. Have you had nights like that too? Especially lately?

The apostle Paul pictured this painful disagreement as a "dividing wall of hostility." Have you encountered this wall? Especially lately?

When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he dared to address the barrier that ran between two distinctly different groups – Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Gentile Christians. To Jewish believers in Christ, the laws were still important. Their lives were directed and shaped by the practice of male circumcision, ceremonial laws, dietary laws, sacrificial laws and a complex system of clean vs unclean.

To Gentile converts, Jewish believers were a mystery. Much like the mystery that early Dutch immigrant Christians were to Canadian Christians who wondered why these strict new immigrants from the Netherlands would not allow their families to bike, swim or shop on Sundays, not to mention the restrictions against so-called "worldly amusements" like dancing, playing cards, or going to movies. In Paul's day, Gentile believers were similarly baffled by all the rituals and rules that defined and shaped their fellow Jewish believers in Christ.

CURRENT CONFLICTS

In our day, the pandemic, the political climate and any number of polarizing issues have conspired together to build a painful sleep-robbing, shalom-stealing barrier between friends, families, neighbours and church members. We find ourselves thinking: "I can't believe that you accept that as fact and as truth." People are keeping their distance and even skipping out on special family gatherings and church services to avoid situations and conversations that only make things worse and keep them up at night.

Faced with a seemingly unbridgeable divide, we can choose to avoid each other. We can normalize insults and put downs. We can get used to empty chairs at family gatherings and missing persons in church services. Like the East Germans 60-some years ago, we can accept the idea of a wall and then make it grow, the way the Berlin Wall began with 50 kilometres of barbed wire in 1961 and then grew to 200 kilometres of impenetrable concrete walls four metres high over the next 20 years. To accomplish this, all we have to do is behave like water and oil, as people are inclined to do.

But I don't believe that anyone reading this article wants that. Despite our disagreements, I believe that all of us prefer, in Jesus' name, to tear down existing walls.

HOW CAN WE LIGHTEN THE LOAD?

There is lots of good advice for difficult conversations. For example: talk to, rather than about, the person with whom you disagree. Talk sooner than later rather than letting things fester. When things get tense, phone or talk face to face, instead of relying on texts and emails in which tone and content are often misunderstood. Enter a conversation with a desire to listen and understand the other person's reasons for believing and thinking as they do. Don't demonize, personalize!

But the best and most hopeful advice comes from the apostle Paul in his letter to the church of Ephesus. In it, he simply reminded the Jewish and Gentile recipients of his letter that, huge differences notwithstanding, they were no longer strangers and foreigners to each other but brothers and sisters in Christ. Where it really mattered, they were not two or three or four, but "one in Christ."

Apart from Christ, we will move . . . well . . . apart. But together with Christ, we can remain together. There is hope for unity and loving relationship wherever and whenever people remember that they and those with whom they disagree are "one in Christ."

To be in Christ is to know that we are sons and daughters and image bearers of God, and brothers and sisters who live by grace, not by works. This grace not only saves us but saves our relationships. To be in Christ is to graciously accept the other's otherness, including not only the other's perspective and culture, but the other's positions and perspectives.

Of course there is one caveat. Our acceptance is limited to what Jesus accepts. And we reject what Jesus rejects. Racism is not acceptable. Neither is sexism, homophobia, bullying, injustice, and everything that contributes to food and housing insecurity or harms our planet. In Christ we stand together against these things. I don't want to cheapen the grace of God by suggesting that we should just go along in order to get along. There are matters that really matter!



Wikimedia.

What Paul understood, however, is that the big issues that separated Jewish and Gentile believers lose their power to divide if and when they truly understood the power of Christ's sacrificial and unconditional love.

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

In my own life, one relationship in particular was threatened by the divisive issues that are causing so much separation and heartache today. It was a relationship that I could not stand to lose. Thankfully, that relationship is very good today.

My decision? After one more trying conversation, I decided that I could not and would not discuss these issues with that person anymore. I drew a line in the sand and it has proven to be a pleasant boundary. This boundary, like a good, well-enforced truce, is keeping our relationship safe.

My attitude? I realized that I needed to give this person the gift of respect. We agreed to respectfully disagree. Today we can smile about my tendency to lean left and this person's tendency to lean right.

With respect to the dividing issues and walls of hostility that are threatening our most important relationships, let's remember the grace and kindness of Christ and the gracious way those very different New Testament Christians were challenged to see each other as one in Christ. Let's remember that protecting a significant relationship is more important than debating and defending the opinions and viewpoints that all of us are more than welcome to hold as we graciously agree to disagree. Remembering these things, I suspect that we'll sleep better and enjoy life more.



Peter Slofstra

Peter is a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church. Check out his original songs, including one on this topic called "Water and Oil," at peterslofstra.com. And scan here for the song and an audio version of this article.



CHATGPT'S MISSING PIECE

Michael Krakowiak

CHATGPT AND SIMILAR AI SOFTWARE can potentially change how we work and help automate some tasks. I have noticed that these tools are helpful with "blank page paralysis." They can help us overcome overwhelm or even procrastination to some extent when beginning to work on a project. Of course, you need to know the topic you're asking the AI about to verify the information produced by it.

Whether the requested result is text content or code, it is helpful to be aware of the system's limitations. For example, ChatGPT heavily relies on probability systems and attempts to give the most likely correct answer. It has been trained on information available before 2022, so any new coding practices or changes to frameworks that happened in 2022 or this year will not be reflected in the answer. If you're asking ChatGPT to generate snippet of code for WordPress, for example, it may have to be checked for best coding practices, security issues and accessibility. It could provide plain wrong information, too.

I look forward to seeing what the future has in store for ChatGPT and other AI systems. I believe they will become increasingly popular tools to improve workflows for professionals. I remember when my mom worked in an accounting department in the 80s. I recall numerous folders of bookkeeping data on bookshelves in her office and a massive calculator on her desk. Now she works with specialized accounting software on her computer (or maybe even "in the cloud"). The bookshelves and the giant calculator are long gone, and she does more in less time. I am sure that AI systems will help us make a similar leap in how we work.

ARE WE SAVING LIVES OR SAVING MONEY?

Meghan Kort

ALLEN PLUG IS A CALVIN UNIVERSITY-TRAINED ONTOLOGIST working for Cycorp, a company that has developed an artificially intelligent hospital advisor. Plug knows how to talk to robots, or – to be more precise – he is an expert in semantic knowledge representation. He's also Canadian and has lived in Saskatchewan, B.C. and Ontario.

Do you think AI is making our lives better?

AI is really just a software system – a program. It's not inherently beneficial or detrimental. What matters is how we use it and how we alleviate any detrimental effects. So really the focus should be on policies and regulations. For example, AI requires and uses vast amounts of data, so we need to think carefully about privacy issues.

We also need to think about how we rely on AI judgements. When an AI determines that a person is not eligible for a mortgage, for example, I think such a person should have the right to challenge those results. We should be able to check if the system is relying on incorrect information or whether its basic principles are biased.

We also need to think about how to help people who work in professions that are likely to be replaced by AI systems. I suspect that certain office jobs, like accountants, are in more danger than skilled trades, such as plumbers.

Cycorp's main product is an AI hospital advisor. Is that about saving lives or mostly about saving money?

Well, both. Our product aims to improve patient throughput, so that when an ER doctor submits an admission order, that patient can be quickly moved to the appropriate unit. The program also tracks the anticipated discharge date and offers recommendations to help achieve it on time. This does save hospitals money and also allows them to see more patients. But it is also good for the patients, since staying beyond what is clinically necessary in a hospital is typically not a good experience.



Allen Plug.

The Cycorp website says "Cyc is very easy to teach and set up. It's like training a new employee." In our lifetimes, will we get used to thinking of AI as fellow employees?

People sometimes, I suspect, think of Star Trek's Data when they think of AI. But Data is still very much an element of science fiction. There are companies working on human-like androids that will contain AI software, but I doubt we will be tempted to think of them as fellow employees. They will be optimized to perform specific tasks and we will likely view them like we do robot vacuums – useful (and impressive) tools. But they will be too far from being human for us to truly be tempted to view them as fellow employees. Although we will certainly anthropomorphize them as we anthropomorphize everything!

IS CHRISTIANITY ABLEIST?

The danger of comparing spiritual understanding to physical abilities. | **Rhianna McGregor Hajzer**





iStock.

ABLEISM HAD LEFT ITS MARK ON MY DISABLED BODY long before I knew its name. As hard as I scrubbed, I couldn't rid myself from the sticky residue on my skin, or remove the thorn that pierced clear through to my bones. It was a part of me as much as Jesus was, but I had no awareness that the ableism that stung the most came from those who claimed to love Jesus, too.

The conservative Baptist church in which I grew up formed not only my Christian identity but also my disabled one. The two never came together: Jesus was only concerned with my heart. But the world around me cared about the body I moved through the world in, how well it functioned according to pre-set standards, and how every deficiency or flaw stacked against my odds of survival and having a "good life." The latter, I learned only in my 20s, was ableism – a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with disabilities. This puzzled me. Why hadn't I heard about ableism in church?

Throughout Scripture, disability often symbolizes spiritual inadequacy. Conditions like blindness and deafness are used to signify how humans cannot grasp the workings of God. This perpetuates the belief many hold that a lack of spiritual understanding is synonymous with physical failure, giving way to an ableist mindset within the Church. But is this Scripture's fault or our faulty interpretation? If "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (II Tim. 3:16), how do we reconcile the truth of the Word with texts that propagate ableist ideals?

'DISABLED' UNBELIEVERS

Disabled people have been marginalized within the walls of churches, and verses that paint disability as equal to spiritual inadequacy are a main part of the problem. Being blind or physically disabled in Scripture are used for two purposes: to promote the healing power of Jesus and as a representation of sinfulness. While Jesus makes it clear that sin is not the cause of the blind man's disability in John 9, other passages, like II Corinthians, use disability to emphasize the parts of being a Christian that are undesirable.

