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Clarion

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AMONG THE MOST REPRESSIVE ISLAMIC REGIMES ARE SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN AND AFGHANISTAN

Cornelis Van Dam

Persecuted

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Christian communities that have existed for millennia are at risk

It is difficult for us living in freedom and being able to worship publicly on the Lord's Day even to begin to imagine what Christians who don't have these blessings go through as believers. The relentless oppression of Christians is only too real in many parts of the globe. Indeed, "Christians are the single most widely persecuted religious group in the world today" – a sobering fact mentioned in the latest book of Paul Marshall, *Persecuted* (2013), which he wrote with co-authors Nina Shea and Lela Gilbert. And the oppression is getting worse. We in the free West are sheltered from this harsh reality, also by the fact that the mainline media pay relatively little attention to this persecution. Yet, it is something that we as Christians need to be aware of. The information for this article (as referenced by the page numbers in parentheses) has come from the book *Persecuted* which has relied on impeccable sources for its data and is a project of the Hudson Institutes' Center for Religious Freedom.

The situation as it is

Christians are harassed and suffer in 133 countries, two-thirds of the world's nations. The vast majority of Christians live outside the developed West. What exactly constitutes religious persecution or oppression?

The US International Religious Freedom Act (1998) defines violations of religious freedom to include arbitrary prohibitions on, restrictions of, or punishment for:

- assembling for peaceful religious activities such as worship, preaching, and prayer;
- speaking freely about one's religious beliefs;
- changing one's religious beliefs and affiliation;
- possession and distribution of religious literature, including Bibles;
- raising one's children in the religious teachings and practices of one's choice.

Furthermore, violations of religious freedom include:

- arbitrary registration requirements;
- any of the following acts if committed on account of an individual's religious belief or practice: detention, interrogation, imposition of an onerous financial penalty, forced labour, forced mass resettlement, imprisonment, forced religious conversion, beating, torture, mutilation, rape, enslavement, murder, and execution. (5-6)

The worst offenders are communist and Islamic regimes. Here is a small sampling of persecution. In North Korea, the most militantly atheistic country in the world (51), Christians are executed or sent to prison camps simply because they possess a Bible. For example, a middle-aged woman, who lived in a city of north Pyongan Province was caught with a Bible in her home. She was taken out of her home and publicly shot to death at a threshing floor of a farm (1). Due to intense persecution, Christians in North Korea have been nearly annihilated over the last fifty years and continue to suffer horrific oppression. However, though the risks are great, Christians continue to gather in secret (54, 58).

China generally allows worship within an officially recognized church but the members of such a church have no right to select their church leaders or to provide religious education for their youth. Repression has been increasing in the last couple of years as house churches are especially being targeted (37). Most Christian gatherings are illegal and can result in arrest and long sentences in prison camps which are notoriously inhumane. The verified tortures experienced by arrested Christians are appalling (e.g., 31). Yet, in spite of all the repression, China may very well have the largest church attendance in the world (16) and there are probably more Christians than members of the Communist party.

Among the most repressive Islamic regimes are Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan, none of which even allows the existence of a church. However, there are Christians in these countries. Saudi Arabia's grand mufti has publicly declared that it is necessary to destroy all the churches of the region, including those outside of Saudi Arabia (12, 156). State schools teach students to hate Christians as infidels and those who convert to Christianity can be executed either by the state or by individual Muslims (158). Also in other Middle Eastern countries, the killing of

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Living in a place where we can worship in freedom, it is difficult to really understand what Christians go through in other areas of the world. In this issue's editorial, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam discusses the persecution of Christians around the world and what we can do about this situation.

The history of the persecution of Christians is the topic of our next article by Dr. Carl Trueman, reprinted with permission from www.reformation21.org. In this article he reviews *The Myth of Persecution* by Candida Moss.

Dr. Arjan de Visser concludes his three part review of Christopher J.H. Wright's book *The Mission of God*. We also have a book review on *Stories from Years Gone By: Cuba Our Private Mission Field* by Leendert Kooij.

Issue 17 has our regular Treasures New and Old meditation, the Education Matters column, a Canticle by Rev. George van Popta, as well as a Mission News insert.

