The legacy of Liberation

Lloyd Rang

From May 3 to 9, 2015, an official delegation from the Canadian government will participate in a series of commemorative events in the Netherlands, together marking 70 years since Liberation. On May 6, 1945, the German forces that had been occupying the Netherlands since May 10, 1940 surrendered. Oddly enough, they didn’t surrender to the army that had done most of the fighting – the Canadians – but to the commander of the 21st Army Group, British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, who ultimately commanded the First Canadian Corps. And the surrender didn’t take place in Holland itself, but just east of Hamburg, Germany.

The surrender was a bit of a formality. The previous day, Canadian General Charles Foulkes and the German Commander-in-Chief Johannes Blaskowitz had already reached an agreement on the capitulation of German forces in the Netherlands in Hotel de Wereld in Wageningen. As far as the world was concerned, the liberation of the Netherlands happened on May 6. But as far as the Dutch themselves were concerned, Liberation Day was May 5 – and that’s the day it continues to be celebrated.

For the Dutch, who had endured five years of occupation, the arrival of the Canadians was like popping the cork on a shaken bottle of champagne. In every town Canadians liberated, people poured into the streets, unfurled orange banners and greeted the soldiers with hugs and dancing and kisses. Every Dutch person who was alive at that time has a favourite anecdote about the first time they saw a Canadian soldier. For my mom, it was being given a pair of stockings for the first time in years. For my dad, it was seeing a Canadian soldier eat.

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The Dutch royal family still sends 10,000 tulip bulbs to Ottawa each spring, in gratitude for shelter during WWII. This May a bronze sculpture of the Dutch princess in a “tulip setting” will be unveiled to mark the 70th anniversary.

The Alberta PCs: Poised to remain in power for 50 years

Mike Wevers

On May 5, Albertans will head to the polls almost a year ahead of schedule, and if the PC party wins it will extend its hold as the longest uninterrupted governing party in Canadian history. Some four decades ago, C. D. Macpherson’s Democracy in Alberta was required reading for a young political science scholar at the University of Lethbridge. Written over two decades before that, in 1953, the book examined the apparent one-party state in Alberta, with successive United Farmers of Alberta and Social Credit governments dominating the political landscape. Macpherson may not have realized that he was being more prophetic than analytical. While the Social Credit party held power for another 18 years beyond his book’s publication, the Progressive Conservative (PC) party, which supplanted the Socreds, has stayed in power the longest. With Jim Prentice’s election call, and no other party likely to form government, it appears the Alberta PC Party will extend its streak for another four years, keeping it in power for over 45 years.

Macpherson’s analysis focused on Albertan’s alienation from, and distrust of, central Canada (commonly referred to as “the East”) and a federal government that was too often seen to serve the interests of the East. In addition, Albertans, particularly its “independent commodity producers” (read “farmers” at that time) had a sense of homogeneity, rooted in their resiliency in overcoming the ravages of the Great Depression and of joining together to build a strong province. While there

Continued on page 2
The legacy of Liberation continued

In occupied land
It’s almost impossible for people who didn’t live through the war to understand it. One woman from Leeuwarden, Mrs. van Heulen, wrote to the family of a Canadian soldier billeted at her home to try to explain: “In 1942 they started sending all our young fellows to Germany to work as slaves for them. Those who could escape were hidden by friends or family. Often the Germans entered the houses and searched for young men, but then they were put under the floor, so that in most cases the Germans could not find any. When a German was killed, they picked out a number of civilians, 10, 25, and in one case even 400, and shot them. You will understand how glad we were when at the end it was all up with them, and when the Canadians arrived here we gave them a cheery welcome wherever they came.”

Van Heulen went on to describe how the retreating Germans had blown up the dykes and flooded large parts of the country, and touches on the horrible hunger of the winter of 1944 – which Dutch people still refer to as “The Hunger Winter” – in which nearly 22,000 Dutch people died of starvation after the Nazis blocked food shipments.

Repercussions
Today, 70 years later, time has erased many of the more painful memories of the last year of the war. People remember the outpouring of jubilation but sometimes forget the similar outpouring of vengeance. How the crowds mobbed young women who had dated Nazi soldiers and poured tar swastikas on their heads. How they rounded up collaborators and shot them without trial. The desire for vengeance had a political side, too. In October 1945, the Dutch government drew up plans to annex parts of Western Germany – which would have increased the size of the Netherlands by 50 percent – as compensation for damages. In the end, the Dutch only took an area of 69 square kilometers, which was returned in 1957.

After the Japanese left the Dutch East Indies, the former colony revolted. The Dutch were convinced that fascists were behind the rebellion and mobilized troops to put down the rebellion. The Indonesian war of Independence lasted from 1946-1949 and saw 3,230 Dutch soldiers, 1,200 British soldiers and some 100,000 Indonesians killed. After 1949, 300,000 former colonists returned to the Netherlands, many of whom had been imprisoned by the Japanese during the war.

Lasting alliances
These days, the anger still shows through in small ways. German tourists receive inhospitable treatment in the Nethelands, and are often given wrong directions by locals. At soccer games Dutch fans mock German teams with the chant: “Ik wil mijn fiets terug” (I want my bike back) – a reference to the theft of Dutch bicycles during the German retreat in 1945.

But of all the legacies of Liberation, the longest-lasting and most positive has been the relationship that has formed between Canada and the Netherlands. The Dutch have never forgotten the sacrifices made by Canadians, and continue to honour them every May 5. But there’s a deeper, material connection between the two countries as well. Canadian soldiers married Dutch girls and brought them back to Canada. Soon after, the Canadian and Dutch governments struck a deal to bring farm-workers from the Netherlands to Canada to replace the young men from Canadian farming communities who had lost their lives in the war. Many of these were recruited through the Gerereformeerd Kerk (Reformed Church), which had created an extensive network of field agents in Canada who could help settle newcomers. Hundreds of thousands of Dutch people made their way to Canada in the years following the Liberation. The Reformed immediately began building churches, schools, labour associations, farm interest groups and even an upset little independent paper known as Calvinist Contact. Later, it would become Christian Courier – just one of the untold number of legacies of Liberation.

The Alberta PCs continued

It has been much criticism of Macpherson’s economic analysis of immediate post-war Alberta, threads of truth remain. In 1980, the Alberta PCs continued the province’s growing population as the province’s motto, underscoring the principle in politics: keeping power when the political scene tends to understate is that the province’s growing population as the province’s motto, underscoring the principle in politics: keeping power when the political scene tends to understate is that the province’s growing population as the province’s motto, underscoring the principle in politics: keeping power when the political scene tends to understate is that the province’s growing population as the province’s motto, underscoring the principle in politics: keeping power when the political scene tends to understate is that the province’s growing population. The Alberta PC Party has persisted long enough to become a solid donor base in Calgary’s oil patch. A movement drew up plans to annex parts of Western Germany – which would have increased the size of the Netherlands by 50 percent – as compensation for damages. In the end, the Dutch only took an area of 69 square kilometers, which was returned in 1957.

The bright and telegenic Danielle Smith, leader of the Wildrose Party in Alberta until last year, thought she had what it takes to put an end to the PC rule in Alberta. In the 2012 election, it appeared that the Wildrose Party would replace the PCs. Then some press “leaks,” orchestrated by PC operatives to be strategically timed in the final week of the campaign, moved the undecided back to the PC’s. Notwithstanding the electoral defeat, Smith led an effective opposition, and continued to raise significant funding, with a solid donor base in Calgary’s oil patch. A Wildrose government was still conceivable.

However, Alison Redford miserably misread what the Alberta electorate could tolerate of premiers serving a continuous government. The Alberta PC Party has persisted by ensuring its leader can be trusted to be competent first, and populist second. With a immediate aura of competence and respectability. He had served as a federal MP with a stellar background in politics and communications and is a member of the CIBC when he left to run for the Alberta Tory leadership.

After leaving federal politics, Prentice went back to the private sector, serving as Vice-Chair of the CIBC when he left to run for the Alberta Tory leadership.

With a stellar background in politics and business, Prentice could very well have been a tax saving. Alberta charities, including churches, are concerned that donors may now reduce their giving. This does appear to be mean-spirited change and Albertans should challenge PC’s when they come door knocking.

Albertans are the least taxed citizens in Canada. 

The Alberta Government plans to reduce the Charitable Donations Tax Credit (CDTC) from 21 percent to 12.75 percent in 2016, the same as it was in 2007. Effectively, when the CDTC is combined with federal credits, Albertans are only out of pocket 50 cents for every dollar they give to charities. The government argues that total giving did not go up as anticipated after 2007, and existing donors reaped a tax saving. Alberta charities, including churches, are concerned that donors may now reduce their giving. This does appear to be mean-spirited change and Albertans should challenge PC’s when they come door knocking.

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Charitable donations

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Further solidifying his hold on the PCs, but he strengthened his position with some early out-of-the-box moves. He brought un-elected
**Column**

**From the Lab**

**Rudy Eikelboom**

I have worn glasses for short-sightedness since about the third grade. I remember going downtown in Montreal each year for an eye examination and then a few weeks later going to pick up my new glasses (no one-hour service in those days). Each year I was amazed how clear and wonderful God’s world was, at least till the next year when the cycle was repeated. Now my glasses are thick – and bifocals, as I need glasses for reading as well. Even as a child, I was thankful that there was an easy solution to my vision problem.

Myopia (short-sightedness) is an inability to see items in the distance clearly because the eyeball is elongated, and light is focused in front of the retina instead of on the retina, resulting in blurred vision. The condition may ultimately be associated with other vision problems like detached retina, cataracts and glaucoma. Myopia usually develops in school-age children and adolescents. Of concern is that the prevalence of myopia worldwide is increasing rapidly. For example, in Asia the prevalence of myopia in 20-year-olds has increased from less than 40 percent to over 80 percent in just 60 years. In the West the prevalence rate has gone from about 25 to 50 percent in young adults.

While genetic factors are involved in this vision problem, the rapid rate of increase suggests other behavioural factors may be involved. Parents have often suggested that excessive reading or, now, time with computers may be a causal factor. My mom was always suggesting that I put away my books and go play outside. A recent review feature in Nature by Elid Dolgin suggests that the science behind myopia is becoming clearer, and my mom may have been half right.