"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers," the apostle Paul says, "to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (II Cor. 4:4). In writing that God has "blinded" the minds of unbelievers, Paul is correlating physical disability with a spiritual inability to know or understand God and his Word; until one becomes a believer, they are "disabled." Disability now becomes synonymous with inferior spirituality, which propels the view that disabled people are not only physically inferior but spiritually as well. Using the language of disability to exemplify spiritual deficiencies is to make a mockery of disabled people and to further marginalize them within the Church. To say that one must "see God," "hear the Word," or "walk in his ways" alienates people who live with these disabilities and allows ableist beliefs to flourish.



Rhianna and her guide dog, a yellow lab.

Is this ableism or a lack of understanding about the context in which the Bible was written? I'd say both. Ableism as a social construct did not exist in Biblical times, and the authors of the Bible are not ableist. But the language they use is ableist because it demeans disability and equates it with a spiritual inferiority that is clearly unbiblical when taken with Jesus' ministry to all people regardless of any man-made division.

Scripture itself is not ableist, but Christianity, due to the faulty interpretations of Scripture by Christians, often is. This is why many disabled people feel isolated from the Church. When disabled people aren't a valued part of the body of Christ; when there's little to no representation of disability except within the realms of healing or pity; when disabilities are used as cautionary tales, it's little wonder then why there's a disconnect between the disabled community and the greater community of Christian believers.

LANGUAGE THAT UPLIFTS

It's why I've struggled to find my place in the Church, not knowing how my disabled body would be accepted or treated by my fellow Christians. In being told that someone who doesn't believe or is in a tough spot is "more blind" than I'll ever be, my blindness has become a metaphor and a secondary part of my identity, rather than an equal part that works together with my faith to glorify God.

How can we, as the Church, transform our thinking and actions to align with God's perception of all people as equal and beloved? I've found one guiding principle that works. We do this by seeing disabled people as Jesus did: people, flawed in their humanity but redeemable and worthy of the grace and salvation only found in him. In practical terms, it's not as complicated as it sounds: We simply need to believe in the value of disabled people and commit to using language that uplifts rather than tears down. Language has power, and while we do not need to erase any mention of disability or its challenges from our vocabulary, we must be mindful of how our language of disability reflects the image of God that is bestowed on all his children. Each one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made, and we can use that to glorify the Creator of all people, able-bodied and disabled.



Rhianna McGregor Hajzer

Rhianna is a disability blogger, accessibility enthusiast and guide dog mom with a caffeinated passion for disability equality in the Church. She lives in B.C. and blogs at Not Your Blind Writer.



GUITAR LESSONS
Written and directed by Aaron James
Extra Butter Pictures / Peace Country Films, 2022.

SWEET SONGS UNDER ALBERTA SKIES

Louisa Bruinsma

"Forget about Eddie Van Halen, forget about what the idiots on YouTube say. Learn your chords. Learn C, G and F – it all starts from there, the rest comes later."

MOST AMATEUR GUITAR PLAYERS will chuckle at this comment made by Ray Mitchell (played by Alberta country singer-songwriter Corb Lund) to his 15-year-old guitar student, Leland Parenteau (played by Kaden Noskiye) in *Guitar Lessons*. It's true: you can play a lot of songs if you know these chords. At the end of the movie, when Leland mastered the three chords, Ray says, "Then you're set for life. Johnny Cash forever."

Guitar Lessons is an independent, locally produced (High Level, Alberta) movie. Its success has by far exceeded the expectations of the low budget film – it even made it into the Cineplex Theatre local circuit. Most members of the cast are Indigenous, many with no previous acting experience. Yet the acting is real and plausible. In the words of producer Aaron James, "We play ourselves."

Corb Lund is not a name easily dismissed – at least not in Alberta. Recently he played a crucial activist role in advocating for stopping coal mining on the slopes of the eastern Rockies, an involvement that was instrumental in changing Alberta government policy. In this movie, he showed how well he could take on another effective role: that of actor. Despite his reputation, *Guitar Lessons* doesn't capitalize on Corb Lund's persona. He doesn't even sing in the movie. In a Q & A session after opening night in Edmonton, producer Aaron James mentioned the focus was not to be on Corb.

Leland is a Métis boy growing up neglected in a ramshackle trailer in a Métis settlement near High Level. Mom is not around. Dad has died but left Leland his guitar. One day he comes home to find his guitar missing. It is in the local pawn shop where his mother traded it in for cash for whatever fix she needed.

In one of the many panoramic shots featuring clear Alberta skies, Leland pushes the only items of value remaining in his home – a table and four chairs – along the dirt road to the pawn shop, to trade in for his guitar. But he needs a teacher, and he relentlessly pursues Ray Mitchell, a rich oilman with a previous life as a rock star, but who has no time for "this kid," and who isn't – in his own words – "exactly a straight arrow." What happens when he finally relents to giving lessons is a mellowing into a relationship of sweet and credible understanding and kindness. As Leland says, kindness "takes practice. Just like guitar lessons."

Be warned: there is some rough language, and some off-colour jokes – done in Cree, and translated with subtitles. There are some great lines, like "The funny thing about time, is you [white men], you have all the watches; but us Indians, we have all the time." Some slapstick-y scenes go on a bit long, but they are quite funny.

In one of the most moving scenes a member of the community desperately approaches an elder for help with his gambling addiction. The smudging scene that follows is profoundly spiritual. It reaches into the deep needs of this man and pulls him into a place of strength.

The incredible panoramic scenes of beauty in the movie go beyond being merely pretty. The Creator in indigenous spirituality is not an abstraction. Creation serves as a member of the cast.

Films dealing with Indigenous culture sometimes condescend toward the culture or romanticize it. *Guitar Lessons* does neither. It respects the people and their spirituality. You wish you could chat with this elder!

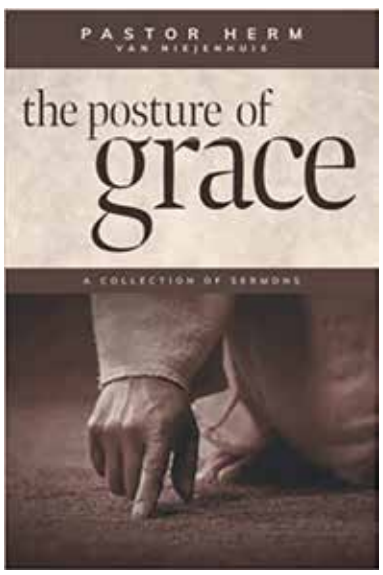
The ending tips towards being Hallmark-y. Ray and Leland eventually live the ideal father-son relationship – fun at the circus, shopping for cool clothes and fishing. The ending was a bit too easy, given their damaged and checkered pasts, but it does make for a good feeling story, and, just perhaps, dramatic changes can come, even to the most hardened and tough men.

There is a plan for Cineplex to release *Guitar Lessons* in all provinces on February 24th.



Louisa Bruinsma

Louisa is a retired high school English teacher teaching ESL in Edmonton, with students from all over the world who teach her so much about living, loving and learning.



THE POSTURE OF GRACE
Herm Van Niejenhuis
Floyd River Press, 2022.

A POETIC PREACHER

Ron Rupke

WHO WOULD DARE TO PUBLISH AND EXPECT TO SELL a collection of sermons in 2022, you might ask? The answer shows up on the title pages, where Van Niejenhuis is described as "a much beloved pastor at Covenant CRC Sioux Center, IA." by the volume editors James C. Schaap and Mary Dengler. The answer continues in the author's dedication, "With gratitude to the congregations that helped make me a pastor/preacher, and to my 'chief botherer ', James C. Schaap, without whom this collection would never have gotten off the ground."

The volume title is taken from the first sermon in this collection, telling the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery and brought to Jesus for judgement, from the Gospel of John. His message focused on the posture Jesus took when confronted by the accused and the accusers. Instead of rising from his teaching seat to pronounce judgement as expected, he goes down, to the place where the accused woman was looking, in effect, joining the accused in the dirt.

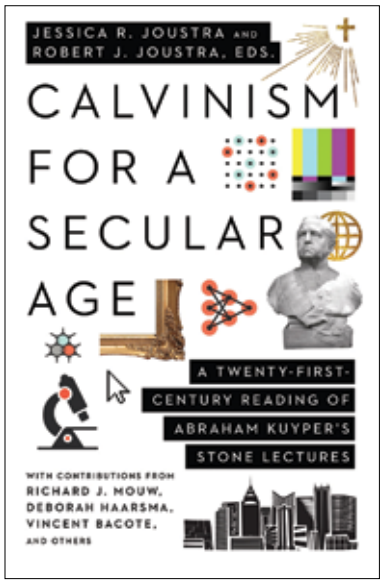
A Lenten series titled "Someone's Crying, Lord" touched hearts so deeply in an Iowa congregation that they were preached again to the Willowdale congregation in Toronto. A sermon titled "What's Right with the Church" preached at an evening service attended by a few hundred college students in 2004 addresses the scepticism of the millennial generation. A sermon on Proverbs 31, The Wife of Noble Character poem, must have had listeners laughing heartily before settling into the wonderful meditation on the Lord of Wisdom in its closing moments. And a funeral sermon for Dr. Russell Maatman deeply demonstrates a pastor's love for a departed parishioner, and the sure hope of new life for every believer.

For readers who still keep a physical library at home, there will be no problem finding a place for this volume. It will be right at home in the poetry section.



Ron Rupke

Ron lives in Presqu'Ile Provincial Park on the shore of Lake Ontario where he catches glimpses of the new heaven and the new earth.



CALVINISM FOR A SECULAR AGE
Jessica R. and Robert J. Joustra, editors; Intervarsity Press, 2022.

NEW LIFE FOR 120-YEAR-OLD WORDS

James Dekker

CONTEMPORARY HURRICANES OF ANGER, agnosticism and cynicism roar against the dreams of Abraham Kuyper, as presented in his 1898 Stone Lectures. Yet editors Jessica and Robert Joustra, spouses and professors at Redeemer University, hope their new volume *Calvinism for a Secular Age* can help reverse such opposition. Since no single Kuyperian practitioner could treat all six lectures, they gathered eight Reformed authorities in their respective disciplines, first tasking the writers to analyze the lectures' original impact. The authors took up that challenge and also suggested new Kuyperian melodies and harmonies for today's intellectual and political cacophony.