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Cover photo: Diriyah – old city near Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Christians rarely leads to murder convictions (e.g., 193). The Muslim oppression is severe throughout most of the Middle East and even includes such horrendous practices as kidnapping Christian girls and women to force them into the Muslim faith by way of forced marriage or slavery, burning churches, destroying Christian homes, imprisonment, and the vigilante killing of Christians with impunity. As a result, the presence of Christianity in that part of the world has plummeted and the so-called Arab spring is really a Christian winter (287). Christian communities that have existed for millennia are at risk. Islamic countries in sub-Saharan Africa are also notorious for attacks on and murders of Christians and places like Pakistan, Malaysia, and Turkey have extremely repressive policies towards Christians which also threaten their very existence in these jurisdictions.

What should we do?

When one reads through a book like *Persecuted*, one can feel powerless and unable to help. What is recounted there on the testimony of good witnesses is unbelievably shocking. One's heart cries out for those suffering and giving their life for their faith in Christ. Yet there are things that we can do. To begin with, it is important that we remember them in prayer, both in private as well as public worship. For the latter we have a good example within the prayer for the needs of Christendom found in our *Book of Praise*. By remembering them in prayer, our prayers accompany theirs to the heavenly throne of grace (cf. Rev 6:9-11). In this way we identify with them and make their cause our own. That association has implications.

There are things that we can do

It means that we show interest in their lot by keeping informed. A good place to begin is to read *Persecuted*. There are also excellent websites that give valuable up-to-date credible information such as World Watch Monitor (formerly Compass Direct) and the Hudson Institute's website www.PersecutionReport.org. Being informed means that we are more motivated than ever to help bring the gospel and encouragement to those who daily live under all kinds of threats simply because their faith. The Middle East Reformed Fellowship (http://www.merf.org/) is an excellent place to direct aid for spreading the gospel in the Muslim world. Similar aid can be given to support Reformed missions in the communist world.

Being informed also means that we can engage our elected representative on the federal level and let him or her know that we are concerned about the outrageous persecution of Christians that is taking place and escalating, especially in Muslim countries and so seek to influence foreign policy. A positive step in this regard is Prime Minister Harper's establishing the Office of Religious Freedom, thereby making the promoting of freedom of religion a Canadian foreign policy priority. Although it remains to be seen how effective the new Office of Religious Freedom will be, it is an important step in the right direction. It provides an official outlet for Canada to highlight abuses and persecution of Christians, as well as other minority religions. If this happens, hopefully the media will also devote more attention to the unspeakable abuse Christians suffer in so much of the world.

In conclusion

History and current events show that we cannot take our Christian freedoms for granted. We live in a society that is discarding its Christian moorings, a development which puts at risk our own religious freedoms, such as the freedom of speech. This freedom has been eroded in the past decades and Canada's Supreme Court decision on Saskatchewan versus Whatcott (2013) is seen by many experts as being on balance a setback for religious freedom. So, we must be vigilant to defend the freedoms we cherish and speak up as necessary. It can mean getting more involved in the political process of our country and relating to our elected representatives. Help in this regard is available through an organization like ARPA which seeks to equip and encourage Reformed Christians to political action and to bring a biblical perspective to our civil authorities (http://arpacanada.ca/index.php/aboutarpa). C

David DeBoer

Wages That Bring Life

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"The wages of the righteous bring them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment."

(Proverbs 10:16)

April 15, 1872 saw a parade of 10,000 people wind through the streets of Toronto. The parade was organized to protest the arrest of twenty-four leaders from the Toronto Typographical Union who had been agitating for a nine hour work day and a fifty-four hour work week. This parade led to similar events in Ottawa and Hamilton and across Canada. Protesters in Ottawa swept the Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, out of his home and took him to City Hall, where he promised to rid the land of "such barbarous laws" as had allowed the arrest of the men from the Toronto union.

This is generally recognized as a defining moment in the Canadian labour movement. The parade was also the beginning of our Labour Day holiday. It became tradition for trade unionists to hold rallies and demonstrations on Thanksgiving Day. Eventually the government set aside the first Monday of September for this purpose.

Although we often do not approve of the methods used by the labour movement, most of us have benefitted from it in the form of better protection at the job site, higher wages, paid vacation time, and benefits. We no longer know the heavy demands and heavy-handed action that caused many to rebel against the greed of big businesses and wealthy barons. We consider it a basic right to be fairly compensated for our labour and to share in the profits of the businesses that our efforts make possible.

My intent is not to start a discussion about the labour movement but to use the occasion of the Labour Day holiday to highlight how much effort has been put into increasing a worker's wages. So much effort is made to get more money and time to spend on ourselves. But the Bible reminds us that there are more important things to work for than the cheque we bring home.