**Sunshine factor**

Early studies that explored if time spent in reading or similar activities made children more likely to develop myopia have been negative. Spending a lot of time reading appears not to increase the likelihood of having short-sightedness. However, American and Australian studies tracked the amount of time spent outside and found that the less time children spent outside the more likely they were to become short-sighted. It appears not to matter what you do outside as a child – you can sit under a tree and read – but being outside seems important. Two suggestions about why children should be outside have been suggested. First, generally one looks farther away outside away than inside, which may force the eye to develop correctly. The other suggestion is that bright sunlight is necessary for correct eye development. There is now some evidence that the bright light theory may be correct.

Research with vision in chicks suggests that in the absence of bright light, the eye does not develop normally.

**The Alberta PCs continued**

members into his first cabinet. The ex-Mayor of Edmonton, Stephen Mandel, became the Minister of Health. Gordon Dirks, head of the Calgary Board of Education, was appointed Minister of Education. If those moves are not Machiavellian enough, Prentice also brought in Michael Percy as his Chief of Staff. Percy, the ex-Dean of the University of Alberta, served as Finance critic with the Liberal opposition in the Alberta Legislature during the 1990s.

**Wildrose Party in disarray**

The Wildrose was unable to thwart Prentice’s ambitions to win all four by-elections he called in October 2014. Danielle Smith’s party finished second in two and a dismal third in the others (behind the NDP in Edmonton, capably led by Rachel Notley, daughter of a well-respected Grant Notley who died, while in office, in an airplane accident). After having seen some Wildrose MLAs move to the PCs under her tenure, smarting from the by-election losses, fumbling through a lackluster fall sitting, and unable to tolerate some social policy rifts in her party, Smith led eight of her colleagues across the floor to join the PCs in December 2014. This move seriously undermined, to say the least, the Wildrose Party’s public credibility. Smith did pay the price for her defection, subsequently losing her PC nomination battle, and leaving politics; it’s a result that some have accused Prentice of orchestrating very well.

**Budget challenges**

Premier Prentice ostensibly called an early election (pursuant to legislation, Albertans did not have to go to the polls until Spring 2016) to get a new mandate, including an endorsement of his recent budget. It holds the line on some spending (which means cuts where inflation and population growth add spending pressures), absolute reductions to some ministries and revenue increases. The most major change is the re-introduction of health care fees to help offset health spending pressures.

Even with the increased revenue, Albertans will be the least taxed citizens in Canada. This “Alberta Advantage,” which successive Alberta governments have promoted, also got the new Premier into a bit of a political tempest. Prentice suggested Albertans “should look in the mirror” to see some of the reason for expected budget deficits. What Prentice was trying to say, in too blunt a way for many Albertans, is that Albertans have expected superior government services while not footing the bill that many people in the rest of Canada pay for even less service. Prentice may have been correct, but he did cause a backlash. The provincial Tories have been using Alberta’s extraordinary energy revenues for decades to shield Albertans from paying the freight for services because that formed the basis of their simple re-election strategy. The Alberta PCs must also look in the mirror for bringing Alberta to yet another fiscal crisis.

**The Coronation likely to come**

Throughout the election campaign, Albertans will continue to talk about needing an effective opposition in government, and worry that the way the PC Party dominates is not good for democracy. Then wringing their hands on the way to the ballot booth on May 5, they will re-elect the PC Party, giving Premier Prentice his first electoral mandate. With some peace, order and good governance, he will pave the way for the next election in 2019, seeking a second mandate and taking the PCs to over 50 years in government (new Premiers seldom think of just one term in office). Canadians may help him by electing a Justin Trudeau-led Liberal federal government that most Albertans may distrust.

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Reunite devotion, confessional literacy and Christian action

Robert Sweetman

I have participated in a summer reading group for the last four years or so. About 20 scholars from the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS), Regis College, Boston College, Villanova University, Providence College, Niagara University and Rosemont College gather together at Toronto’s Regis College for a week of intense study. We read together previously agreed-upon texts of Thomas Aquinas. We exegete them, argue about our interpretations when they diverge, laugh at ourselves and each other, scratch our heads in bewilderment or shake with excitement as the light suddenly dawns. We do all this in the context of prayer – morning prayer, midday worship and evening prayer – food, and a growing friendship. Hard thought woven together with food and friendship to form with worship a continuous act of devotion. It is hard to overestimate how precious that annual reading week has become in my longing for and practice of Christian scholarship. Who can resist work that is at the same time joy, delight and wonder? Who is left untouched to live as if they had not been given a grace of great worth?

More than a Christian word in edgewise

The spiritual children of Abraham Kuyper include those whose hearts warm to his voluminous devotions; those whose minds define themselves in terms of his theological conceptions; and those who dedicate their very lifeblood to building, right here and now, the social and political infrastructure of the coming Kingdom of God. Of course, there is no need to identify these three responses to Kuyper with three separate groups of people. Each reaction is an authentic response to one or the other side of this very complicated and gifted Christian leader. But Kuyper’s spiritual children in North America have tended to view these three responses to Kuyper as mutually exclusive. Reformed pundits have often spoken as if it were pietists who warm their hearts before the fire of his devotional classics, doctrinalists who define their understanding of Reformed faith using Kuyper’s Encyclopaedia of Sacred Doctrine, and “Kuyperians” who parlay his notions of common grace and life lived pro rege (for the King) into the development of a web of social and cultural institutions designed to provide Christians a platform from which to get a Christian word in edgewise. To be “Kuyperian” in this account is to be a social and cultural activist over and against those whose sights are focused on a disciplined devotional ethos to our living or who look to clear and consistent understandings of the historical creeds of the Reformation to anchor peoples’ sense of the faith in a culture increasingly subject to shift and constant change.

Combination creates a vibrant witness

By playing one side of the legacy of Abraham Kuyper over and against the other sides we spiritual children in North America have weakened all sides. In the case of activism without the centring and anchoring power of prayer, worship and devotion can become hollow and spiritually unsustainable. Devotional discipline without a sense that society itself in all its many spheres is a worthy subject, not just a field for Christian sanctification, remains small-souled and chauvinist. Both devotion and Christian action benefit from a clear understanding of the tradition of articulate faith supporting individual and communal identity, whereas the restriction of articulate faith to inherited formulations which then are held as if they were the Faith itself (in essence) petrifies that same identity, killing it in the process (“dead orthodoxy” was long an evangelical by-word and with good reason). Devotion, articulate faith and a society-wide sense of the implications of faith and devotion – this combination when present in a person or community makes for a vibrant Christian witness to the wonder and awe of God in Christ and of the life we are called to embrace in gratitude. The effective energy that built a wide array of faith-based societal organizations in the Netherlands in the first half of the twentieth century and in Canada in the second half of the same century testify to the liveliness of the faith-life that such a combination enabled. It is my hope that the weakening of spiritual vitality, noted alongside our attempts to view these three sides of the Kuyperian legacy over and against each other, convinces us all that their re-integration holds out a healing promise for a stronger and more effective service going forward.

Grace is an amazing gift

Bert Witvoet

It’s Tuesday morning, April 7. Our son John phoned from Calgary to see how we are doing. His question is not without some concern. About a week ago I was admitted to our local hospital because of a stroke. I never lost consciousness, but I definitely experienced a slow down. After four days I was home again, but in need of restoration. It’s hard to account for this unwelcome invasion of heart problems. How does one resume living while recovering from a mental lapse? Time will tell how all this affects my life style.

The only thing I could count on was grace.

After my conversation with John, I started to read the newspaper, and on the letters page I find 35 short letters written by readers of the National Post who give an answer to “the oldest question in the universe” namely, “Do you believe in God?” Of the 35 people who responded, 11 say they don’t believe in God. So the outcome of this quest is that belief in God hovers around two-thirds of all respondents. Not bad, I guess. But I have an idea that belief in God is an unpredictable outcome. And who knows what people are really saying when they profess or deny a belief.

There was one profession of belief stated on the Letters page that interested me more than some of the others. A 68-year-old gentleman called Al Sontrop from Ottawa said that he believes, but he is more impressed with those who, “through their own lived experience, can explain, practically, why belief now has real meaning.” This gentleman likes the experiential expression of faith by people who live out their faith in practical ways. He added the observation that his own work in carpentry taught him, that “it’s harder to fix my own mistakes than someone else’s.”

There is a certain humility expressed in this relatively old gentleman’s observation. I suspect that he is more effective in judging someone else’s lifestyle than he realizes. Underestimating your own effectiveness in the work of sanctification is generally a productive activity. And we would all benefit from such an honest and underestimating assessment of our own sanctification.

Love is in the air

Perhaps, this unexpected turn of events for Mr. Sontrop is instructive for me as I try to understand what has really happened to me after my heart adventure. As I dealt with the aftermath of my coronary lapse, I discovered that I was in a better position to understand my subordinate status in the kingdom of heaven. If perchance I had been guilty of overestimating my importance in that kingdom before, the realization of my true status kind of sucked the air out of my balloon. Without that air, the only thing I could count on was grace. And grace is a gift rather than an achievement.
A renewal poem

Today Christian Courier came, with a bill.
Well . . . no bill gives us a thrill.
But this time it made us glad
for all the Couriers we had.
With editors and writers we relate.
You become friends we appreciate!

Dan and Mary Friend
Edmonton, Alta.

A poem for thin-skinned writers

A well-known writer wrote to complain
how when she wrote it was a pain
to hear from folks who, in their shock
would throw at her a proverbial rock.
My thoughts went to the apple tree
which sheds its fruit on you and me
when we do shake its loaded branches.
So be prepared to take some chances,
to have an apple drop on the very place
we least expect, and just in case
dear reader) you miss the point, just think
the apple drops, quick as a wink
onto the place where everyone knows
originates the writer’s prose.
Those who write in a house of glass
must be prepared for rocks. Alas!

Best books for 2015

For three years, Christian Courier columnists and writers have recommended their favourite books in a summer issue of the paper. This year, I’d like to open the floor to you – our readers.

What’s the best book you’ve read recently, and why?

It could be a non-fiction book on church life, a study that shaped your thinking recently, a new noteworthy Christian writer, a classic you still treasure or a beautifully-written novel.

Please email your top pick for 2015 along with a 75-word review to Angela Reitsma Bick at editor@christiancourier.ca by June 1. A selection of your submissions will be published in these pages this July.