The first six essays pose the same three questions: What did Kuyper say? What did Kuyperians do? What should *we* do? Over the years rigorous critical scholarship and action in some Dutch-immigrant communities have made significant impact. These scholars aim to find concrete ways that this new "neo-Kuyperianism" might flourish today in North America.

THE ESSAYS ONE-BY-ONE

Historian James Bratt's preface first places Kuyper in 19th century Europe's intellectual climate. Before Kuyper's arrival in New Jersey, Charles Hodge, "long Princeton's foremost theologian, had asserted that no fundamentally new idea had ever been broached at the seminary." Kuyper challenged Hodge's dour judgment at Princeton and in several U.S. Dutch enclaves to "go back to the living root of the Calvinist plant . . . to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times" (p. xi).

In "Kuyper and Life-Systems" Richard Mouw finds that first lecture too polemical. Many Christians, feeling demeaned by Calvinists, have accused us of spiritual pride by insisting on our own rightness, while declaring others off-base. As well, Mouw renounces Kuyper's racism, which South African governments used to institutionalize apartheid.

Kuyper recognizes four systems offering foundational guidance for humanity: paganism, Islamism, Roman Catholicism and modernism. But none accepts "the supreme authority of the God of the Bible", nor God as distinct from creation. Because that church considered herself co-authoritative, Kuyper faults "Romanism" as flawed Christianity. Many over 50 raised in Calvinist communities recall antipathy toward Catholics. After all, they worshiped idols in churches, homes, schools, even on dashboards!

In "Kuyper and Religion" James Eglinton sees Calvinism as a solid foundation for social ethics, because religion "produces a blessing for man . . . but does not exist for man." Here Kuyper was responding to 19th century theology and philosophy that went off the historical rails by labelling faith a human construct.

God-centred faith is the only reliable source of personal and social ethics and thus is "soteriological." Because of "the lostness of humans and the cultures they produce" Calvinist churches' "center point must be entirely external to this world." Criticized for the endless splitting of Calvinist churches, Kuyper tolerated such contradictions, since uniformity in faith cannot be coerced. Regardless, such flaws still weaken Christianity's public witness.

SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

Jonathan Chaplin's "Kuyper and Politics" explains Kuyper's principle of "constitutional pluralism", that is, governments must be limited by institutions and individuals in order to develop true liberty and justice. Here "sphere sovereignties" ("personal, institutional, family and local") join for the commonweal and individual flourishing.

Astronomer Debra Haarsma's "Kuyper and Science" celebrates her discovery of "*integrating faith and learning*" as a scientist and Christian. Lamenting many Christians' rejection of science, she envisions cooperation between science and theology. Christ's "cosmological significance," witnessed in Colossians 1, John 1, and the Belgic Confession's "two books of creation," offers a bridge across faith boundaries for scientific and theological collaboration. Haarsma sees common grace as God's gift for such peace, potentially including such minefields as "evolutionary creation."

Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin digs into Kuyper's understanding of art, noting that Protestant churches have been deserts of graphic art. Kuyper posited that 17th century Dutch painters accurately reflected their different social classes, even connecting it to election. Their products "highlight God's impartiality by saving not only those of importance by human standards but, at least in principle, anyone." Chaplin later lauds Calvin Seerveld for advocating Kuyperian aesthetics in music and art.

Bruce Ashford began reading Kuyper while living in Russia, and "Kuyper and the Future" recalls his discussions with disbelieving Soviet colleagues. Living in Russia's oppression of theology and religion, Ashford woke up to the need of public theology for Russia. Later encountering North American academia's secularist denial of anything supernatural, Ashford sees neo-Kuperianism as a vehicle of partnership with non-Christian faiths. Again, sphere sovereignty provides cultural space to respect other faiths, while keeping church/mosque and government properly limited.

WAS KUYPER RACIST?

Vincent Bacote's "Kuyperianism and Race" looks closely at Kuyper's racism that still clouds his reputation. As does Richard Mouw, Bacote repudiates Kuyper's racial views. Yet he suggests a counterbalance, since Kuyper recognized that "we stand as equals before God and consequently equal man to man." Such a balancing act will be tricky, especially considering South Africans' painful memories of *apartheid*.

Jessica Joustra's concluding essay traces Kuyper's impact on American and Canadian Dutch immigrant communities during his post-lecture tour. As does Bruce Ashford earlier, she notes development of regional Kuyperian organizations, asserting that they live with greater influence in Canada than the U.S.

Significantly, 124 years after Kuyper's lectures, three foundational principles remain neo-Kuyperianism's lifeblood: God's sovereignty, integration of faith and life, and catholicity. Contemporary Kuyperian-based organizations keep developing within their respective contexts. While sovereignty and integration of faith and life show significant vitality, catholicity still founders among competing ideologies among Christians.

Calvinism illuminates the best of Kuyperianism, while challenging its tendency toward elitism and recognizing Kuyper's racism. Kudos to Intervarsity Press for encouraging catholicity by opening Kuyper to a wide Christian readership.



James Dekker

Jim first read Lectures on Calvinism 43 years ago. He believes he really understands them now.

Find a longer version of this review at christiancourier.ca.

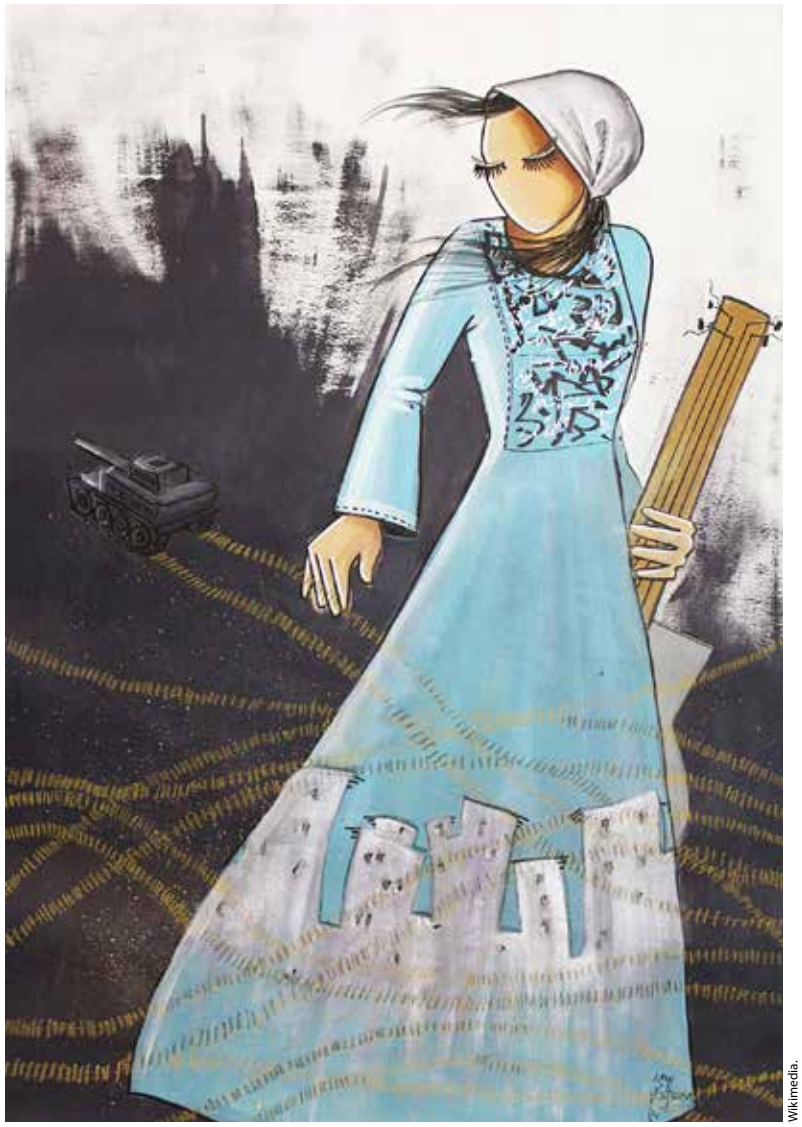
CAN ART CONQUER WAR?

From the streets of Kabul to Buckingham Palace, two artists are calling for empathy to end war. | **Maaike VanderMeer**

GIVEN SPRAY PAINT, A BROKEN WALL and 15 minutes, what would you say to the Taliban?

Ukraine erased Afghanistan from our news. Many people are entering 2023 weary of news of war and worried over inflation. Our lack of attention doesn't mean that atrocities stop. Ukrainian, Afghan, Yezidi, Rohingya and Nigerian individuals are still living the repercussions of yesterday's headlines. How do we bear sustained attention to victims of war when we are saturated with violent news?

Two women artists have an answer. At first glance these artists seem to be opposites. Shamsia Hassani chose street art; Hannah Rose Thomas chose sacred art. Thomas' canvases hang in places of power like Buckingham Palace, while Hassani's canvas of choice is abandoned walls on the side streets of Kabul. Thomas' portraits are of individual women who have shared their stories. The woman in Hassani's murals is abstracted, geometric, dressed in a bright blue burqa – the face of multitudes. Both artists made these choices intentionally. Both paint in the context of war and violence. Both command hope. And both wish to let their canvases sway policies and end war.



Wikimedia.

Hassani often puts the skyline of Kabul on the woman's dress. Prestige Series, New York.

RED: THE DAY KABUL FELL

Shamsia Hassani was born in Tehran in 1988 as an Afghan refugee. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, her family returned to Afghanistan. She wrote on Instagram about arriving in her homeland at age 16: "I did not have to hide my identity anymore. When I saw the map of Afghanistan, I thought to myself how good that this piece of earth is mine. How beautiful was the feeling of ownership." Kabul was opening up. Women were studying, cafes were opening, art was on the rise. Hassani pursued a BA and MA in visual arts. But there were rumblings of war. Once, an explosion went off a few metres away from Hassani. "I felt the hot flame next to my tent, my clothes and face were covered with pieces of flesh and blood. From that day on, my heart shakes with the smallest sounds."