The wise teacher tells his protégé in Proverbs 10:16 that there are wages that bring life. A righteous man looks forward to an eternity of joy praising God, which is far more satisfying than the temporary pleasure of a bigger paycheque. When a worker labours to earn a paycheque, he provides for his physical needs, but true life cannot be obtained on the jobsite or through the increase of one's financial worth. Both the righteous man and the wicked do their daily work, but the righteous man is rewarded with life while the income of the wicked is punishment. Both may earn the same physical rewards, but only the man who serves and loves God will enjoy the reward of eternal life. Whatever effort we make to increase our wages, we ought to be even more devoted to the wages of righteousness that bring life. The hardworking labourer will enjoy the temporary benefit of wealth that rusts, fades, and spoils, but the devoted servant of God will enjoy the lasting blessing of a reward that is eternal.

If we are sensitive to the doctrines of grace, we may feel uncomfortable with the language of "wages." We confess that we cannot earn life, nor does God ever owe us a reward (LD 24). Paul reminds us in Romans 4:1-8 that the reward of a righteous man is credited to his account by a gracious act of God. Jesus alone is truly and completely righteous and deserves the Father's blessing, while every human only deserves God's curse. Yet God promises you a heavenly treasure through Christ when you put your faith in him as Saviour. As long as we understand that our "wages" are an undeserved gift, it is appropriate for us to speak of a righteous man "earning" a reward of life and blessing.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6:19-20 to work for better wages than can be obtained through our efforts on the jobsite or in the office, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." This Labour Day we should remember what wages and treasures are truly valuable and should be thankful to Christ for the work he did for us in his life, death, and resurrection, and for the work he is still doing at God's right hand.

People in Toronto in 1872 helped achieve higher wages for less work, but Jesus has obtained for us wages that bring life. Our main goal and effort should be to enjoy the wages that bring life. C

Carl Trueman

The Myth of Persecution

Carl R. Trueman is Paul Woolley Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary. His latest book is The Creedal Imperative *(Crossway, 2012).*

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Candida Moss, T*he Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne 2013), 320 pp., $25.99

This is an entertaining, at times thought-provoking, but deeply flawed book. For all of its underlying scholarship, it is reminiscent of those Christmas specials on the History Channel where some learned scholar announces to the camera that the Bible never specified that there were three wise men. Cue portentous pause, the assumption apparently being that somewhere in the ensuing silence one can hear two thousand years of Christian theology (rather than a mere century of kitsch festive season artwork) collapsing into a heap of rubble.

Moss wears her learning lightly and obviously enjoys her role as aspiring iconoclast. She articulates her basic thesis in clear, readable prose: in the first three centuries empire wide, intentional, targeted persecution of Christians specifically for their Christianity was extremely rare; and martyrs were more significant because of the manner in which they were represented in literature than they were in their own times and contexts. Further, it is often difficult to date with precision the martyrs who do survive or to ascertain how historically reliable they are. As a historical thesis it is scarcely radical and reflects what I was taught as an undergraduate and what I teach in my M.Div. classes at Westminster Theological Seminary; it is the political thesis to which she moves that is far more contentious.

Moss's historical thesis depends upon a number of points. She points out that it was not Christianity in itself but certain implications of Christianity (for example, the problematic nature of loyalty to the emperor and the civic sphere for those of an exclusive religion) which created much of the hostility. She also tends to posit late dates for martyr accounts, tying them to developments concerning what we might describe, for want of a better phrase, as the fetishizing of the body exemplified in the rise of monasticism and the cult of the saints in fourth-century Christianity.

There is a sense in which the general thesis relies heavily upon the ignorance of the reader. Throughout the book, the impression is given that the paucity of empire-wide persecution of Christians and the lack of reliable first-hand accounts of the same will somehow deal a devastating blow to the faithful. It may be that there are some out there who think the Romans organized mass persecution for centuries before it all ended rather unexpectedly with the sudden conversion of Constantine; but surely no first year undergraduate or modestly well-read churchgoer would believe such a narrative. Further, it is also true - and not seriously contested by any scholar of which I am aware – that Christians are severely persecuted in numerous areas of the world today. True, this is not really the case in America; but persecution today is no myth. A dove may not have emerged from Polycarp's side as he died; but millions of Christians have died for their faith, or for the social outworking of their faith, throughout the centuries. To talk of the "myth" of persecution is somewhat mischievous.