Happy browsing! – Editor

CC on the Word Awards shortlist

On April 15, the Word Guild announced the 2015 Word Awards Shortlist, recognizing the best work published in print last year by Christians in Canada. Christian Courier writers were chosen as finalists for seven articles published in CC.

David Koyzis, columnist for 25 years, was also shortlisted for his recent book We Answer to Another (Wipf and Stock).
New Egyptian church dedicated to the recent Coptic martyrs

ROME (Zenit) – The first stone of a church dedicated to the 21 Egyptian Copts killed in Libya by ISIS was laid on April 1 in the village of Al Awar, Egypt. Al Awar is 25 kilometers from Minya, the province where most of the martyrs came from.

Its name is Church of the Martyrs of Libya.

Although some local Islamic groups protested the proposed construction of the church, local representatives of the Islamic community were present at the dedication to express their support and solidarity with Christians.

The governor of Minya had held a meeting of its Conciliation Committee with representatives of elders and influential Christian and Muslim family clans in the area. Senior representatives of the army and security forces also participated in the meeting.

A week following their brutal murder, Coptic Pope Tawadros II announced that the martyrs’ names would be inserted into the Coptic synaxarium. The synaxarium is the Oriental Church’s equivalent to the Roman martyrology. The procedure is equivalent to canonization in the Roman Catholic Church.

Christian leaders call for prayer for persecuted believers

NEW YORK (TCP) – A call to prayer for persecuted believers throughout the world issued by New York City Roman Catholic Cardinal Timothy Dolan and Hollywood producers Roma Downey and Mark Burnett has sparked a wave of support in the Christian community.

Leaders from various parts of the world responded to the call, made on Easter weekend, to combat the growing persecution of Christian men and women throughout the world. The official prayer request was made in an opinion piece published on CNN.com.

“We are calling upon Christians to reflect upon the crucifixion, beheading, stoning, enforced slavery, sexual abuse, human trafficking, harassment, bombing and displacement of hundreds of thousands of Christians – and others – whose faith alone has made them a target of religious extremists,” wrote Dolan, Burnett and Downey. “These communities need our love and support like never before, and they also need security and protection from the world like never before.”

In response, more than 80 well-known faith leaders pledged their own support of the call and that of their faith-communities.

The call was the latest in a series of initiatives to encourage faith communities to pay greater attention to the growing persecution occurring throughout the world, some of which include the mass slaughter of believers.

Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference in the U.S., responded by saying, “When light stands next to darkness, light always wins. As individuals of faith suffer persecution, we stand convicted and convinced that terror and intolerance cannot, and will not, extinguish the light of grace, truth and love.”

Dolan, Burnett and Downey explained the severity of the situation in the Middle East in the opinion piece. “Rarely since the first century has the church in the East faced persecution on this scale,” they wrote. “Christian communities that took 2,000 years to build, and that were started by the Apostles themselves, lie in ashes between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Survivors waste away as refugees, often in deplorable conditions, with no homes or churches to return to if the region eventually stabilizes.” In parts of the region so many Christians have fled or been killed that it is feared Christianity may be on the brink of extinction in those areas.

34,000 black-Latino congregations sever PCUSA ties over gay marriage

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CN/TCP) – Urging the Presbyterian Church USA to “repent and be restored to fellowship,” the National Black Church Initiative (NBCI) has declared it has severed ties with PCUSA after that mainline denomination amended its constitution, changing the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples (April 13, Christi On Twitter). The NBCI represents 34,000 congregations in the U.S. from 15 denominations, totaling 15.7 million members.

The NBCI defines itself as “a coalition of 34,000 African-American and Latino churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI’s mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public.”

“NBCI and its membership base are simply standing on the Word of God within the mind of Christ. We urge our brothers and sisters of the PCUSA to repent and be restored to fellowship,” said NBCI president Rev. Anthony Evans.

Evans continued, “PCUSA’s manipulation represents a universal sin against the entire church and its members. With this action, PCUSA can no longer base its teachings on 2,000 years of Christian scripture and tradition, and call itself a Christian entity in the body of Christ. It has forsaken its right by this single wrong act. The Apostle Paul warns us about this when he declared in Galatians 1:8 that there are those who will preach another gospel.”

No church has the right to change the Word of God. By voting to redefine marriage PCUSA automatically forfeits Christ’s saving grace,” alluding to the Apostle Paul’s list in 1 Cor. 6 of continuing sins which will result in not inheriting God’s kingdom. “But there is always redemption in the body of Christ through confession of faith and adhering to Holy Scripture.”

Evans said PCUSA “deliberately” voted to change the Word of God and the interpretation of marriage between one man and one woman. “This is why we must break fellowship with them and urge the entire Christendom to do so as well.”

Israel: Messianic ministry features online testimonies of Jews who believe in Jesus

JERUSALEM (BCN) – It is today no longer so uncommon to find Jewish people, in Israel, who believe in Jesus (Yeshua) as the promised Messiah, reports Israel Today. Even so, the report notes, believers in Yeshua are often disregarded by mainstream Judaism as confused or disillusioned.

The Israeli Messianic online ministry One For Israel has set out to demonstrate that Jewish people from all walks of life and social strata, and most certainly in their right minds, are indeed coming to a realization that Yeshua is the Messiah and they are not hiding the fact.

For most of the past 2,000 years, the group reports on its Facebook page, “it would have been shocking, scandalous even, to claim that Jews can believe in Jesus.” As part of their new project, “I Met Messiah,” One for Israel has posted “dynamic video testimonies” of Jews who have embraced Jesus as Messiah.

Over a period of 10 weeks, the One For Israel team, in partnership with Chosen People Ministries, interviewed 35 Jewish professionals who are today believers in Yeshua. Their video testimonies are available online at immetmessiah.com.

A nun prays on Easter Sunday in Garissa, Kenya, where extremist violence against Christians recently flared up.
UK: Former ed secretary says Christians are ‘openly derided, dismissed’; watchdog agrees

LONDON (TCI) – Christians in the UK are now “openly derided” and “coolly dismissed,” but their beliefs and work to help others are hugely valuable, says former British Education Secretary Michael Gove. Writing in the Spectator magazine, Gove said: “Relativism is the orthodoxy of our age” so “to call yourself a Christian in contemporary Britain is to invite pity, condescension or cool dismissal.”

While British culture belittles Christianity on a daily basis, churchgoers’ demonstration of their love for Jesus through service to others is of incalculable importance, Gove added. HimselFa Christian, he’s far from alone in experiencing negativity towards his faith. But one does not have to be a Christian to see it. Last month an equality watchdog found evidence of widespread discrimination against Christians.

Following its largest ever consultation, the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported numerous examples of Christians being marginalized. It revealed churchgoers saying they have been mocked for their beliefs at work, passed over for promotion and under pressure to keep their faith quiet at work.

By John Morrisson

Shortly after the commission released its report, another example of “dismissal” arose. Several major British supermarkets refused to stock Easter eggs which featured pictures of the cross and a leaflet explaining the resurrection. David Marshall, the head of The Meaningful Chocolate Company that makes the eggs, asserted that supermarkets appear biased.

“We do wonder at times if there is an anti-Christian agenda from some of our supermarkets who just keep turning it down,” said Marshall. “It is as if some feel Christianity is politically incorrect or the Easter story, which mentions Jesus, might put people off. One buyer asked us what Easter is politically incorrect or the Easter story, which mentions Jesus, might put people off. One buyer asked us what.”

Meanwhile, Michael Gove noted that Christian charity is also “seen by many as somehow suspect” because churchgoers’ faith is perceived as an “ultimo motive sullying their actions.”

“The suspicion was that Christians helped others because they wanted to look good in the eyes of their deity and earn the religious equivalent of Clubcard points securing entry to Heaven.” But it’s just not so, he said. He referred to “thousands of quiet kindnesses” in caring for the homeless, alcoholics, married couples and children, and said Christianity helps people “feel a sense of empathy rather than superiority. And genuine Christian faith – far from making any individual more invincibly convinced of their own righteousness – makes us realize just how flawed and fallible we all are.”

British culture belittles Christianity, equality watchdog reports.

Canadian L’Arche founder wins Templeton Prize

Marian Van Til, with files from Templeton/Prize/L’Arche

W EST CONSHOHOCKEN, Pa. – Canadian Jean Vanier, 86, the founder of L’Arche, a revolutionary international network of communities where people with and without intellectual disabilities live and work together as peers, was announced last month as the winner of the 2015 Templeton Prize.

The Templeton Prize honours a living person “who has made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery or practical works.” Established in 1972 by the late Sir John Templeton, the prize aims, in his words, to identify “entrepreneurs of the spirit,” i.e., “outstanding individuals who have devoted their talents to expanding our vision of human purpose and ultimate reality.”

L’Arche encourages people toward “mutually transformative relationships,” in which “those who help are transformed by those they encounter.” Vanier discovered that people who society typically considers the weakest enable the strong to recognize and welcome their own vulnerability.

Vanier is the son of the late former Governor General of Canada Georges Vanier. He currently lives at L’Arche’s headquarters north of Paris, in a village of handicapped people and their helpers that is the prototype for the now 147 L’Arche residential communities operating in 35 countries. There are 29 L’Arche communities in Canada: five in Atlantic Canada, nine in Ontario, eight in Quebec and seven in the west. There are also 1,500 “Faith and Light” support groups in 82 countries that similarly urge solidarity among people with and without disabilities.

Vanier began L’Arche “quietly” (somewhat inadvertently) in northern France in 1964 when he invited two intellectually disabled men to come and live with him as friends. Since then he has sought social justice and the working together of peoples of differing faiths through lectures, conferences and retreats around the world. He has written 30 books which have been translated into 29 languages.

Pursuing “ultimate reality”

The Templeton Prize is valued at about $1.7 million, one of the world’s largest annual awards given to an individual. The announcement was made at a news conference last month at the British Academy in London by the John Templeton Foundation, which is based in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania.

The prize is a cornerstone of the foundation’s international efforts to serve what it calls “a philanthropic catalyst for discoveries relating to human purpose and ultimate reality.”

Jennifer Simpson, the daughter of foundation president and chair Dr. John M. Templeton, Jr. and granddaughter of Sir John Templeton, noted that Vanier brings a “much-needed perspective to how the power of love can advance spiritual progress in the world.” She said, “By recognizing the importance of every individual, regardless of their station in life, Jean Vanier underscores how each of us has the ability not only to lift up others, but also ourselves. His powerful message and practice of love has the potential to change the world for the better, just as it has already changed the lives of countless individuals who have been touched by this extraordinary man.”