Despite those moments, Hassani writes, Afghans held tight to their joy. Hassani went on to become an arts professor at Kabul University. In 2010, she participated in a graffiti workshop run by Combat Communications, an arts advocacy group. Graffiti reaches people who wouldn't enter a gallery, she later explained in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times*. "And at the same time, I can change the view of the city by covering bad memories of war."

For about 10 years, Hassani created a new work of graffiti every two to three months. She chose ownerless walls when possible. "I have to work fast," she said in 2016. The situation could turn ugly at any moment, giving Hassani 15 to 20 minutes to complete her painting. Often she couldn't complete a mural, and returned to find it painted over. She was afraid of explosions and of ugly attitudes towards a woman painting in public. Still, she persisted, and Kabul began to recognize her trademark style.

The iconic, often solitary woman in her murals is geometric and bright. "I want to change the shape of women," Hassani said in an interview with *Art Radar Journal*, years before the Taliban returned. "I am painting them larger than life. I want to say that people look at them differently now."

Hassani's woman wears a burqa, which is often red. "I wanted to show the secret beneath the burqa," she explained, "which is that there is a real person inside. It is red because the color is used to draw attention to important things in Afghanistan."

Afghan women barred from education face the grief of what could be, but also of what was. Women gained suffrage in Afghanistan in 1919, one year before the U.S. and one year after Canadian women. That lasted until the Taliban took control from 1996 to 2001, barring women from school, work, public spaces (unless chaperoned) and public speaking.

The woman is painted with



Wikimedia.

Prestige Series, New York.



A portrait of Nigerian, Rohingya and Yezidi women by Hannah Rose Thomas, used with permission.

closed eyes and no mouth, symbolizing these struggles. She almost always holds a musical instrument. "This musical instrument gives her power to speak in society," Hassani said in 2018. "Her eyes are closed because usually, she has nothing good around her to see, and she cannot see her future. However, it does not mean she cannot see." Some of Hassani's murals are filled with lidless eyes swarming the sightless woman, or forming her burqa.

On August 15, 2021, Kabul fell to the Taliban. For a second time, Hassani was required to flee her homeland as a refugee. Her Instagram followed the news, real time, in all its horrors.

July 20, 2021 – *The woman in a red burqa lifts her chin, holding a bouquet of dandelions behind her back as a tank rolls into town.* Dandelions symbolize wishes in Hassani's work.



Wikimedia.

Shamsia Hassani.

August 14 – *The woman has tears streaking down her cheeks, holding her pot with a solitary dandelion in the face of a Taliban soldier.* Hassani wrote, "Maybe it is because our wishes have grown in a black pot."

August 17 – *The woman is in a white burqa, barefoot, kneeling and covering her face with her hands. Her dandelion pot has been kicked by the boot of a Taliban soldier who looms large above her, his shadow swallowing the lower half of the painting. The white dandelion seeds are scattered on packed earth. Behind them is a barely visible city in a haze of red.* She titled it, 'Death to darkness.'

GOLD: PORTRAITS OF SURVIVORS

Where Hassani paints in red, a cultural colour of importance in Afghanistan, Hannah Rose Thomas compels viewers of another visual language. She works in gold.

Thomas has her MA from the Prince's School of Traditional Art in London where she specialized in early Renaissance egg tempera painting and gilding. In 2014, as an Arabic student in Jordan, Thomas turned refugee tents into canvases with Syrian refugees. In August of that year, ISIS abducted over 6,000 Yezidi women and children. Three years later, Thomas traveled to Northern Iraq. She taught Yezidi women who had escaped ISIS to paint their self-portraits. At the same time, they told their stories. The escaped women live in fear of what happened to their children at the hands of ISIS, whom were separated from them at abduction. Some of the women chose to paint themselves with tears of gold. Most of them chose to paint themselves in white robes, Yezidi traditional dress. Then they asked Thomas to paint their portraits. Thomas did, in Renaissance iconographic style. She kept the white robes and tears of gold.

In April 2018, Thomas organized an art project for Rohingya children on the Myanmar border. Thomas listened to the stories of Rohingya women and later painted their portraits in oil, chiaroscuro and sfumato techniques giving the sense of firelight, a recollection of the burning of their villages in Myanmar.

Later she traveled to Nigeria with Open Doors for an art workshop with survivors of violence by the Boko Haram and Fulani. Boko Haram has displaced millions in Nigeria since 2009 and abducted thousands of women; Fulani herdsmen use sexual violence to target farming communities. Charity, one of the participants, was held captive by Boko Haram for three years. When she finally reunited with her family in an IDP camp, her husband beat her and wouldn't recognize the baby Charity returned with. Because of the stigma of sexual violence, Charity faces daily abuse from her community. Aisha, who was raped by two Fulani herdsmen in the presence of her three children, said: "I want the whole world to know that I have pain. Women are going through a lot and they do not have anybody to speak out for them."

Thomas' paintings of Yezidi, Rohingya and Nigerian women are exhibited next to their self-portraits in places like UK Houses of Parliament, European and Scottish Parliaments, Lambeth Palace, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, and in an online exhibition, 'The Future is Unwritten: Artists for Tomorrow,' marking the UN's 70th Anniversary.

By hanging her art before the eyes of decision makers, Thomas aims to bring politics and humanitarian work together through the empathy created through art, to influence policy change.

"I chose the sacred imagery, painting techniques and gold leaf traditionally used for paintings of the Virgin Mary – the Mater Dolorosa, Mother of Sorrows – in the Renaissance. (Con't on p.14)



Hannah Rose Thomas presents her portraits at the International Peace Institute in New York.

This is because Mary, like these Yezidi, Rohingya and Nigerian women, knew what it means to be poor, oppressed, a refugee; and for her heart to be pierced with grief at the loss of her beloved Son," explained Thomas in an interview with Jonathan Evens. "The use of gold leaf is to show the sacred value of these women, in spite of all that they have suffered. It is symbolic of the restoration of dignity, especially important considering the stigma surrounding sexual violence." She painted the headdresses of Nigerian women in lapis lazuli blue, a precious pigment used for Renaissance paintings of the virgin Mary.

Thomas, who journeyed through her own teenage trauma by painting, has always seen the beauty of the world around her through art. Now she recognizes it in these women: "Seeing beauty in each and every individual is at the heart of my portrait practice. I'm in awe of the resilience of the human spirit, of what people can endure and their kindness, their grace, their goodness in the midst of such atrocity – this is nothing short of a miracle of grace."



Wikimedia.

'Once Upon a Time' painted by Hassani at Kabul University, 2016.



Hannah Rose Thomas with Nigerian women holding up their self-portraits.

THE HIGH COST OF ATTENTION

Both Thomas and Hassani pay a price for their art. Thomas, for ethical reasons, will not accept recompense for her portraits. In the slow process of iconography, Thomas sits again and again with the stories and faces of women who have suffered deeply. She does not turn away. In an interview with *Makers & Mystics*, Thomas explained that iconography starts with a dark layer. It builds into highlights and coloured layers, symbolizing the journey of the soul. "These sacred methods are a form of prayer for me, like a visual psalm. I can pour out my heart for these women."

Hassani's Kabul murals are literally erased by the Taliban now – paint and newly planted trees cover up her bold, geometric, hope-filled art. From the other side of the world she grieves her motherland. She hasn't stopped painting. She wrote of how she is cut off from her community that remained in Afghanistan. Those who left are scattered throughout the world. "My country and my art gave me an identity. The day Kabul fell, I could not believe it; my heart was on fire," she told the *Guardian*. "I used to believe that art is stronger than war, but now I realise that war is stronger, and everything we built over 20 years could be destroyed within minutes by its darkness. The reason I am still painting here is to help myself stay afloat and not sink in this darkness."

On the one-year anniversary of Kabul's fall Hassani shared another painting: the woman in blue clutches a keyboard, but almost all the keys have fallen to the ground. In December she wrote that the world watched women be denied the right to education. "Does it mean that the whole world is so weak?"

Both Hassani and Thomas grapple with atrocities larger than their art can contain, or cure, and yet they don't look away. "It takes more courage to keep your heart soft and gentle in the harshness of this world," said Thomas.



3D graffiti on Kabul's sidewalks by Hassani.

Art which is formed from contemplation creates the space to contemplate incomprehensible crimes, said Thomas on the *Makers & Mystics* podcast. "It's all too easy to turn away, to shut down, to choose not to see. The beauty of a painting of an individual, of a human story, is that it captures your attention, draws you in. I've been astonished by how many people have been moved to tears in these hallowed halls of power."

Art can gentle us into kinship with those who suffer violence. When Kabul fell, I followed Hassani's Instagram religiously. It was my only way to comprehend the magnitude of what was happening from the other side of the world. Since then, Hassani has expressed solidarity with the displaced people of Ukraine, the fate of Mahsa Amini, the targeting of Hazara women and the depression of migrants. Comments on her Instagram come in all languages, proving the empathy and connection created through her art.

As you follow the news, give your attention to prophets and artists like these. Like the women who walked the via dolorosa, who waited at the cross, who wrapped their dead Messiah in spices and waited at the opening of the tomb, these artists do not turn away. Their art declares that life is always stronger than death .



Maaike VanderMeer

Maaike is CC's Art & Development Manager, intrigued by the relationship between hope-filled journalism and the arts. You can follow her visual experiments on Instagram @maai_abrokentulip.

KITCHEN CHAOS



Heidi VanderSlikke | *hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com*

Heidi lives in Mapleton Township, Ont. Her life and writing centre on faith, family and farm life.



Before.



During.



After.

WHY DID I EVER AGREE TO KITCHEN CABINET refinishing in December? The little voice in my head practically screamed: *Just say 'No!' December is already busy enough*. True. But they happened to have an open week and the man promised our cabinets would be easily completed. Imagine – a beautiful, bright kitchen by Christmas! I hushed the banshee in my brain and sealed the deal.

The weekend before work was to begin I was recovering from the flu. I rested as much as possible and planned to get up early on Monday. I could unload drawers in an organized manner before the workers arrived. I solemnly warned Jack – no sleeping in and no lollygagging over coffee. "Got it," he said with a smile.