This presumption of ignorance on the part of the reader leads to some oddly patronising comments. On page 89, for example, we are informed in parenthesis that "yes, the Christians owned slaves." Cue History Channel pause and sound of distressed faithful abandoning the church in droves? I doubt it. The fact that Christians owned slaves is surely news only to anyone who has not read the New Testament or seen any of the many new atheist polemics which delight in texts such as Colossians 3:22. Moss's comment thus left me wondering whether her target audience was not, after all, benighted Bible-thumping Christians but rather the fan base of *Jersey Shore*.

Further, even though the early church accounts of martyrdoms are stylized or enhanced, it does not really undermine claims about the general reality of persecution even if it should make us very cautious about the details of individual accounts. We know from the writings of Ignatius of Antioch that persecution and death for the faith (at least as assumed in the mind of the Christian even if not legally defined as such by Rome) became an ideal for some Christians very early on in the post-apostolic world. There is also the rise of monasticism in the fourth century. Moss is possibly correct to locate the rise of martyrdom literature with the fetishizing of saints' bodies; but I am not sure that one can draw too many hard conclusions about the reality or prior function of martyrdom from such later use, even if true. It would seem at least arguable that the accounts are designed to maintain, as an aspirational ideal, the kind of physical asceticism which the church had previously found in the persecution it had suffered from the state.

I would also dispute her reading of the early second century letter of Pliny, governor of Pontus Bithynia, who uncovered a Christian community in his territory and meted out harsh punishment upon those who refused to abjure their religion. We know from Pliny's other letters that he was an unctuous creep. This was, after all, the man who did well under the despotic Domitian and yet switched sides and survived to prosper under Trajan. That in itself is eloquent testimony to his political astuteness. He was a man always wanting to ingratiate himself with those higher up the political ladder in order to bolster his own standing. Given the confident way in which he deals with the Christians and yet, despite his "ignorance" of proper process, happens upon essentially the correct process, it seems to me a perfectly reasonable reading of the letter to Trajan that Pliny did know of precedents for treating Christians but wanted to present his actions to the Emperor as a form of wise guesswork which might therefore elicit praise from his master. Maybe my interpretation is wrong but it is at least worth pondering. That it is not even considered reflects a methodological flaw that runs throughout the work: a "maybe" in interpretation becomes a certain foundation for further historical argument and confident assertion. A tad more self-awareness regarding appropriate levels of certainty based upon contestable interpretations of narrow evidential bases would have been most welcome in Moss's work.

Now to Moss's political thesis. The most contentious and indeed mischievous part of the book is the connection Moss makes between what one might call the breakdown in modern political discourse and the "myth of persecution." While she says that she is not targeting the Right in particular (p. 12), in the context of the book as a whole such a claim seems like so much throat-clearing. I am no fan of the American Right and have no sympathy with the Glenn Becks and right-wing conspiracy theorists; but, brief protestation notwithstanding, Moss does seem to focus rather exclusively upon the Right and its shortcomings.

Her argument is simple: the myth of the persecution of Christians has fuelled a paranoid victim mentality on the political Right that imperils intelligent civil discourse. Ironically, as she makes this case, she herself engages in precisely the kind of myth making that she rightly decries. On page 252, she recounts her shock at hearing two students at Notre Dame expressing no sympathy for a nine-year old rape victim who had had an abortion. She was right to be shocked; but if her point is that the Christian mythology of persecution polarizes the world around and destroys civil discourse, then she herself here provides a good example of how alternative myths do much the same.

Moss's definition of myth seems to mean "a narrative which radically distorts actual historical realities." Surely it is then the case that, of all current political issues, abortion more than any other depends upon an established mythology: the idea that its primary reason for existence is to serve the victims of rape and incest? Like the little girl referenced by Moss, there are such victims and it is indeed horrible to hear of two young women expressing no sympathy. But if Moss can claim this lack of sympathy is somehow connected to a myth of Christian martyrdom, then how much more is lack of sympathy for babies in the womb connected to a "mythology" of rape and incest? I wonder if Moss will follow this volume with one that debunks the pro-choice myth of persecution that poisons current political and ethical debate far more than that of Christians with, I have to say, far less historical and contemporary evidential support. That would be most useful.

Thus, given the ultimate political purpose of the book, the final problem with Moss's thesis is not really historical at all. It is the fact that she fails to set the function of martyr narratives within the wider framework of modern politics. The problem is not martyr myths; it is that politics, stripped of any common ground and left only as an increasingly angry struggle between competing and incommensurate narratives, has become a species of mere emotivism, of which stories of persecution are simply one obvious tool. How iconoclasm, which creates its own mythology by building certainties, historical and moral, on debatable readings of history, is to serve in overcoming this impasse is entirely unclear to me. But, then again, I am not part of the *Jersey Shore* fan base. C

Arjan de Visser

The Mission of God

by Christopher J.H. Wright (Part 3)

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We continue our review of Christopher J.H. Wright's book *The Mission of God*.[1] In previous articles I have summarized the book and mentioned a number of positives and negatives. In this last article, I raise a few more concerns.