Vanier will be formally awarded the Templeton Prize at a public ceremony at the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields in London May 18.

Crystal Cathedral founder Schuller dies at 88

Marian Van Til, with files from BCN, ChristianPost

G ARDEN GROVE, California – Crystal Cathedral founder and televangelist Robert H. Schuller died earlier this month after a battle with cancer of the esophagus. He was 88.

Known worldwide, Schuller infused his sermons and books with “possibility thinking,” which he saw as the Gospel and which he also advocated during his “Hour of Power” TV program.

Schuler was born in Alton, Illinois in 1926 and was ordained by the Reformed Church of America (RCA) in 1950. He was pastor of the Ivanhoe Reformed Church in the Chicago area from 1950 to 1955 before moving to California. Once in California he began a ministry preaching at a rented drive-in theater, an unusual move at the time. In 1970 he began the “Hour of Power,” which at its peak reached 20 million viewers.

The landmark glass-paned Crystal Cathedral, built in 1981, became synonymous with Schuller and his “Hour of Power.” While staying on the board of directors, in 2006 Schuller named his son, Robert A., his ministry successor.

However, two years later the elder Schuller removed his son from the position over “lack of shared vision.”

By 2010 Crystal Cathedral Ministries was deeply in debt and filed for bankruptcy while owing a $36 million mortgage and owing more than $7 million to creditors. The elder Schuller and his wife, Arvella, themselves brought a multimillion-dollar suit against the ministry for copyright infringement.

The Schullers were awarded less than a million dollars and their appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court was denied.

The church was sold in 2012 to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange for $57.5 million. It became the bishop’s seat of that diocese and was renamed the Christ Cathedral. The original Crystal Cathedral congregation splintered into at two major groups: Hope Center of Christ, led by Sheila Schuller Coleman, who was a former pastor, CEO and president of the ministry; and Shepherd’s Grove, led by the elder Schuller’s grandson, Bobby.

Besides his son, Schuller had four daughters. His wife predeceased him last year.
New toolkit will help churches reach out to refugees and be revitalized

Danielle Rowaan

“Like oil in an olive press, the pressure of the times can create a pure oil, a purer, deeper sense of what it means to be church,” said Mary Jo Leddy, paraphrasing Augustine’s City of God.

Leddy, founder of Romero House, a ministry to welcome refugees in Toronto, was speaking in March to a packed room of refugee sponsors, refugees and church members about current refugee policy in Canada and the power of relationships with refugees to revitalize the church, especially in communities where this ministry occurs.

The group was gathered for the launch of a new refugee workshop and online toolkit called “Journey with Me” produced by several Christian Reformed agencies and other refugee ministries.

Leddy opened the morning by speaking about the change in refugee policy and public attitudes towards refugees in recent years. “What refugees most need is for this country to be good, decent, just,” she said. She told of the beginning of Romero House, when the neighbours surrounding the house expressed fears that the presence of refugee claimants in the neighbourhood would raise crime rates and decrease property values. But when the neighbours and Romero House residents began to come together around potlucks and helping neighbours, the neighbourhood became more close-knit than before the refugees moved in.

Similarly, Leddy said, it will take refugees to remind us of who we are called to be as the Church.

The 80 attendees then participated in the Journey with Me workshop, facilitated by Jeanette Romkema of The Lighthouse and Humberto Lopes of the Office of Race Relations. The interactive 90-minute workshop helps participants imagine the challenges refugees face in Canada today by using true stories of refugees. (The workshop is available free of cost on the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue’s website: www2.crcna.org/pages/publicdialogue_toolkit.cfm)

‘This one’s yours’

Part of the workshop sent participants into Scripture to learn about what the Bible has to say about welcoming the stranger. In response to 1 John 4:18, Jean Kooger of Covenant CRC (St. Catharines) observed, “It strikes me that in our culture of fear towards refugees and immigrants, this verse is telling us that love is the opposite of that fear.” Jean and her husband John have been active in refugee sponsoring for 35 years. Speaking about the beginning of their work with refugees, John said, “When [Leddy] talks about ‘getting the call,’ I get teared up because it was like this verse is telling us that love is the opposite of that fear.” Jean and her husband John have been

Secularization

Fast forward to today. A few universities have a Religious Studies program that explores the history and variety of human religious expressions with a few students. It is a critique if a sermon is said to be too theological, and catechism classes, if still given, are weakly (not weekly) attended.

I am excited to begin a new position as a Campus Pastor. During interviews for several different positions, seldom was I asked about my theology. I would submit a personal faith statement, but it was not discussed. I was always asked about my people skills and my approach to management. We have asked about a vision for ministry, the interviewers were not looking for a theological vision. They wanted to know what the program could look like. Often those hired for leadership positions, in Christian education and even in churches, had little theological training.

May be these observations and experiences are because we have secularized life, especially in education, and possibly even in the church. We want counselors, self-help teachers and technicians, not theologians. Business managers are the new gurus.

Democratization

On vacation, I was in a Bible study class in a Presbyterian church. The person leading the lesson introduced herself by saying that she was not a theologian, she simply read and studied the Bible. The person sitting across from me whispered “good.” The lesson was not good Biblical interpretation or theology.

Maybe we have democratized theology. While I was in Lithuania, my wife, Dawn, joined a reception to call play cards and was asked by another person what her husband did. She said that I was a theologian. The man replied, “We are all theologians.” We all have a theology, but are we all theologians? We may all count

What is theology?

We all have a theology. We all have some vision of a god that affects how we live. Different religious traditions have different understandings of god. Even those who reject religion have a theological perspective. They make something ultimate – themselves, humanity in general, matter or spirit – that affects their choices and values.

Everyone’s theology is distorted or incomplete. Theologians help us explore and grow in how we understand God and see how it affects our values and behaviours.

What is our theology? What is at the heart of your understanding of God, and how does this affect how you live? I will leave that for another article, but a hint is that I can summarize much of my theology in one word: “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.”

More theology

Good theology gives life purpose, power and perspective. I hope to be God’s Biblical theological image-bearer expressing Immanuel on a secular university campus.

Theology gives us a context for life. Life is more than meets the eye, more than the material world, more than education or career, more than the joys, pains and fears of the moment. Theology gives us more. Good theologians help us see and be more.

Dr. Wolthus, a CRC pastor, has just been appointed the new Director of Geneva Campus Ministry at the University of Iowa.
Setting the record straight

Jonathan de Vries

Recent events have made Karen Armstrong’s recently published Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence tra­gically topical. New stories splashed across our computer and television screens do little to dispel the prevalent notion that religion is disproportionately linked to the less positive aspects of the human condition. Armstrong challenges this assumption, not by empirically weighing the consequences of religion and non-religion in the scales of history, but rather by positing a whole new outlook, one that challenges the prevailing Western idea that religion is a purely private phenomenon.

First of all, a note of caution: Armstrong’s particular views on religion may give some pause. Religious experiences, according to Armstrong, is a universal experience that transcends creeds and doctrines. Despite any differences in its actual expression, whether in terms of doctrine or practice, it is normally based on the same underlying characteristics. Religion has never really been about truth, whether historical or metaphysical. Rather, religion provides the means by which individuals and communities can explore, contemplate and understand the “elusive, puzzling aspects of life and give some kind of structure and meaning to the world before our eyes.”

Religion, according to Armstrong, was never a private or individual experience, but was an integral part of the public life of any community. Indeed the historic inseparability of religion from public life is the core message of Armstrong’s narrative. One of the key and ubiquitous characteristics of religion is what Armstrong dubs the “cult of community,” the way in which religion has historically been a communal activity that drew people together and created a basis for respect for others. Using this perspective, Armstrong undertakes a survey of the interaction between religion and violence across most of recorded history. Given this broad scope, Armstrong is forced to tell her story in very broad strokes, with the odd focus on particular religious developments or flash points. A specialist might take issue with some of her generalizations, and her historical viewpoint comes with a strong tincture of popular anti-colonialism. Yet this is a book very much aimed at a lay audience, so it may be forgiven some of its failings.

The theme that Armstrong develops is that while religion was often the handmaiden of political power and structural violence, it was just as often a counter-cultural phenomenon which opposed the powers that be, and preached the innate value of human life. In this latter sense it played a crucial role of “bearing witness” to alternate, more just forms of society. This pattern of religion’s oscillating role can be traced not only across Christianity, but across most of the world’s faith traditions. Properly and historically understood, religion is not a distinct phenomenon that can be termed “good” or “bad,” but is instead an integral part of the human condition and all of its possibilities and failings.

Secularism, on the other hand, comes in for significant criticism from Armstrong. Despite its modern advocates, who usually come armed with standardized tropes involving references to the “Dark Ages,” the crusades, and Galileo, secular societies can lay no special claim to being non-violent or more tolerant. Indeed, secularism has often deliberately targeted religious groups, particular minorities, both internal and external. Secularist ideologies, aside from their historical hostility to religion, have propagated the fallacy that religion should be treated as a private, individual matter, a development that Armstrong traces back to the Reformation and the Enlightenment, and which finds its most pronounced form in Protestant Christianity. The result is that religion in secular society has lost its ability to bear witness, to challenge the existing pattern of things and restrain the structural violence of society.

While Armstrong’s universal and instrumentalist view of religion may trouble some Christian readers, her ultimate message matches that of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Soviet dissident who once commented that the principal trait of the 20th century, with all its violence and inhumanity, was that “Men have forgotten God.” Metaphysics (or the lack thereof) aside, Fields of Blood is a powerful and persuasive historical corrective. It is a well-written rejoinder to those who argue that religion could only cause a great deal of damage if ever allowed to influence events, and that all would be better off if it were purely a private matter, a quaint and curios cultural trinket, perfectly tolerable so long as it remains unobtrusive and politically neutered.

Jonathan de Vries practices law and lives in London, Ont.

We owe each other our bodies

Adam Fleming Petty

Along with text messages and cat memes, “the debate” is one of the forms of communication most favoured by our culture at the moment. Click around on the internet for a few minutes, and you’re sure to find the latest salvo in any of the following: science vs. faith, liberal vs. conservative, McDonald’s vs. Burger King. There is seemingly no topic that can’t be reduced to the rallies and steel cage match of online polemic.