But someone forgot to set her alarm. I woke up two hours late and hit the ground running. I dumped kitchen junk into whatever containers were available and scrambled to find more boxes. By 9:00 a.m. I was sweating profusely, hoping I wouldn't end up in the ER. Half an hour later a message came – due to illness, they weren't coming that day. I surveyed my disaster area and let out a great wheezing laugh.

The boss assured me they could make up for lost time. Days later they removed my cupboard doors and drawer faces to refinish at their shop. I emptied the rest of the shelves and waited for their return with the portable paint booth. A week passed. More delays. My office looked like a yard sale had exploded. The kitchen resembled the deck of the *Black Pearl* – nothing but the skeletal remains of empty cupboards. Preparing meals was like playing a memory game – *where did I see that pot?*

At last they brought in the temporary plastic walls and started sanding. The fridge stood beside our table. The sink and stove were totally inaccessible. The living room became an obstacle course of shelving and equipment.

A congenial young man worked steadily for a few days. Above the roar of the compressor, something called "psychobilly" blared from behind the plastic. He explained it's a musical genre fusing punk with rockabilly and dealing lyrically with zombies, vampires and death, "but in a fun way." The project was almost complete when the blizzard hit on Friday before Christmas weekend. Shut. Down. Again.

Tuesday morning I received another call. The boss was taking the day off because it was his wife's birthday. I listened in stunned silence. I looked around at all my overtly Christian Christmas decorations amidst the disarray. The little voice said, *don't scream. It'll ruin your witness.* As calmly as I could, I insisted that somebody had better show up and get some work done.

As I write we're a full week into 2023. The cabinets look fabulous, although there are still some finishing touches required. (Any day now – I hope.) There's much to learn from all of this. For one thing, chaos won't actually kill you. But more importantly – NEVER ignore that little voice in your head!

BLACKBIRDS IN FEBRUARY



Katie Munnik | *katiemunnik@yahoo.ca*

Katie is an Ottawa writer living in Cardiff with her spouse and three growing children. You can also find Katie on twitter @messy_table.

THERE ARE THREE SMALL trees in my garden and none of them is large enough for a bird's nest, but whenever there is a flutter, I find I freeze and hope because February brings blackbird weather and blackbird song.

Growing up in Ontario, the first redwing blackbirds were an early sign of spring. I remember watching for them from the backseat on the way to Kingston to visit my grandmother. There – one, there – sitting on a fencepost, see that flash of bright red, that band of yellow. I'd shout and point and my younger brother complain I hadn't showed him in time, but there'd always be another one on another fencepost further up the road. In my garden now, the blackbirds are different; their plumage is all black, their beaks a bright yellow, but they sing, too, and their song is a bright ribbon in the spring air.

There is an old story about a blackbird and an Irish monk. I heard a storyteller share it once on a night of Celtic tales, and I read it again recently in a poetry collection by Seamus Heaney. He strides right in with a storyteller's flair. And then there was St Kevin and the blackbird.

COMMITTED TO PRAYER

Heaney shows us Kevin at prayer, with his arms outstretched, but the monk's cell is very small, and one arm stretches right out the window, open-palmed as always to thank the Creator for the day. Then, a flutter, a weight. The wiry scratch of a bird's feet on his palm, perhaps a twig. Who knows? Then feathers and moss, more twigs as the bird builds her nest and settles in. And Kevin stays still, committed to prayer.

In his poem, Heaney asks us to imagine what that was like. How did it feel? Did it hurt? Did the saint suffer? Or could he lose himself in the act of sheltering? Did body and mind pray together?

Kevin was a 7th century Irish hermit who founded a community at Glendalough, a valley in County Wicklow. He lived a simple, holy life, attuned to the natural world around him, a kind of Irish Francis of Assisi. This ancient story of the saint and the blackbird has reached down through the centuries, and I imagine different generations found their own depths in his simple, persevering act. As a hermit, he was seen as an eccentric, someone living against the grain of social life. Later, as a community leader, he was a figure of shelter and a model of strength. He was holy, a legend, an example, a saint.



Steve Smith.

But we all hold blackbirds. We live through our days with hands outstretched, cradling the living life of our prayers like small, feathered things. Their feet scratch. Our arms ache. We are surprised, awkward and willing all at once because we can sense there is life hidden there, fragile and protected. We learn to care. Sometimes, we find we shelter each other. We make soft, nesting places where others can rest. This, too, is prayer and a kind of discipleship. Faith is crafted day by day as we greet what comes with open hands and find the strength to offer shelter until the work is done and a moment comes for flight.

LOVING FOREVER



Sara Pot | *thepotfamily@gmail.com*

The Pot family story includes a life of caregiving for daughters Rachel and Janneke.

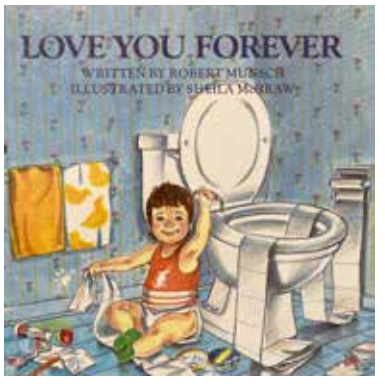
IT WAS A DAY WHEN Janneke was home from school, and from my office, I could hear her giggling in her room. I had positioned her in bed while I worked on some emails. I set up a playlist from well-known Canadian storyteller Robert Munsch on the iPad. That morning, his expressive voice and playful audio presentation were evidently bringing Janneke great delight. As I went over to observe her, I heard the beginning of a personal favourite, *Love You Forever*. I stood there, letting the words fill the room and watched Janneke, as she also listened to the chorus within the story:

I'll love you forever.
I'll like you for always.
As long as I'm living, my baby you'll be.

Seeing my disabled teen, lying in her bed and hearing Munsch eventually shift to a sillier tone with a new story, I reflected on how being a parent and caregiver has influenced my perspective of love and the idea of loving forever.

LOVE IN LESSONS

When I was a child, I believed love connected me to my parents. They cared for me, and told me they loved me. I didn't question that. Love between friends meant invitations to birthday parties, spots saved on the school bus and divided snacks at recess. This love was questioned often, due to the fickleness of childhood loyalties. Falling in love was an entirely different kind of feeling, one with both a sense of vulnerability but also excitement. And that has led me to be grateful to share life with Ralph and learn more



together about love as parents.

In being a parent and caregiver, I am learning the importance of letting go of what I had determined for my children. Though there is value in supporting children as they develop aspirations, it became painfully evident with the births of Rachel and Janneke, both born with developmental concerns, that my own expectations for my children were just that – mine and not theirs. Loving them would require (and still does) a new frame of reference. Furthermore, over time, our older two children also began to stretch and grow in their own ways.

THE COMPLEXITY OF LOVE

Loving children who can't reciprocate in familiar ways but never question your ability to show up at all hours of the night to change the bedclothes is wonderful and exhausting. Loving children who grow into amazing adults and invite us to explore the world with them is amazing and humbling.

Lately, I've leaned on Thomas Merton's words from his work *No Man Is an Island* (68). This particular quote continues to both motivate and subdue me:

The beginning of this love [of God] is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. If in loving them we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness to ourselves, then we do not love them: we only love the reflection of ourselves we find in them.



May we love, as we are Loved.

TAKING ACCOUNT



Brian Bork | *reviews@christiancourier.ca*

Brian is CC's Review Editor and a CRC chaplain at the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University.

IT'S NO MEAN FEAT, TELLING the truth about history. History is politicized, covering contested terrain. It's often told solely by the victors. It's often grim, and sifting through the bones and ashes isn't always the happiest endeavor. And it's often received with a kind of snooty modern superiority.

All that said, it's important to carry on going back to the past, because it's of utmost importance to know where we come from. The former history major in me takes that as axiomatic, anyway. In that spirit, I'd like to take some column inches here and commend to you my favourite podcast.

The Rest is History is hosted by Dominic Sandbrook and Tom Holland, two Oxbridge-educated Englishmen. Their friendship is palpable, which is half the delight of listening in. Over the past couple years, the podcast has built an impressive following, recently charting at #1 in the UK, with downloads in excess of 50 million. Sandbrook and Holland both have their areas of expertise; the former writing much about mid-century British history, and the latter covering the ancient world and the medieval era. The podcast itself – nearly 300 episodes thus far – covers a similarly vast terrain.

My first introduction was an episode examining whether the depiction of the Middle Ages in *Game of Thrones* was accurate (it is, according to Holland, rather not). Since then I've relished their short series on the fall of the USSR and the rise of Putin, speculations on the historical influence of the Beatles, the history of childbirth, the history of drink, and a delightful World Cup series which gave attention to the history of each country in the competition (the episode Switzerland: Calvin's Cancel Culture was great fun).

DEEP CHRISTIAN VALUES

Over Christmas the duo explored, in a two-episode series, the "history" and "mystery" of Jesus. I found much in those episodes that illuminated and opened up my understanding of Jesus and his surrounding circumstances. Some



of it raised my eyebrow, too – it's fascinating to see sacred and secular ways of telling history collide. As I say, contested terrain.



Twitter.

Sandbrook (left) and Holland, hosts of The Rest is History *podcast.*

On that score, the religious sensibility of the show is worth noting. Neither Holland nor Sandbrook are Christians, but Christianity often takes centre stage in the podcast, particularly when Holland is the raconteur. Holland's abiding thesis, across the episodes, is that Christianity is the very substrate of our culture, and so much of what we value – our understanding of the dignity of the human person, or understanding of justice, etc., etc. – is rooted in that fact. Smug moderns don't always tell the tale thus, so it's a gift to have Holland bring it to mind. Indeed, someone recently speculated on social media that through his insistence on this thesis, Holland may be – despite his unbelief and perhaps rather unwittingly – the most significant Christian evangelist of our time. A provocative idea. For that reason, and more, I heartily recommend *The Rest is History*.

PEOPLE-FIRST FEDERALISM



Kathy Vandergrift | *kathyvandergrift@rogers.com*

Kathy, a public policy analyst, brings experience in government, social justice work and a Master's Degree in Public Ethics to her reflections.