A key aspect of Wright's book is the fact that he gives the Old Testament a significant place in building a biblical theology of mission. This is praiseworthy as such. It is a welcome correction to the approach that many authors follow (which may be summarized as: Skim through the Old Testament and move on to the New Testament as quickly as possible). At the same time, the approach followed by Wright results in the book having the feel of an *Old Testament* theology of mission, rather than a *biblical* theology of mission. There are many references to the New Testament in the book but there is no significant discussion of mission in the gospels, in Acts, or in the letters of Paul.

This would perhaps be acceptable if nothing more was at stake than that the Old Testament gets more attention in Wright's book than in most other books on mission. But something more serious is happening: because Wright is so convinced of the abiding value of Old Testament motifs such as the Exodus and the Jubilee, he does not take into account that there is significant discontinuity between the old and the new covenant. Indeed, God delivered his people socially and economically by liberating them politically from slavery in Egypt and bringing them into their own land. But the situation of the new covenant, at least in its present form, is different. For Christian believers redemption means in the first place forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and being gathered into the church as the body of Christ. And although the effects of this spill over into other aspects of the Christian life, it does not follow that Christians are always delivered from political bondage or economic hardship. One could even argue that the Christian life can, to some extent, be compared to the life of God's people in Egypt. Christians are "aliens and strangers in the world" (1 Pet 2:11-12).

Eschatology

It is not just the distinction between the old and the new covenant that is not recognized sufficiently. The same happens to the distinction between the present age and the future age when God will make all things new. Biblical promises regarding the last judgment (Rev 20:11-15) and a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21) do not get the attention they deserve. There is not a strong sense in the book that in this era we have only a foretaste of the fullness of blessings which awaits us on the new earth. Sure, Wright will admit that we do not yet see the completion of that redemptive work in present history. But he will also make statements such as: "The restoration of ecological harmony does lie within the possibilities of a redeemed human history" (410). The suggestion is that we may have great expectations about the possibility of salvation and restoration in the present era. When Wright claims that mission should focus on social, political, and environmental aspects, one almost gets the impression that God is believed to be gradually building and establishing the fullness of his kingdom on earth, and that the church is called to participate in the building process. It is a popular notion today, especially in liberal-ecumenical theology, but it is not biblical.

Weak view of sin and judgment

In this connection I need to add that Wright's book suffers from a weak view of sin and judgment. The fact that God will bring terrible vengeance upon the wicked (Rev 21:8) does not play a meaningful role in Wright's eschatology. That people need to be rescued from the coming wrath (1 Thess 1:10) is not part of his rationale

MEETING

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CHURCH NEWS

for mission work. That there is a place called Hell is not even mentioned in the book (unless I missed it; at any rate, there is no reference to hell in the book's Scripture Index).

The same weakness emerges when Wright describes the results of the Fall. He does not mention our guilt before God or our need to be reconciled with God. Instead, he focuses on "the mess" we see all around us: "Through rebellion and disobedience against our Creator God, we have generated the mess that we now see around us at every level of our lives, relationship and environment" (55). Similarly, when he describes salvation, he does not mention reconciliation with God. Instead, he says: "The solution has been initiated by God through his choice and creation of a people, Israel, through whom God intends eventually to bring blessing to all nations of the earth and ultimately to renew the whole creation" (55).

I suspect that Wright, if we asked him, would agree that forgiveness of sin is an important aspect of salvation. But it does not receive emphasis in his book. This is unfortunate. Changes in theology usually occur incrementally. In the case of Wright, the emphasis has shifted away from an emphasis on reconciliation with God to an emphasis on the restoration of creation. This is not a good development.

Social action and evangelism

This brings us to another important aspect of Wright's book: his view of the relationship between social action and evangelism. His position can be summarized in two points. First, *everything* is part of mission, whether it is preaching the gospel or helping the poor, caring for AIDS patients or protecting the environment. Second, Wright contends that it is wrong to say that evangelism should have *priority* over social action in the church's mission agenda. He prefers to say that evangelism has *ultimacy*. Quote: "We can *enter* the circle of missional response at any point on the circle of human need. But *ultimately* we must not rest content until we have included within our own missional response the wholeness of God's missional response to the human predicament" (319). What is Wright saying here is that it does not matter where we start, whether it is with evangelism or with social action, as long as *ultimately* we get to the point that we tell people the good news of Christ.