If you’re a conflict-averse Midwesterner like me, debates make you anxious. As soon as things get heated, you want nothing more than to make everyone hot chocolate. However, this means that you might not be all that knowledgeable about certain topics that only seem to get considered in the form of debate. You want to be a well-informed, conscientious citizen, so what to do?

An excellent place to start would be reading On Immunity: An Inoculation by Eula Biss. This short but dense book is about vaccination, a topic that can shift a pleasant conversation into a heated debate in no time. Biss certainly has opinions on the matter (in short, she thinks the benefits outweigh the risks), but what makes her book so valuable is that she’s not interested in winning a debate so much as wondering why we’re having the debate in the first place.

Biss became interested in the subject when her young son developed certain allergies and food sensitivities. Her son’s pediatrician said it might be a good idea for him to not get a flu shot, as the egg whites used to grow the vaccine could have an adverse effect on him. Several of Biss’ friends, mothers who were educated, upper-middle-class and, for the most part, white, like Biss herself, were also considering whether or not to have their children vaccinated. Their reservations included specific fears, such as the possibility that vaccines can lead to autism (a thoroughly discredited idea, as Biss elucidates), to the more general fears about the effects that such “unnatural” substances could have on their children’s health. All of these mothers were genuinely concerned for their own children, but that’s just the point. Vaccination is a tool used not just for protecting the health of individuals, but of the whole public. Forgoing vaccination, in a sense, means that one is forgoing participation in a society. Biss writes, “If we imagine the action of a vaccine not just in terms of how it affects a single body, but also in terms of how it affects the collective body of a community, it is fair to think of vaccination as a kind of banking of immunity.”

I’m not sure if it’s due to how hard it is to think in systemic terms, or how easy it is to think in individualistic ones, but much of the usual discourse around vaccination seems not to give enough credit to the public good that it enables. Protect yourself and your family, say the advertisements at drugstores during flu season. Promoting the collective good and doing your part to uphold the social contract just doesn’t have the same ring to it, and not just because it’s awkwardly phrased. The very idea of a social contract seems dated, even regressive. The era of Rotary clubs and men wearing hats appears, from our historical moment, just as notable for its racism and sexism, as Mad Men demonstrates in stylish fashion.

But there are also losses that have resulted in turning away from the mores of that time. It was Margaret Thatcher, of all people, who best summarized the new era we’re still in. “There is no such thing as society,” she said, envisioning a world where it is the responsibility of individuals to take care of those less fortunate. Here’s the thing, though: left to their own devices, individuals will take care of themselves, their families and friends, leaving strangers to deal with their own problems. This is, in part, the dilemma Biss identifies through her examination. We are a society that doesn’t think of itself as a society, a body politic that doesn’t believe it has a body.

Making decisions out of fear isn’t just conduct unbecoming of a good citizen, it’s unbecoming of a Christian. We in the church, after all, have been commanded to care for the strangers in our midst, image-bearers of God as much as ourselves. Christians often don’t make this point as explicit as they should: loving one’s neighbour as oneself is inherently political, the basis for a good, just society. Although Biss isn’t religious herself, she certainly sees the implication of her promoting vaccination as a public good. Her father was a doctor, however, and often spoke of medicine in terms of his own religious upbringing.

“I was not raised in the church and I never took communion, but I was not reminded of Jesus offering his blood that we all might live when my father spoke of the universal donor. But I believed, even then, that we owe each other our bodies.”

Adam Fleming Petty is a writer and stay-at-home father living in Indianapolis, Ind. with his wife and daughter.
Seeds of stewardship: A call to chemical-free caretaking

Delores VandenBoogaard

Complicity can feel comfortable. It is often believed that one person or one home cannot truly make a difference, but as we celebrate Earth Day this month, let’s look at what God requires of us. I’d like to share how he has taken me on a journey to heighten my awareness of what it means to be a “caretaker” and how he has provided a mission field for our family.

In 2000 my dad, Jack Reitsma, was diagnosed with cancer and passed away six weeks later. His sudden passing was a shock. I had been raised on our family farm in Smithers, B.C., where we had grown our own vegetables, raised our own meat and eggs, drank fresh milk and sourced our water directly from a local glacier. Our lifestyle epitomized “clean living.” That said, the farm was also where we were in contact with a plethora of chemicals— including gasoline for washing our hands! Subconsciously I affiliated many of the chemical scents found indoors with cleanliness and, truthfully, I liked it. When I married and moved out, I stocked my own home with an arsenal of wipes, sprays, aerosols and fabric softener as I had been accustomed to using. Though I was aware of the toxic symbols on the containers, I was naíve to their greater effect on my health and our environment.

Clean living revisited

Years later I was given an environmentally friendly cleaning cloth by my sister that she said worked amazingly well. I proceeded to use it with Windex, thinking the cloth was meant to reduce our paper towel consumption. I didn’t realize the cloth was made to be used with only water, so my results were disappointing and the cloth was abandoned. A few years after that I watched my other sister remove her waterproof mascara using only a cloth and water. Immediately I stopped using my regimen of wipes, cleansers and toner and switched over to her routine. Skin is our body’s largest organ and it is constantly absorbing. If I could wash with only water, I decided that would truly be “clean living!”

In the Garden of Eden God assigned mankind to be caretakers of the earth. Reflecting upon this, I had to ask myself: What do I do differently than my neighbours in this regard? How am I a caretaker? How am I God’s ambassador for his beautiful creation?

Through my research I discovered I could maintain both our personal care and house cleaning without the use of harmful chemicals through switching to environmentally-friendly cleaning products. My husband wasn’t convinced until he read documentation showing the test results of these products which were being used to clean hospitals in Europe. All of this converged on the heels of my dad passing, so we decided to convert our home to “green cleaning” and I became a consultant with a company called Norwex.

As a parent, I had taken pictures and enjoyed the humour when our babies kissed themselves in the mirror—not thinking about the fact that the mirror had been cleaned with toxic cleaning spray. Each of our homes contains many chemical residues— unless we choose an alternative. Dr. Dick Irwin, a toxicologist from Texas, reports that “chemicals have replaced bacteria as the main threat to health.” Indoor air pollution is one of the top five highest-ranked environmental health problems in America, with chemical levels up to 70 times higher than outside. Norwex chair Bjorn Nicolaisen notes that, “More than 80,000 new chemicals have been created and most have never even been assessed for their impact on human health.”

Paper towel facts

- Over 13 billion pounds of paper towel are used yearly in North America. This works out to 3,000 tons of waste every day.
- To make one ton of paper towels, 17 trees must be cut down and 20,000 gallons of water consumed.
- Multiply that by the 3,000 tons (mentioned above), and you get roughly 53,000 trees and 60 million gallons of water consumed every day. For what? A single-use, throw-away product.

Choices and changes

Whose life has not been affected by cancer, allergy or disease? The statistics are unprecedentedly higher than in the generations before us. The Consumer Protection Agency states that “150 chemicals found in the home are connected to allergies, birth defects, cancer and psychological disorders.” Our society assumes that if it’s sold in the store it must be tested and safe. It isn’t! We can make the decision to change this.

After my introduction to cleaning without harmful chemicals, I felt led to educate others about the alternatives. When we are obedient to God, he uses all platforms of vocation for his work. My first calling was to educate our society about the choices they could make. Caring for our health and the environment starts with us, but we must make changes to our lifestyle and daily habits. Not only are some chemicals harmful, many other conveniences are ruin our ecosystems as well. Through my research I discovered many disturbing facts, such as a study released by Simon Fraser University to determine the impact of extremely low levels of toxins on children. These toxins are in our everyday lives and found in our homes. (The results are alarming and can be viewed on YouTube: Little Things Matter, The Impact of Toxins on the Developing Brain.)

I also learned that plastics do not biodegrade, but eventually break down into small particles from exposure to the elements, lasting virtually forever. And this all for the sake of convenience: shopping bags, bottles, ziplock and fresh produce bags, stretch food wrap, straws, micro-beads in body wash, etc. Only five percent of all plastic generated globally is recycled. Our great-great-grandchildren will experience the ramifications from our plastic gluttony. As David Suzuki says, “What we do to nature, we are doing to ourselves.” How do we begin to reverse these problems? Can one shift make a difference? I believe we can and we need to do something.

Our business is God’s business

My second calling has been to speak life by mentoring and making disciples. As a Norwex consultant trainer and team leader, I daily coach and mentor my consultants to develop the gifts God has given them. God has shown me how to express my belief in others so they can believe in themselves. Once a friendship and trust is nurtured, I can naturally invite people I meet to seek God for their true identity. In 2009 God laid upon my heart the desire to start a Bible study for my unsaved consultants. While some say it’s not professional to mix business with religion, that is exactly what God told me to do. Six years later many of these women have given their lives to Jesus. God has moved into their homes; first generation Christian children are entering Christian schools, baptisms are occurring; new spiritual leaders are rising up and beginning to disciple others! Regardless of what we do, our business is God’s business. God is using my Norwex business as a platform to fulfill his purpose for my life. As a child, I wanted to be a teacher or a missionary. Today I’m living that dream—daily, both are fulfilled! Since 2006, God has grown and blessed my desire to educate those around me and I now lead a team of over 4,000 consultants across North America. Each consultant represents thousands of homes that are being educated yearly.

Call to action

I challenge you to make every day Earth Day by doing some or all of the following:
- Strive weekly to bring more recyclables than garbage to the road.
- Radically reduce your use of plastic: be intentional to find other options!
- Write the date inside your roll of paper towel and see how many months you can use one roll.
- Choose to clean your home without harmful chemicals. If you are not willing to pour the solution into an expensive salt water fish tank, please don’t pour it down your drain.
- Research your food, personal care, cosmetics and cleaning supplies. See what they are made of at ewg.org.

Never think that one person or one home can’t make a difference. Start by looking at the products you are using daily. Filter each item through these three questions:
1. Will this harm or protect God’s creation?
2. Is there an alternative?
3. Am I setting an example or living for convenience?

My goal is to heighten awareness so the upcoming generation will think twice about every product they use. As stewards we need to wisely evaluate our choices to honour and glorify God in every aspect of our lives. As long as there are aisles full of chemicals for personal care and cleaning in every department store, I’ll have a message to deliver and I know God will continue to bring me families to disciple.