WHEN I MOVED FROM Edmonton to Ottawa in 1993 I made a promise that, whatever else I would do in Ottawa, I would try to help "Easterners" better understand the real Alberta – the one beyond the stereotypes of cowboys, large pick-ups and anti-Ottawa slogans. I promoted the can-do, community spirit of Edmonton, the rich multicultural and artistic festivals, the innovative and nature-loving initiatives – why I still miss Edmonton. These days the conversations are harder, in light of the Sovereignty Act, the Freedom Convoy, and what seem like deliberate distortions of how Canada works. That pains me.

It feels like the atmosphere before the 1995 Quebec referendum on national unity, when part of my job on parliament hill was countering distortions inside Quebec about the "rest of Canada." Experience has taught me that how we talk about each other matters during political tensions as much as during family fights.

In Canada it is easy to weaponize issues that involve federal-provincial relations for partisan political advantage and polarize the population against Ottawa, against Quebec, or against "the West." The harm done to real people is buried under reams of misinformation or missing information. One example is equalization, one of the current, contested public policies. Only a few people fully understand how it actually works. It has become a war about dollars, far from its intended purpose to ensure some equity in basic people services. That is a problem because it takes active civil society engagement to prevent destructive conflicts between power brokers.



Twitter.

Tim Houston, premier of N.S., discusses food security at a visit to Pictou Food Bank.

PEOPLE-FIRST FEDERALISM

What would happen if Canadians talked about federalism as a covenant between the peoples of Canada instead of just a power struggle between premiers and the Prime Minister? I think most Canadians would support the core objective of equalization, for example; most want other Canadians to have good opportunities to flourish, regardless of where they live. That is not how we talk about federalism and cost-sharing agreements right now.

We need a federalism that puts people first. We, the people, can insist on a stronger focus on outcomes for people than on dollar amounts. Children's health policy, one example I know well, is a constant blame game between provincial and federal governments. Meanwhile, Canada's children do worse than children in comparable countries, and where a child lives can pre-determine their future. There are tools to measure real outcomes for children across Canada, report them publicly, and use them as a basis for ensuring basic opportunities for all Canadian children. Other steps are much higher transparency, practical means for on-going public accountability to citizens between elections, and practical ways for civil society groups to be active participants in policy decisions made between elections. Given the current intentional polarization by our political leaders, it is dangerous to leave the future of our Canadian covenant to wars between strong personalities.

Am I dreaming in technicolor? Today it feels like it, partly because there are so few civil society networks that connect people who care about the state of our common well-being across Canada. That could change quickly; it has in the past when our future was threatened. I hope that faith-based communities across Canada will be active players in fostering a more covenantal approach to how we provide the conditions for human flourishing across Canada.

LIFE IN TRANSLATION



Roland De Vries | *rdevries@pcmtl.ca*

Roland is Principal of The Presbyterian College in Montreal where he also teaches.

FOR TWO WEEKS this past Fall, I lived my life in translation. This was not my first time in Taiwan, but from the moment I landed in Taipei I was aware that most of my encounters and experiences involved mediation. Often this was through the kind and gracious work of translators – those who worked hard to put into English the concepts and words and feelings of those speaking to me in Indigenous languages, Taiwanese or Mandarin. In many situations I also, invariably, tried to bridge the distance to this new world by reference to what I have known in my own context. At the centre of my time in Taiwan was a three-day pastors' conference at Yu-Shan Seminary. I was there to share on the themes of forgiveness and reconciliation. We may be tempted to think there is a universal definition and experience of forgiveness, but that is not the case. Family relationships and friendships are inhabited differently across various cultures. This means that we also have different understandings of harm in such relationships and about possible paths to restoration. When a young pastor asked how to respond to situations of persistent hostility or disagreement in his congregation, our differing cultural locations meant that my answer could only be tentative. I offered thoughts about what it means to maintain a posture of openness to others in such situations, even if we remain at a distance from them. I don't know exactly how my words were received by him or how he imagined them in relation to his own church context and relationships.

GOOD AND SLOW WORK

Translation is never simply a technical matter. It is not a matter of knowing which word or concept in English corresponds to which word or concept in Mandarin, for example. Translation is more about discerning what is lost if we establish a too-hasty equivalency between specific ideas, words or concepts in different languages. For this reason, I approached my brief time at Yu-Shan in a broadly dialogical way. I assumed that moments of exchange between participants and myself would allow us to refine our understanding of each other and the words we shared. And again, all of this could only happen with the support of wise and careful translators. As you can imagine, there is a great deal of trust that goes into such encounters – a trust that runs in all kinds of directions. Trust that I have some experience and awareness of forgiveness. Trust that I am communicating my own thoughts clearly. Trust that translators are passing my ideas on carefully. Trust that I am understanding something that is being passed back to me through the translator. Trust that the Holy Spirit is present to bless this sharing. Trust is a hard thing. In the case of my time in Taiwan, however, this trust was underwritten, or strengthened, by hospitality – by conversation over shared meals and during walks together. I acknowledge that even in such experiences there was some element of uncertainty; an awareness I might be missing something in translation. But there is nothing quite like shared laughter to provide an assurance that we really can do this good and slow work of understanding and learning together.



Roland with Professor Changhua Lin (translator) and his wife Amo (MDiv student) in Taiwan.

HOW I FELL IN LOVE WITH LITURGY



Savannah Shustack | *guest columnist*

Savannah Shustack is a second-year English student studying at Calvin University and has been attending Shawnee Park CRC in Grand Rapids, MI.

I DON'T LIKE TO apologize. Apologizing means taking responsibility for something you have done wrong, which is never fun. Over time, I have realized it is a necessary part of living as a sinful being in a fallen world, but when I was younger, my mom had to force me to apologize. I protested that "I don't feel sorry, so why should I say I am?" This battle of wills always ended in a victory for my mother, and I always sullenly muttered "I'm sorry" to the sibling I'd wronged. I rarely meant it.

While I now apologize of my own free will (usually) without sulking, the slight hypocritical feeling born of saying something that doesn't feel true lingers, particularly in my faith life. Should I say something that is right to say, even if I don't feel it in the moment? How can I say that I believe something, even when I don't feel it is true?

My mom made me apologize because she knew I was in the wrong; she was showing me the right response, giving me the correct script. It's like the script we follow during the time of confession at the Christian Reformed Church I attend in Grand Rapids. Initially, this kind of communal prayer was foreign to me. I grew up in a non-denominational New England church that very rarely used any kind of liturgy or had congregational participation. I was taught that the most genuine form of prayer was a personal, original one.

ALIGNING MY HEART

This may be because my home state of Massachusetts is one of the least religious U.S. states. In that context, churches tend to be seeker friendly; services where everyone knows the words to a liturgy might feel alienating. It took me almost an entire semester to get used to saying "Thanks be to God" after a Scripture reading! Yet even though the style of worship was a bit weird for me at first, I realized that it was exactly what I needed in this season of college. The busy-ness, the



Lightstock.

uncertainty, the lack of feeling God's presence: these all contributed to a kind of apathy. But when I didn't have the personal strength or ability to draw close to God, saying the words given to me by generations of other Christians helped me to align my heart in a way that I would be unable to do on my own.

Liturgy became a tool for when I don't feel as if something is right or true. When I don't feel like God has my back; when I don't feel forgiven; when I don't feel as if God cares about me, and when I feel like justifying all the things I've done instead of repenting of them, liturgy helps me to still say things that are true, right and powerful.

"*Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.*" Can having a script lead to complacency? Yes. But I still think liturgy is a beautiful way to worship; it conveys to me the unity and the catholicity of the church. When I am in church, I recite true things about God and myself together with my community, the communities that came before, and the communities that will come after.

SEX AND MONEY



Bob Bruinsma | *bruinsmabob@gmail.com*

Bob is a retired Professor of Education living in Edmonton.

I HAVE PURPOSELY not written a column expressing my opinion on the 2022 Christian Reformed Synod's Human Sexuality Report, and specifically not about the report's recommendations concerning same sex relations. My reason is that, from the outset, I judged the entire process to be ingenuous. Handcuffing the committee members with a mandate that forced it to consider the CRC's 1973 stance on homosexuality as normative, meant that it could only come to one conclusion: homosexual practice is a sin. Why bother with a lengthy study that already has a predetermined conclusion? It's like having a murder trial where the judge and jury have already decided that the accused is guilty before the trial starts.

WORD STATISTICS

I did research what the Bible has to say about sex and money. While quantity does not necessarily trump quality, it is interesting that there are reportedly about 2,300 verses in the Scriptures about the dangers of wealth compared to only about 100 that speak out against sexual impropriety, only 5 of which address homosexuality (although that word itself is nowhere to be found in the original Hebrew and Greek in which the Bible is written). In the New Testament, Jesus spoke about money in 15 percent of his teaching, and in 11 of 39 recorded parables.

SYNODICAL SILENCE

The thrust of the Bible's concern with money is that it is the pre-



Jeepers Media.

eminent idol of all cultures. The pursuit of wealth is the greatest detriment to seeking first the Kingdom of God. As Jesus said, "You cannot serve both God and wealth" (Matt. 6:24). Now, it's easy to believe that the pursuit of wealth is only the preoccupation of the super-rich of the world like Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Tesla's Elon Musk, Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and the like. But stop and think for a moment about how much time you and I, and most middle-class readers of this fine newspaper, devote to money matters compared to almost any other endeavor with which we are engaged. How often do we check our bank balance, RRSPs and other investments, interest rates, sales flyers, travel deals and mortgage rates, compared with how often we pray, read the Bible, look for ways to serve our neighbours, or reduce our carbon footprint? How often do we have serious conversations about what constitutes economic sin in our lives as compared to sexual sins in the lives of others?

I would love to see a synodical study committee made up of a diverse selection of both lay and expert persons do a serious 3-year Biblical study of economics with a view to providing pastoral guidance to the church on a host of economic practices such as wealth accumulation, investing, charitable giving, economic slavery, environmental stewardship, resource extraction and support for capitalism or socialism, just to mention a few. However, I'm not holding my breath to witness such a synodical committee at work. As my dear wife says, "We CRC folk don't much like talking about our sex lives or our money. Especially not about our money." Too bad.