It should be noted that this represents a shift in thinking within the Lausanne movement. For many years the dominant position was that evangelism and social action are both important but that evangelism is *primary* in the mission of the church.[2] This was also the position defended by John Stott.[3] Now Wright promotes what he calls "a different way of thinking about mission" (317): We should understand mission holistically, and all aspects are equally important, whether it is social action or evangelism or action for environment.

Reflecting on this, I'm reminded of John Stott's words: "Christians should feel an acute pain of conscience and compassion when human beings are oppressed or neglected in any way. . . But is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the gospel? And how can we seriously maintain that political and economic liberation is just as important as eternal salvation?"[4]

The Apostle Paul's main concern about his own people, the Jews, was not that they were under political oppression but that they were cut off from Christ (Rom 9:1-3). His main desire for them was not that they would regain political independence but that they might be reconciled to God and be saved (Romans 10:1). Paul understood his own mandate as being a "ministry of reconciliation, that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor 5:18-19).

It is a real weakness in Wright's book that he does not deal with these passages in Paul's letters, and that he also ignores other New Testament passages that describe the character of the missionary mandate, such as the Lord's words to the apostles (Acts 1:7-8) or Paul's words to Timothy (2 Tim 4:1-5). Wright appears to be very concerned that people will be too narrow in their understanding of the church's missionary mandate (as in: focusing only on the salvation of the individual). Unfortunately, his own understanding of the missionary mandate is too broad and will inevitably lead to confusion regarding the priorities. Evangelism and church planting will be replaced by activities such as digging water wells in Africa and helping refugees settle here in North America. Nothing wrong with such activities! But if they take the place of evangelism and church planting in the church's vision for mission work, something is seriously amiss.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Wright's *The Mission of God* is an interesting and thought-provoking book with good sections on

biblical monotheism, the uniqueness of Christ, and other important issues. The outstanding feature of the book is the attempt to make the Old Testament relevant for developing a biblical theology of mission. Unfortunately, the book suffers from a strong tendency to use aspects from the Old Testament in order to promote a holistic view of mission in which social action and evangelism are seen as equally important. The book itself illustrates that core aspects of mission such as the preaching of the gospel for forgiveness of sins are pushed aside to make room for socio-political action, medical health care, and protection of the environment. The book also suffers from a weak eschatology: What the Bible presents as belonging to the future age (after the return of Christ) is drawn into the present age.

If this book is going to shape the understanding of mission work of the next generation of mission workers in the evangelical world, I'm afraid we are going to see a lot less preaching of the gospel. It may not be Wright's intention, but his book opens the door to socio-political activism receiving more attention than the preaching of the gospel and the planting of the church.

There is a well-known saying in mission circles that is attributed to Bishop Stephen Neill: "If everything is mission, nothing is mission." Wright hates that quip and refers to it as an "old knock-down line."[5] If only he had more seriously considered the danger it points to!

(Endnotes)