Delores (Reitsma) VandenBoogaard is the Executive VP Sales Leader for Norwex. She lives in Edmonton, Alberta, with her husband and three children. Delores blogs about her experiences with clean living at DeloresVan.com.
A mountain bluebird, a white-crowned sparrow and a purple finch are among the many birds that bring us the sounds of spring. Are we listening to their call? (photos by John Franken)

Sounds of spring: A call to sustainability

John Franken

As I write this, it is February in north central British Columbia’s Bulkley Valley. Outside, more than 60 centimeters of snow cover the ground, and already I am beginning to imagine what spring will be like. Not only will the melting snow reveal the ground once again but I look forward to green grass, dandelions and red-winged blackbirds trilling. Joseph T. Renaldi, a modern American poet, shares this feeling in his poem, "Hurrah! It’s Spring":

Many birds are harboring in the trees, Hurrah! It must be Spring. Their presence is highly gratifying. As the song birds begin to sing, I have endured the long, dreary Winter, And cherish the Spring season anew; Excited to bid a cordial welcome . . .

The sounds of spring are infectious. Who can help but feel excited to see and hear spring come after a long winter? But does everyone in the Christian community view the coming of a new spring in the same way? Is it a reminder of our stewardly responsibility, or is it just a wonderful experience that our awesome God provides for us while we walk our earthly journey? I believe that when God’s creation comes alive it gives us all new hope and a time to reflect on the creation mandate. For me, each new spring starts by reminding me of the greatness of our God. It is a fitting time to reflect on the words of Psalm 104 that give tribute to the goodness of our God to his glory through bringing hope and restoration to creation.

The theatre of God’s glory

John Calvin describes the earth as being the theatre of God’s glory. In Raveished by Beauty, Beldon Lane explains, “The theater for Calvin [of creation] thus served as an apt metaphor of God’s action in sustaining the work, luring all creation back to its Maker.” The apostle Paul reiterates in Colossians 1:15 that creation is not just about humanity but all creation was created for God to his glory. It seems to me that many have lost this wholistic understanding that all creation belongs and is important to God. In fact, dominion requires that humanity serve God’s creation, not use and abuse it. Calvin de Witt calls this the Abad Principle: We are to safeguard and serve what God has created. Secondly, we are to continue and practice the Sabbath principle. Lastly, we are to honour the blessing of fruitfulness that God has given to creation.

Unfortunately, contemporary Christian thinking about creation has often been reduced to an entangled argument about climate. On the one hand, Pope Francis has been quoted as highlighting the importance of the climate, urging Catholics to take action on moral and scientific grounds. On the other hand, some evangelical Christians, such as Calvin Beisner of Cornwall Alliance, believe that the environmental movement is unbiblical and a false religion. There seems to be a divided opinion among Christians about our life on earth. Is it only a temporary place to journey while waiting for Christ’s return or is it our God-given home to enjoy and care for until he returns?

Journeying through vs. taking delight

Author Beldon Lane provides an insight into this problem by offering two possibilities to the origins of this contemporary conflict. Lane compares two historical theological models: the Turretin model (based on the beliefs of Swiss-Italian Reformed theologian, Francis Turretin) vs. the Reformed model in the tradition of John Calvin.

Lane says that, “Turretin’s model is primarily absorbed with predestination and God’s overwhelming work of redemption, viewing original sin as distorting every aspect of the created order, [so] there is little reason to seek God in the natural world.” Therefore, the purpose of life is to experience salvation within the context of the correct doctrine and creation is simply an experience God provides.

In contrast to this, Lane describes Reformed theology (after Calvin), “as beginning with creation, discerning God’s glory in all of its wonders despite the ravages of sin, [and so] there is every reason to take the world seriously.” In this view, mankind is here to experience God’s glory through bringing hope and restoration to creation.

Joseph Sittler adds to this, echoing the words of the Westminster Catechism: “The proper starting point for a Christian attentive-ness to the ecological crisis is the exercise of delight – the enjoyment of all manifestations of God’s glory in the natural world.” Taking the world seriously implies that humanity should be Godly stewards, honouring all of creation.

A wholistic challenge

Regrettably there are many instances of the opposite happening. One example is soil – is it considered a living organism or just a medium for growth and productivity? Some Christian farmers – who relish the coming and beauty of spring as I do – could try harder to be what environmentalist author Joel Salatin calls “environmentally active farmers.” A friend of mine owns a certified environmental hobby farm. His neighbours, many of them not embracing any sort of Christianity, seem to take more interest in preserving the ecological soundness of his farm, than do other neighbouring farmers who believe in a reformed doctrine world and life view. Many of these Christian brothers and sisters practice instead what Salatin calls a mechanical view of soil and animals. Salatin proposes that we need to practice wholistic farming that recognizes the soil as a living organism providing healthy perennial pastures and crops without the mass use of chemicals. Are we up to this challenge of implementing a wholistic approach?

Another example that highlights a problem in creation is the birds. I love the sounds of birds in the spring as they return to the north. An avid gardener friend of mine commented to me one day, “I am not interested in birds.” I would maintain that all of us should take a deep interest in the health of bird populations. Much like the canary in the cage used by coal miners to warn of imminent danger, songbirds are our modern canaries – our bio indicators – and their songs are the voices of spring once again to come alive and tell us that God’s creation is meant to do – glorify God – and I will reflect on the kind of a steward I am being. Am I making sustainability a priority or am I blindly embodying an industrial/consumerist society?

Listening to creation’s call

As I look forward to the snow melting and spring returning, I will be anticipating the voice of spring once again to come alive through budding trees, green grass and bird’s songs. I will listen to creation for what it is meant to do – glorify God – and I will reflect on the kind of a steward I am being. Am I making sustainability a priority or am I blindly embodying an industrial/consumerist society?
Trash talking: A call to confession

Monica deRegt

My husband once used an analogy of garbage day as a “Call to Confession” while leading a worship service. He shared with great enthusiasm his eager anticipation for Tuesday mornings – garbage day in our household at the time – the day on which we (OK, truthfully, he) could joyfully rid our house and yard of all the accumulated garbage from that week. People thought he was joking. He wasn’t. His enthusiasm is infectious, and Tuesday mornings became a small celebration in our house, with everyone joining in the activity of bringing out the trash. At a young age, our kids even understood the extent to which Daddy loved garbage day and drew pictures of garbage trucks for his office walls. His message was clear – it feels great to get rid of the junk in our lives, both physical and metaphorical. And once we bring it to the curb and then watch the garbage truck drive off with it, there is a feeling of peace, order and cleanliness restored once again. As my husband said, we know that filthy garbage is not ever coming back. And we can know the same about our sin. Once we bring it to the cross, and receive forgiveness, it really is gone forever. That’s the amazing thing about God’s grace – he erases our sin.

Conveniently bothersome

Of course, just like with garbage that needs to be set out each week again, confessing our sin doesn’t mean we never deal with sin again. There is always new garbage to get rid of, isn’t there? And it can feel daunting, especially if we let it pile up.

The new community we’ve moved into doesn’t have curbside garbage pick-up service. Much to my husband’s dismay, there is no official garbage day anymore. Instead there are two large bins, located conveniently close to our home, that we can dump our garbage into anytime of the day or night. At first glance, this seemed handy – no need to store our garbage for a whole week, no need to find space for bulky blue bins in our garage. Our home could be clean and garbage-free every day of the week. How wonderful!

In fact, the opposite began to happen. Because we didn’t have a system for taking out the trash, or anywhere to store it until someone could be bothered to haul it the 100 feet to the bin, we started accumulating piles of recycling and garbage everywhere. Whereas Tuesday mornings used to be the motivator which had us running around the house emptying all the garbage cans from bathrooms, bedrooms, offices and kitchen, we now had overflowing trash cans. We could bring it away whenever we wanted to. But no one could be bothered. We knew we should, we knew we’d feel better once we did, but there was always something more pressing. Oh sure, we didn’t let it get too bad – eventually we’d gather it all up and bring it to the bin. But without a regular routine, this became a bothersome chore. And once it was done, we didn’t look forward to doing it again like we used to.

Joy in routine

As more and more churches abandon the practice of including liturgical elements such as the Call to Confession in their services, I wonder if we might be losing something much more important than what some believe to be a stiff and formal, meaningless ritual. I admit I was that person who felt stifled by overly liturgical, methodically planned services. I like spontaneity and I was quick to argue that there was no room for the Spirit to move in such a tightly controlled environment. But maybe, as sinful people, if we are left on our own to take part in confession, it will become just like the garbage in my house – a job to be avoided or viewed as an undesirable chore that has to be done only when things get really bad. But removing the routine can rob us of the joy that comes from being regularly reminded of the amazing fact that God has, in fact, removed that garbage from our lives forever. And though there is nothing we can do to earn it, we do need to own it. Despite the fact that the bins are always available, just like God’s grace, it is so easy to let the mess take over.

After all, who likes confronting garbage? While I shared my husband’s enthusiasm for getting it out of our house, I sure detested the actual act of tying up those stinky bags and carrying them anywhere. And pity the poor soul who had to bring the maggot-infested green bin to the curb after a particularly humid Ontario summer week. Garbage is revolting, and so is our sin. That’s why getting rid of it feels so great. That’s why taking part in a regular reminder of God’s amazing gift can be such a joyful experience.

But what if we take the analogy one step further and do exactly that – confront our garbage, and take a look at what makes up that trash in the first place?

Lasting impressions

As I learn more about our physical garbage and its effects on our world, I can’t help but make more comparisons. The reality is that our garbage – what we create, how we create it, and how we dispose of it – is making a lasting impression on our world, and it isn’t pretty. The same can be said of our sin. Maybe instead of just getting rid of it in an opaque black bag, or simply confessing our sins and moving on, we need to examine things more closely.

When I was a child, it was not uncommon for people to toss garbage out of the car window into the ditch. We have come a long way from those foolish practices, but unfortunately I think the sentiment has not changed much for many people: as long as I’ve thrown it away, it’s gone. It’s not my problem anymore. Yet we know that landfills are overflowing; the oceans are teeming with our waste. The garbage isn’t really “gone.” It’s time to change the way we create our garbage in the first place.