With 2,300 texts on money to choose from, it's difficult to select a few for a short column, but here are a few that readers may want to check out: Deut.8 10-14; Proverbs 11:28; Mark 6:24; Mark 10:23; Matt. 6:24; Matt. 13:22; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim. 6:8-9.

BEWARE THE CHICKADEE



Curt Gesch | *cgesch63@gmail.com*

The Gesches' neighbours (who haven't moved) love their unconventional gardens. The Gesches' clothes dryer is loud enough to drown out the sounds of livestock.

ALBERT AND MARJORIE bought a house in a subdivision and perhaps didn't read the fine print. Their small back yard was shaded, so they made very neat gardening beds in the front yard to grow their organic vegetables. Neighbours complained, citing a subdivision ordinance that front yards must have x-amount of lawn and the rest be ornamentals or plastic covered mounds with reddish bark mulch.

Solution? Albert and Marjorie left many of the vegetables and planted flowers in between them. (If we can have blended families, why not blended gardens?)

I'm not one to suggest breaking laws or public acts of rebellion. Nor to alienating your neighbours.

But. Sometimes it seems that rules are too particular.

HOW TO BEND RULES

Are you getting complaints about having visible compost boxes? "They draw rats!" Solution? Build a fence so the neighbours can't see the offending compost box. Make it properly and you won't have rats. In case mice show up, use traps. If you are squeamish about killing mice caught in a live trap, surreptitiously release the mice in the nearest park or Walmart foyer, with a supply of food, of course, gleaned from discarded snack boxes and a neat, bright plastic non-recyclable little mouse-house, which you can buy in any Walmart.

Not allowed to shoot a gun in town to control those pesky squirrels eating buds, bulbs and your attic? (Hopefully your fence is already up to obstruct the neighbours' sight lines.) Buy the appropriate-sized live trap and give swimming lessons. Eat the squirrel.



The Gesches' unconventional gardens blend flowers with vegetables.

No pigeons allowed in town? First, ask your bylaw officer to eliminate pigeons in parks, overpasses and tall office buildings. Then get pigeons that can barely fly – Modenas or Giant Homers – and keep them in a tiny shed with an outside, covered cage. If the cooing gets too loud, start your gas-powered lawn mower and let it idle. Or just run the weed-eater as if it were a normal Sunday morning.

What if you want to improve your yard's bird habitat, but you wouldn't get away with a brush pile? Try a beautiful sculpture made of irregularly-stacked pieces of wood, brick and stone with rock garden plants on it. A plaque with the artist's name on it should be included along with the suggested retail price. (I've found that French, Spanish and Slavic names resound the best in skeptical neighbours' minds.)

For subdivisions that don't allow outdoor clotheslines? Don't wash your clothes for a month and then invite the neighbours for tea in a very neat, very small, poorly ventilated breakfast nook or den.

For general deterrence of neighbours try signs no one could object to. BEWARE THE CHICKADEE. THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD. A FOR SALE sign with price $185,000 higher than market value on it.

CLEAN FUSION?



Rudy Eikelboom | *reikelboom@wlu.ca*

Rudy, who as a child wanted to build a small nuclear reactor in the back of his bedroom, is a retired psychology professor.

IN MID-DECEMBER, SCIENTISTS for the first time reported a successful nuclear fusion experiment that produced more energy than made it happen. A friend who is a physics professor at the University of Waterloo was bubbling with excitement when he shared its implications with me. Ever since I was in high school, about 60 years ago, I have heard about the promise of fusion energy as a clean and potentially abundant source of energy that could end our dependence on fossil fuels.

Fusion, in theory, is a simple idea. Two light hydrogen atoms are fused into a larger helium atom, releasing energy. Unlike nuclear fission (the process used in our current nuclear power plants) where a large atom is split into two, with fusion no radioactive by-products are produced, making it a much cleaner energy source. The difficulty, however, is in the details.

THE LONG ROAD AHEAD

Getting two hydrogen atoms to fuse takes a lot of heat and pressure, which is the initial energy input needed. Until now, all fusion experiments required more energy going in than was generated by the resulting fusion. This recent experiment is exciting to scientists and engineers because it proves that, in principle, fusion has energy-producing potential. But while the energy going in (2.05 megajoules) was less than the energy produced (3.15 MJ), these numbers were dwarfed by the energy required to set up and run the experiment (322 MJ). This is only a tiny step toward fusion technology becoming a day-to-day reality. Engineers need to do much more work to make fusion a viable energy source.

Fusion also faces a fuel problem. 99.98% of hydrogen has one proton and no neutrons in its nucleus and is unsuitable for fusion. Two rare hydrogen isotopes are needed. Deuterium, which has a single proton and one neutron, is reasonably common and can be found in heavy water. It is used in Canadian CANDU fission reactors, which converts a minuscule amount of the deuterium into tritium. This process is one of the few sources of tritium, an isotope with a single proton and two neutrons. Tritium is necessary for fusion. Currently, one gram of tritium costs about $400,000 and there is only a small supply, made mainly in our CANDU reactors. This fuel-availability problem may limit fusion power.

These realities have led everyone to recognize that while fusion may have great potential, it will be a long time before we are able to fully harness it. In the meantime, the reality of climate change, due to the increasing amounts of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, can be seen in our more extreme weather events. Fusion may someday become a common clean energy source, but that will not happen quickly enough to prevent further increases in carbon dioxide if we do not change our current energy use. As Christians who realize that we are only stewards of God's earth, we need to be at the forefront of efforts to reduce our carbon use. Fusion may happen, but it is not a solution to our current climate problems.



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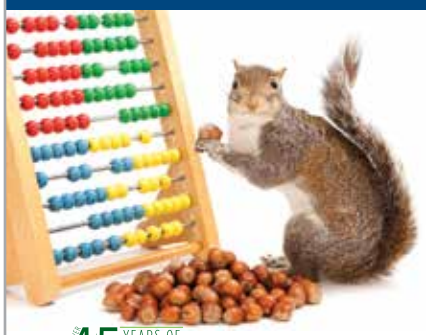
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A WINNING RESPONSE

When we published "Redeeming Waste: Art From Everest" at the end of last year, we asked our readers to share stories about reclaiming and repurposing things that other people throw away. One of these responses was randomly selected to win a one-year subscription. Congrats to Tom Horlings who will now enjoy a full year of *CC* for free, and thanks to all of you for sharing creative waste saving solutions! (see below) By the way, it's never too late to chime in. If you have a unique way of giving garbage a second lease on life, we want to hear about it! Send an email to editor@christiancourier.ca.

WHEN IN DOUBT, DON'T THROW IT OUT!

Maybe you'll find inspiration in one of these examples:

- Decorate paper bags to turn them into gift bags.
- Make soup stock out of vegetable peels and other food scraps.
- Use broken and uncoupled jewelry to make ornaments.
- Wrap all gifts in coloured comics – except for Christmas shoeboxes and wedding presents!
- Clean and repair shelving units, desks, tables and chairs and donate them to Thrift Stores.
- Use heavy wire on lawn signs to support garden plants or fix bicycle fenders.
- "Four times in the past 10 years, I have picked up discarded vacuum cleaners on garbage day; cleaned them, unclogged the filters, and given them to my older grandchildren when they rent apartments during university."

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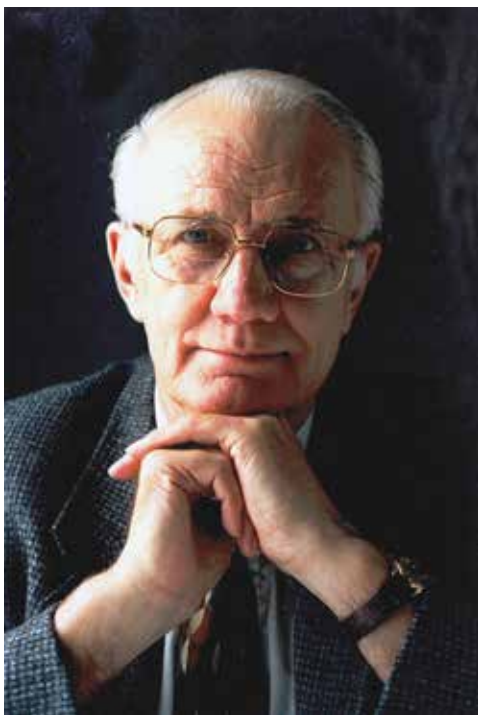
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THE PASSING OF A GIANT

On November 4, 2022, Harry Antonides passed away at age 91.

Adapted from a eulogy given by Ian Dewaard, CLAC's Ontario Director, at Harry's funeral.



IF YOU KNEW HARRY, you know that he had a deep and abiding passion for his vocation at the Christian Labour Association of Canada (CLAC), where he worked for 35 years. He was a man who had ordered his working life around the idea that a Christian world and life view, when lived out personally and through the ordering work of an institution such as CLAC, had something valuable to offer to the workplace and to the worker.

The passion Harry held for biblically inspired ideas about work, conflict and justice was so central to his being that it seemed to ooze from his pores. He was an avid storyteller and a humble and gracious guest. He rarely spoke in first person, preferring to recount the major achievements and hardships in CLAC's history always as what "we" had experienced.

Harry began his career in 1962 as the second representative hired by CLAC. But he had been involved with establishing the organization for many years before as a volunteer and supporter. In the 1950s and early '60s, the organization was still fighting in the courts to achieve the



Harry on the picket lines in 1975.

legal status it needed to organize and represent workers, something that multiple labour boards had denied CLAC because of the overtly Christian language in its constitution. When reflecting on those days, Harry explained, "It was important to say who we were, without hiding our colours. If the communists could sing their songs, and the socialists have their creeds, surely a union that confesses to be guided by Christian principles also had its place."

It took great courage to start a career with an organization that at the time lived only as an idea. As he recounts in interviews and articles, Harry spent his early years travelling across Ontario from Sarnia to Kingston, working most nights in the week to drum up support from likeminded workers and engaging in discussion and dialogue around a new vision for labour, one based on promoting dignity for all.