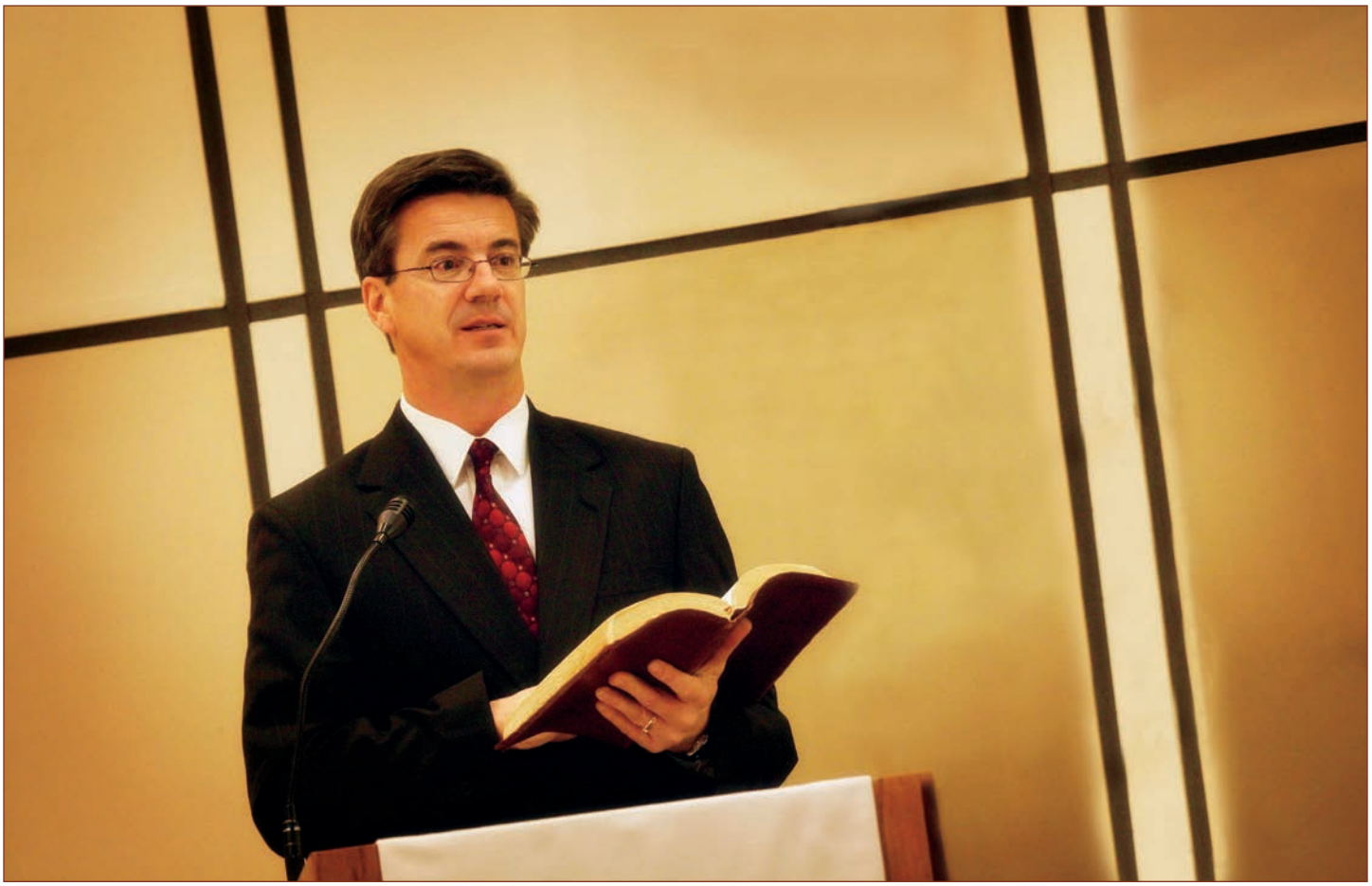
[1] Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. IVP, 2006.

[2] Lausanne Covenant, 1974, paragraph 6 *The Church and Evangelism*.

[3] See John Stott, *Christian mission in the modern world* (Falcon, 1975), 35-36.

[4] John Stott, *Christian mission*, 35.

[5] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*. (Zondervan, 2010), 25-26. C