And as the people in our world suffer unimaginable horrors – poverty, famine, wars, illness, persecution, sex trafficking, debilitating depression – maybe it’s time to confront the “garbage” that is our sin, and the impact that our actions, forgiven or not, are having on the rest of the world. After we confess our sins of greed, pride, selfishness, laziness and indifference, and we celebrate that God removes our sins from us, the story isn’t over. We need to go one step further in examining that filth and begin to make changes to the way we create that garbage too. Just like a choice to stop using plastic water bottles can reduce the strain on our environment, so our choice to live a less greedy life can have far reaching impacts on the rest of humanity.

Reduce sin; recycle spiritual fruit

As you take up the challenge this Earth Day (and all year long) of reducing, reusing and recycling in an effort to take better care of our world, consider applying these ideas to your spiritual life as well. I recently read about a family that was attempting to create zero garbage in their home. Can we commit in a similar way to create as little sin as possible? Can we take a proactive approach and be intentional about the by-products of our spiritual lifestyle? We can reduce our use of anger, greed, selfishness and judgement. We can re-use and re-cycle the fruits of the spirit. By doing so, we will take part in God’s redeeming of his world, and look forward not only to the joy of being forgiven and cleansed of our sin, but to the ultimate joy of a world in which “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.”

Monica deRegt is the Features Editor for Christian Courier. When she finished writing this article she promptly brought all of her garbage and recycling to the bins in her community.
A year ago in February I began publishing a farming newsletter. There were several reasons for beginning this publication: (1) a dearth of local agricultural information, (2) much of the agricultural info from organisations devoted to beef, dairy, grain or forage production ignores agricultural communities living on the fringes and/or small-to-medium-sized operations, (3) I thought that a stewardly approach might help inform and unite many local people who are very concerned about food, land use and agriculture.

I have not (yet) succeeded in inspiring readers to form a local community agricultural organisation. As an information channel, however, Just Farmers does seem to reach its goals. We presently have 120 subscribers. Some of these are relatives (naturally!) living in Wisconsin; a few live elsewhere in B.C. or other parts of Canada; most are from the central interior region of B.C. Some are Christian, some are not, but almost all the subscribers generally agree with the principles of the newsletter.

In connection with other articles on the environment in this issue of CC, I thought you might appreciate seeing the document called Just Farmers: Principles, printed below. You will probably notice that there is nothing explicit about a Christian approach to farming. On the other hand, the intentional and confessional approach to these principles may just tip off anyone in the know that the publisher (not) comes from a philosophically-Reformed background.

**Just Farmers: Principles**

**Foundation:** We are stewards, not owners, of the land we farm. We are accountable for the way our land use affects the environment which includes land, water, air, plants, animals and human beings.

**Goals:**

- To encourage and support the agricultural community. This includes sponsoring educational activities, local farm tours, and so on.
- To provide healthy, locally-produced food for human and animals.
- To provide a voice for those often ignored by agribusiness.
- To participate in discussion of local community plans.

**More Just Farmers**

For archives of the newsletter, type [www.justfarmers.wordpress.com](http://www.justfarmers.wordpress.com) in the top ribbon (not through Google). I’d appreciate any comments you may have at cgesch68@gmail.com. If you wish to subscribe, please contact me at that email address; the newsletter is free and available on email only (pdf and docx).

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**Artful Eye**

The metallic skeletal remains ("As the deer pants for streams of water . . .", Psalm 41:2) is frozen in a position of need and supplication on a melting ice floe. Mankind is altering the landscape. It is now well known that the survival of the caribou in the north is threatened by encroaching resource development and related global warming. Is it possible to give the land a voice? What would we hear and see?

Peter Reitsma

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Peter Reitsma lives and works in Milton, Ontario. He has worked as an illustrator and graphic artist for most of his career. His paintings examine the possibility of expressing on canvas the spiritual places we find ourselves in when engaging culture. To view more of his work, visit petereitsma.com.
I joined the Golf Lakes Harmony Notes while in Florida this past winter. It’s been fun. The choir sings popular music (from six decades ago) and, surprisingly, an abundance of Christian pieces. In fact, the choir’s motto is Psalm 104:33: “I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.”

We have a gifted director and accompanist, both 79 years young. They are “retiring” at the end of the season. Thankfully, replacements have already been recruited. Our choir “uniform” varies: blue Golf Lakes polo shirts and white pants for casual events, black and white for church services, sequined teal capes for sing-outs and sequined silver capes with fringe for concerts.

One event stands out. Our choir visited Westminster Towers, a sizable residence for seniors in Bradenton, owned and operated by a Presbyterian association. We entered a spacious auditorium, decorated for St. Patrick’s Day, with festive green streamers and a stuffed toy leprechaun grinning rather manically on a desk at the back of the room. Many residents were already seated; more were arriving. A solid audience of about 75 seniors.

Ruth, our pianist and song leader, handed out the songbooks.

Before our performance, we chatted with the residents. A blond woman on the sidelines, with a walker in front of her, thanked me for coming. Our pleasure, I assured her. The lady next to her asked where we were from. I told her we were from Golf Lakes, a mobile home park, but I couldn’t make her understand. “I’m blind,” she said, as if that explained it.

We opened our binders and sang some oldies: “When I Grow Too Old to Dream,” “Let It Be Me,” “Catch a Falling Star.” Many of the residents were singing along—a woman whose head shook uncontrollably, her dangling earrings glinting and dancing in time, a man with a cowboy hat, a couple of ladies in look-alike cardigans. In the front row a heavyset younger woman sat in a wheelchair, her hair pulled back into a severe ponytail, her glasses as enormous as those we wore in the 70s, in matching sky blue jogging pants and t-shirt, both embellished with silver studs. She had a presence, singing along confidently with every number. A black male attendant yawned through most of our selections, but pitched in on “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” Every time our pianist called out a number, a handsome gentleman with a cheerful expression shouted it out again—louder. Directly across from me was a man with his arms folded across his chest, scowling. He didn’t sing at all. But, I thought to myself, he’s in the front row.

Maybe that means something.

Help and comfort

At the end of our “concert” we sang “Happy Birthday” to three individuals who had March birthdays. One was our jovial announcer. He told us, chuckling, that he was 39. The blond lady who had thanked me for coming had a birthday, too. She was 85. The third birthday celebrant was a diminutive woman in a wheelchair, draped in an elegant paisley shawl. She was 96. With a captivating smile, she gestured at us, repeating, “I love you all. I love you all. Thank you. Thank you.”

Birthdays. A cause for joy. Or not. Three men in the audience had significant bruises on their bald heads. One had a black eye, too. There were more than a few listeners whose heads hung on their chests, never looking up once. Many of our audience members weren’t permitted, because of diet restrictions, to accept the homemade cookies we handed out.

Yet one song got a rousing response: “Count Your Blessings.” I, myself, could hardly choke out the words watching these aged folks sing the final verse:

So, amid the conflict whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey’s end.

I hope we were a help and comfort for those elderly friends. Could it be we were their attending angels that day? I know this much. If I ever end up in a nursing home, I won’t be consoled by the lucky of the Irish or leprechauns or homemade cookies. I’ll be pining for the songs of faith. And if those good old hymns are sung by some ragtag choir of ordinary seraphs, I won’t care what uniform they’re wearing. They’ll be clothed with Christ. Yes.

Cathy Smith is a retired teacher and contributing editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.

The choir’s uniform varies for church services, sing-outs and concerts.

Cathy Smith is a retired teacher and contributing editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ont.
Q. I am 38 and a stepmother of three, as well as a biological mother of two children. They range in age from two to 15 years old. When I was expecting my first child, I was told by my husband’s sister that once I had my “own” child I would need to work hard at loving all my children equally. I think I have failed.

I married my husband when he had been a widower for two years. His wife lost her life to cancer. I was told she struggled valiantly in an effort to beat this devastating disease. My husband deeply mourned his wife’s death until he met me, at which time he began to feel some hope for a healthier and happier future for himself and his children. There was no doubt I was ready for the challenge. I had been a career woman since age 18 and longed to be a wife and mother.

I love my husband, but I have doubts about how good a mother I am for our oldest three children. Sometimes they seem like strangers to me. Especially when they are behaving badly and I wonder whether I can help them through their adolescence and whether they are your birth, step or adopted children. They are all different and your children in terms of who they are as people with specific strengths and weaknesses to a certain criteria. A more helpful suggestion is that you love the essence of your children to know you love them even if they are not perfect. Mature and healthy unconditional love.

Pray for your children

At the same time, having to love them equally means parents have to measure up to what we have done. Your sister-in-law’s advice is too simplistic for this complex situation. She offered her opinion when you were in a sensitive time of change: newly married, stepmother of three, expecting your first child after being in the career world for quite a few years. I am not surprised you took her suggestion to heart. It shows you are conscientious about your role in your family.

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A. In the 1880s, an anthropologist discovered that the Inuit have hundreds of words to describe snow. Maybe we need as many words for “love,” because it is hard to be specific with only one word.

In terms of your struggles, here are a few points to ponder.

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At the same time, having to love them equally means parents have to measure up to a certain criteria. A more helpful suggestion is that you love the essence of your children in terms of who they are as people with specific strengths and weaknesses whether they are your birth, step or adopted children. They are all different and your love for each of them can also be different.

Pray for your children

From what you shared above, it seems you are in touch with yourself and are aware of what you are feeling. Many of us prefer to blame others for our struggles. But in your case, you are simply being honest. This sense of self-awareness can be your major strength.

The idea of your older children seeming like strangers could be about your loss of important bonding time when they were babies and toddlers. As a consequence, there is a sense of mystery to them that is normal considering you came later into their lives. Do not hesitate to pray for insight into your older children’s lives so that you can move towards a sense of peace in this area.

By looking at your children’s range in ages, I believe you are heading into adolescence with the three older ones. I suggest educating yourself in terms of this stage in their lives. Equally important is educating yourself in terms of the trauma they have experienced through the tragic loss of their mother.

An important bottom line for your children is your unconditional love. They need to know you love them even if they are not perfect. Mature and healthy unconditional love is more than a feeling or a decision. It is also an on-going action. Continue to hug them if they are open to it no matter how old they are becoming.

If you continue to feel troubled, feel free to see a therapist who specializes in blended families. Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and member of the Fleetwood CRC in Surrey, B.C.

How shiny will your crown of life be?

Christ suffered God’s wrath to reconcile us to him. Gratitude is our response; greater striving to love him ever deeper with heart, soul, mind and strength as our “priceless treasure, source of purest pleasure.”