In 1964, a year after the Ontario Supreme Court decision that labour boards must recognize CLAC, Harry and his family relocated to B.C. to shore up support that had waned during the years of long court battles, and to organize workers. Then, in 1970, he moved back to Toronto to become CLAC's first research and education director, a job he did for 27 years until his retirement. Although he believed that he was a less gifted writer than others, he went on to pen numerous books and booklets, government submissions, and many, many articles and op-eds.

Harry's thorough research work and strong advocacy of the relevance of Christian principles won him the respect of academics and colleagues alike. His work enabled CLAC to grow in maturity, and to impact provincial governments and labour boards throughout Canada. His work also became known and quoted on several continents. In the latter years of his career, he travelled to places such as Mexico, El Salvador, Europe and South Africa as an invited speaker and lecturer. Today, his articulation of principles and ideas about our work are still relevant and compelling, a testament to the enduring quality of his contributions.

Harry exemplified the sacrifice and dedication that the founding generation offered. They toiled with no promise of reward, with no promise that their efforts would succeed, and in the face of bitter and sometimes violent opposition from their adversaries.

In this work and throughout his career, Harry was most of all a thought leader and spokesperson for Christian ideas made practical. It would be easy, but too simple, to say that the legacy of Harry and the early founders is CLAC, a national union of over 60,000 workers, that has organized many thousands of workplaces, and that is a known name and presence on the Canadian and international labour relations scene.

LIFE & LEGACY

Harry was born in 1931 in the Netherlands, one of 10 children.
With Bernard Zylstra, he co-founded the Work Research Foundation, now called Cardus.
He worked many years on CLAC's publication *The Guide* and also founded *Comment* magazine.
In 1985, he published *Stones for Bread: The Social Gospel and its Contemporary Legacy*.
Harry also wrote many years for *Christian Courier*, including a column entitled "The Public Square."
Harry is predeceased by his wife Janet, who died in 2021 after their 69-year marriage.

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OBITUARIES

EELKEMA, Menno



Menno Eelkema of Listowel, went home to be with his Lord, on Tuesday, January 3, 2023, in his 85th year.

Husband of Effie (Klinker) Eelkema. Father of Brian & Lisa Eelkema, Jacqueline & Frank Geerlinks, Selia & Fred Koops, Alice & Rick Meloche, Brenda & Greg Hiemstra, Sara & Mark Verkuyl, Krista & Jim Hall, and the late Mark Eelkema (1983-2000).

Grandfather of 18 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren.

Brother of Elisabeth DeBliek, and George & Patricia Eelkema, and brother-in-law of Greta & Harry Harsevoort, Jack Klinker, Riek Klinker, and Linda Klinker.

Menno Eelkema was born in Blija, Friesland, The Netherlands and emigrated with his family to Canada at the age of 9. After living in the Owen Sound and Sarnia areas, he moved to Listowel with his wife Effie and young family over 54+ years ago. For almost all that time, they lived and worked on their dairy farm east of Listowel on Highway 86. Church and School were important areas of his life and he spent many years in leadership and treasurer of both organizations.

Correspondence Address: 10-750 Nelson Ave S Listowel, ON N4W 3W1

KUNTZ, Neil (Cornelius James)



Neil (Cornelius James) Kuntz was born in what was then known as the town of Weston, on September 20, 1965.

His spirit returned to his Maker on December 16, 2022.

He attended Timothy Christian school in Rexdale and Toronto District Christian Highschool in Woodbridge graduating in 1985.

Despite getting diagnosed with Myotonic Muscular Dystrophy in 1990 (as was his sister Lynn) he was always upbeat and he would make the very best of every day. Brother and sister together purchased a two bedroom condo in Etobicoke in 1994. From the moment he graduated from high school he volunteered in retirement and nursing homes and joined St. John Ambulance as a volunteer, the latter for about 15 years.

He held a variety of jobs which gave him good life experience and he was always liked by his co-workers. He had to give this up due to his worsening physical condition, but he kept on volunteering in a long term care home in Etobicoke, while also serving as the disability advocate for his church.

This ended when in 2012 he followed his sister into an apartment building in Brampton with assisted living, run by the March of Dimes. Lynn passed away in May 2013. During this time, Neil remained involved in Friendship Ministry.

Grace Manor at Holland Christian Homes became his next abode in September 2019 and, as he said several times: he loved it there. In spite of needing total care he was always upbeat and cheerful, getting along well with fellow residents and staff.

His certain hope was based on his unwavering faith in his heavenly Father.

Similar to what had happened to his sister, Neil's death happened unexpectedly and without any further suffering. He is now united with the Lord and His Son Jesus, as we are confident are his mother and sister.

Correspondence Address is 45 Kingknoll Drive, PeT 703, Brampton ON L6Y 5P2.

E-BOOKS

ABRAHAM KUYPER IN E-BOOKS

A small library of Kuyper writings in English – by Kuyper and about Kuyper. Translations by Dr. Jan H. Boer and others. About Kuyper – many from *Christian Courier.* Available free of charge on www.SocialTheology.com and on www.lulu.com. Contact Jan H. Boer boerjf@hotmail.com. Vancouver.

BIRTHDAY

DERUYTER, JANTJE (JANE)



Happy 100th birthday (Feb. 18) to our dear mother, grandmother and great-grandmother Jantje (Jane) DeRuyter. With love from your children: Karen and Bill Dekker (Calgary); Ron and Sharon DeRuyter (Kitchener); and Jeff and Connie DeRuyter (Guelph). Hugs from your grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

JOBS

SENIOR PASTOR REQUIRED

Hebron CRC requires an experienced pastor to lead and encourage our members in fulfilling the great commission in the fast growing multi-ethnic community of Whitby, ON Canada. Please contact Phil Ralph at phil@woundedwarriors.ca or office@hebronchurch.ca for more information.

TORONTO CHURCH SEEKS PASTOR

Willowdale Christian Reformed Church, a church of 200+ diverse members is seeking a senior pastor. For detailed information including a church profile and position description, please see the full posting at https://network.crcna.org/job/senior-pastor.

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‘A UNITED CANADA’

New Act in Alberta creates sovereignty without independence. | **David Koyzis**



FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS ARE TESTY even in the best of times, but these are not the best of times. Pandemic, war, inflation and global supply-chain disruptions have affected us all, and it is scarcely surprising that they would also affect Canada’s federal system, as a new threat to national unity has recently demonstrated.

In early 1830s United States, a debate raged over nullification – that is, over whether individual states had the constitutional authority to nullify federal statutes harmful to their own interests. The crisis arose due to a protective tariff that favoured nascent industries in the north but hurt cotton farmers in the south. Outright secession was narrowly averted for another three decades, but, when it finally came, it tore the Union apart until the matter was settled on the battlefield.

Since our own rebellions of 1837, Canada has been at peace, although national unity has always been a precarious enterprise.

Since our own rebellions of 1837, Canada has been at peace, although national unity has always been a precarious enterprise. For most of our history, the major issue has been linguistic, with French-speaking Québec being the most obvious candidate for separating from the rest of the country.

But now the government of Alberta, led by United Conservative Party Premier Danielle Smith, has passed something that smacks of René Levesque’s paradoxical 43-year-old goal of sovereignty-association: *Alberta Sovereignty within a United Canada Act*. According to the provincial government’s website, “The act allows Alberta to fight harmful federal laws and defend the constitutional federal-provincial division of powers.” Among other things, it allows Alberta’s legislature to debate and pass a motion to the effect that a particular federal policy violates the constitution or harms Alberta in some way. Once the legislature has approved such a motion, it will turn the matter over to the provincial cabinet to take appropriate action.

The website hastens to assure readers that the act does not permit Alberta to separate from Canada or to act against the country’s constitution. No American-style nullification crisis is looming, it seems. However, it does give new powers to cabinet, thus centralizing administration within the province’s jurisdiction.

OTTAWA OVERRIDE?

Needless to say, the law is too new to have been tested in the courts, although some observers are already questioning its constitutionality. How it will be used remains to be seen, but its very existence portends an eventual showdown of some sort between Edmonton and Ottawa. Smith defended the law in these words:

“It’s not like Ottawa is a national government . . . . The way our country works is that we are a federation of sovereign, independent jurisdictions. They are one of those signatories to the constitution and the rest of us, as signatories to the constitution, have a right to exercise our sovereign powers in our own areas of jurisdiction.”



Twitter.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith on Lake Louise, Jan 20, 2023.

But what happens if Smith’s government determines that a federal law harms Alberta’s interests? And what if Ottawa declines to back down? If Alberta chooses to ignore or defy a federal statute, it is difficult to imagine that it could win if the case goes to court. What then?

Formally speaking, Canada’s constitution is top-heavy with the bulk of powers not explicitly delineated in the *Constitution Act, 1867* going to Ottawa. Our Fathers of Confederation gave Ottawa three significant powers to use against the provinces. These are disallowance, reservation and the declaratory power, which, taken together, permit Ottawa to override provincial legislation of which it disapproves. However, because disallowance was last used in 1943, most constitutional scholars believe these last-resort federal powers are effectively dormant, and a federal government would be unwise to revive them today.

DISCONTENT AND DISCONNECT

Nevertheless, the intention of the Fathers is enough to cast doubt on Premier Smith’s assertion that Canada is “a federation of sovereign, independent jurisdictions.” Unlike the members of the European Union, the original parties to Confederation were not previously sovereign states. They were dependent colonial provinces within a larger British Empire which London cajoled into a broader union.

Yet if Smith’s history is dubious, her government’s suspicion towards Ottawa is not without justification. Albertans have long memories of our Prime Minister’s late father’s National Energy Programme of 1980 which they believe lopsidedly benefitted central Canada at their expense. Discontent over the NEP led to the formation of the Reform Party in 1987. Although the Reform Party is gone, its support base continues in the Conservative Party of Canada and, of course, Alberta’s United Conservative Party.

Where will the Alberta Sovereignty Act lead? Is it a toothless warning to an apparently out of touch federal government? Or, like America’s nullification crisis, does it foreshadow a more serious danger to national unity? We shall see.



David Koyzis

David, a Global Scholar with Global Scholars Canada, recently learned that Inter-Varsity Press will be publishing his forthcoming new book, provisionally titled Citizenship Without Illusions.