In theology it’s called sanctification. At the end of our sanctification road, God will judge each of us according to our works, then assign us our place in his heavenly Kingdom, and on the New Earth after the Judgment, based on those works. Does it seem unfair that God doesn’t reward every Christ-believer the same gold star, so to speak? Some serve Christ more steadfastly and far longer than others; some endure torture; some give their lives for him. We get “paid” accordingly. Jesus confirms that in his parables of the minor/talents (Matt. 25:Luke 19) and the workers in the vineyard (Matt. 20). Perhaps the Reformed tradition downplays this because the Reformers were so afraid of “works righteousness.” Our works can’t save us; but God judges and rewards us “according to what we have done” (Rev. 20:12).

At the Last Day “God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccles. 12:14). We will be forced to give account “for every careless word we utter” (Matt. 12:36). Paul warns the Corinthians that they must “build with care” on Christ our foundation, lest they barely get their reward: “If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames” (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

Paul also warns them they must leave behind lives of sin if they want to inherit the Kingdom of God at all: “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.” Then he lists sins that, if not repented, will keep us out of the Kingdom. Paul later reiterates, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 3:12-15).

There’s a full reward awaiting us in glory: “To the service given unto God’s dear Son; It will make the joys of heaven all the brighter; We’ll receive it when the victory is won.

There’s a crown of life for humble service rendered; There’s a crown unsafing given for our zeal; Crowns of joy and glory for the hosts unnumbered, And thro’ faith we all may have them if we will. From an anonymous 19th c. Memonite hymn

Marian Van Til (mvanilt@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, NY. She blogs at ReformedRevelry.wordpress.com.
Liberation memories

Dick Kronemeyer

My experience of Liberation Day occurred on April 13, 1945 – three days before my 12th birthday. It is important to understand some of the situation of that time in order to appreciate what I was feeling that day. The whole country, including our town of Haulerwijk in the northern province of Friesland, was under the foreign rule of the Nazis. The people who collaborated with the occupying forces were deeply resented by everyone else, and this translated, of course, into passionate hatred expressed by the younger generation. I was only seven years old when the war broke out and almost 12 when we were liberated and all during that time we hated the Nazis, but we utterly detested these “traitors.” They – the ones who embraced the enemy – were appointed to various government positions, which included jobs in keeping law and order. They were known as landwacht – what is now called the Militia. These men were easily recognized by their uniforms, and they often gloated in their positions of authority over us.

During this time of occupation many things were forbidden, including the playing or singing of the Dutch national anthem, Wilhelmus. But many people in our area had small organs in their homes, which were often used to sing and play religious and folk songs. We had one of these organs in our home and I was fortunate to have been given a few years of weekly lessons. One day as I practiced, I was trying to play our national anthem. But I was warned by my parents to play it softly, since it would be a serious offense if it was heard by the wrong ears!

We were eating dinner on April 13 when a strange-looking military vehicle came into view across the canal from our house. It stopped at a curve in the road and then we realized, with an almost electric shock, that this was not a German machine, but a Canadian weapons-carrier! At that exact moment a group of five Militia men, on their bikes, also came into view from the opposite direction. When they spotted the military vehicle they promptly saluted and began almost strutting on their bikes, showing off to what they thought were their comrades in arms. What a hilarious spectacle it was to watch their confusion and hesitation, and then when the realization hit them, we could literally see them sag. They thought they would quickly turn around and disappear, but the Canadians swiveled their small cannon into their direction, and yelled at them to continue in the direction they were travelling!

We were, of course, ecstatic at the news that this was Liberation Day for our community. I immediately jumped onto the organ bench and began to play the Dutch anthem as loudly as I could, and this time my Dad told me to play it with all the stops wide open!

Dick Kronemeyer left Holland almost exactly seven years after Liberation Day and moved to Smithers, B.C., where he lives with his wife, Connie. He had hoped to instill an interest in organ playing in their six children, but alas, it didn’t catch on!

WWII veterans honoured at the 65th anniversary in 2010.

Remembering the Liberation of the Netherlands 1944-1945

In gratitude for the tremendous sacrifice in the cause of our freedom, we express our sincere appreciation to the Canadian soldiers for their courage and effort in our liberation. Some of us walked through the cemeteries in Holten in Holland, remembering the Battle of the Grebbeberg. Silently we strolled among the many white markers on the graves of those young soldiers, many just 18 years old. We praised God as we mourned your tribute. Many of us now live in our adopted country, proudly Canadian. A fraction of those surviving war emigrants now live in Shalom Manor & Gardens in Grimsby, Ontario. Established by the grace of God, we are a long-term care home established 35 years ago and an assisted living facility established in 2006. We appreciate the sacrifices made and offer congratulations and thankfulness on this 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Netherlands.

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email: orgnbdot@gmail.com

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**Hillie Westerhoff**

Born in Groningen, Netherlands on March 31, 1917

Died in Brampton, Ontario, Canada on February 19, 2015.


Survived by her brother Hessel van der Veen in the Netherlands.

And by children

Ceus Westerhoff (Nelly)
Irene Jonker (Leo)
Catharina Dryfhout (David)
Margaret Kingma (Peter)
17 grandchildren and
35 great-grandchildren

Throughout the years of her life, Hillie remained a strong and active woman, managing her domain and life with dedication and unwavering Christian faith. As health concerns increased, her spirit remained strong and love for her family and friends never faltered. Hillie Westerhoff, having now started a new life in God’s presence, will also live on much loved and treasured in the memories of many.

For correspondence:
C Westerhoff
4957 Merritt Road
Beamsville ON, L0R 1B1

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If interested, please send your resume to ericjondief@yahoo.com.

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- provide opportunities for the youth to engage in transformative, missional experiences
- work in concert with the staff team to support our intergenerational focus

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**Submissions**

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APRIL 27, 2015

Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Contact admin@christiancourier.ca to have an event listed here. Cost: $10 or free with a display ad. Calendar of Event listings are limited to 1-5 lines.

May 1 “Thank You Canada” concert tour with the Soli Deo Gloria Christian Male Choir. Mountainview Christian Reformed Church, Grimsby. 7:30 p.m. See ad pg 17 for details.

May 2 “Thank You Canada” concert at Knox Presbyterian Church, Woodstock. 7:30 p.m.

May 4 “Thank You Canada” concert at Hebron CRC, Whitby. 7:45 p.m.

May 5 “Thank You Canada” concert at Redeemer University College, Ancaster. 8:00 p.m.

May 6 “Thank You Canada” concert at St. George’s Anglican Church, Guelph. 8:00 p.m.

May 7 “Thank You Canada” concert at Cathedral of St. Catharine of Alexandria, St. Catharines. 8:00 p.m.

Church community rallies
continued from page 20

The first two performances were held in the Tillsonburg Christian Reformed Church, March 26 and 27. Proceeds from these evenings were donated to Community Advocates Tillsonburg, which helps provide transportation for adults with developmental disabilities in the Town of Tillsonburg.

Barn collapse

Sunday, March 29, just two days after the final performance, the plight of a family from the Tillsonburg congregation was shared during the service. Joel and Amy Van Gurp and their three young children had moved to a pig farm in PEI in January, one of the harshest winters on record. The weight of over 17 feet of snow caused the barn roof to collapse March 22. In Ontario, some beautiful children’s hearts connected messages in the Fulgham play with the plight of the family who had recently moved away. “Share,” “hold hands” and “understand and reflect the light” resonated with the Renkema children, who asked, “Mom, can we do the play one more time and have the proceeds go to the family?” Clearly the word ‘LOOK,’ which the kindergarten class had difficulty spelling correctly, also took on a much larger view! “When we want to see God, we have to LOOK for him, and when we LOOK for him, we will see him!”

In three days, 20 people plus the cast and crew rallied together, everyone needing to be on board to make a benefit performance possible in such short notice. As one participant said, “We know what it’s like to start on a farm. We know it’s hard. We just did what God calls us to do. All glory and honour go to God!”

WINDFALLS

Sweepstakes Inn

The owner of a rustic Maine inn plans to give the property away to the winner of an essay contest open until May. In a concise 200 words, applicants must share their interest and qualifications for running Center Lovell Inn and Restaurant, which has been valued at $905,000. Owner Janice Sage says the fee of $125 per submission will cover the cost of the 210-year-old building if 7,500 people participate.

Her goal is to help talented people without the means to “just go out and buy an inn like this. Now all they need to do is write and convince me.” The winner must agree to keep the business operational. Sage herself won a similar contest in 1993, set up by the previous owner.

“I came here on angel’s wings,” she said. “I hope I can do the same for someone else.”

Hands-on benefits

“If I had known how wonderful it would be to have grandchildren,” as the saying goes, “I’d have had them first.” Sure, grandparents appreciate grandkids for restoring a certain zest to life. Who can resist the slight weight of a newborn against your chest, the outstretched hands of a toddler or the story tumbling out in one long stream of words from a middle-schooler? But that’s not all – science has another reason for the importance of this relationship.

A recent study shows that babysitting the grandkids may prevent Alzheimer’s. Researchers in Australia found that people who spent one day a week caring for grandparents enjoyed increased brain function and memory and thus had a lower risk of developing neurodegenerative disease. Other studies have linked babysitting with decreased rates of depression, but this is the first study examining the role of grandparenting on cognition. And don’t forget how much it helps parents, especially those with young kids. Let me take this chance to thank my parents for babysitting our son twice a week for nearly two years!

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All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten: Church community rallies around young family

Etty Broer

All that school mumbo jumbo? Turns out it really can’t hold a candle to the wisdom of kindergarten. A group of amateur actors, from seniors to recent college graduates, many of whom have never acted on the stage before, presented a dramatic production of Robert Fulgum’s bestselling book and donated all the proceeds.

Although this group is drawn together from all walks of life – professionals, farmers, trades people and home makers – they learned together the wit and wisdom of Fulgum’s book.

Spurred on by Director Etty Broer, the intrepid performers mastered their lines. The stories resonated with the personal experiences of many in the production. You could see it in the eyes of the watchers and the watched – from the shy little boy who insists on playing a pig in Cinderella, to the man who flies over Los Angeles in an aluminum chair and weather balloons, to the mother of the bride who graciously adapts to an unexpected disaster. Every story celebrates each person’s uniqueness.

Continued on page 19.