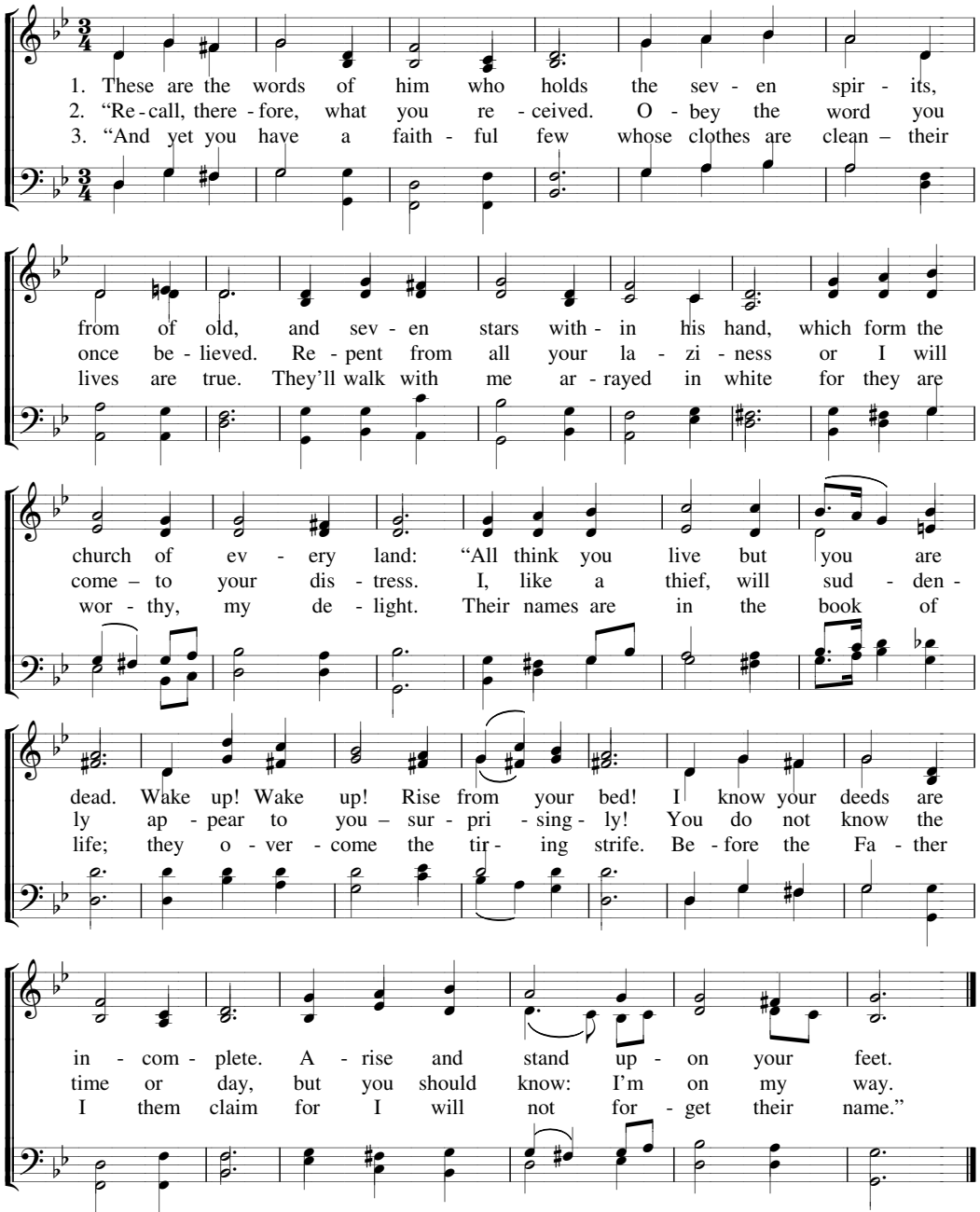


Canticle

Rev. George van Popta
is minister of the Jubilee
Canadian Reformed Church
at Ottawa, Ontario
gvanpopta@gmail.com

Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6



Text: Revelation 3: 1-6; vers. George Ph. van Popta, ©2013
Tune: Joseph Parry, 1870

MERTHYR TYDFIL
LMD

Dave Nienhuis

Did You Make the Team?

Dave Nienhuis has been teaching and coaching for over twenty years. He is a Level 3 Theory NCCP certified coach and is constantly looking to improve his coaching technique.

As soon as the sign-up sheet is posted on the athletics bulletin board, excitement fills the hallways. By the end of the day, twenty names are written down. For the coach, it's equally exciting to hear the buzz and to see the enthusiasm for the new basketball season, but for many reasons, to run a team this large is not ideal. The coach's first job is to select the team. For many coaches, selecting the team is the most difficult and dreaded task of coaching. What criteria does a coach use? How will he or she select or cut to make the team?

Previous articles in *Clarion* have set out the rationale for school sports, so I will not go into that extensively now. May it suffice to say that as teachers in a Christian elementary or high school, we encourage our students to develop their talents in many different areas: academic of course, but also social, inter- and intra-personal, musical, artistic, as well as athletic. One way that athletic talents can be developed is through school sports, especially through inter-mural (between schools) opportunities.

Criteria

As a coach, one of the most difficult balancing acts is to have my team do well (which is often defined as winning, but that is a discussion for another day) and to provide opportunities for students to be involved in school sports. This two-fold desire has ramifications for my coaching strategy and for things like the amount of playing time I give to various team members. Keeping these things in mind helps me to determine the types of athletes that I wish to have on the team. Another key factor in this discussion is the level of the team. I would argue that in the initial stages, say Grade 7 and 8, the focus is on exposure to the sport and on the skill development needed in the sport. For this reason, I would want as many students as possible to have the opportunity to participate, but a student's attitude toward the sport and his or her coachability (willingness to listen and practice) are the most important factors in selecting him or her for the team. I'm not advocating having basketball teams of twenty athletes, nor am I suggesting that all Grade 8 students must be on the team, but I would emphasize selecting students from Grade 8 first, and then choosing students from Grade 7 to fill out the team. At the high school level, the pendulum swings more towards the ability area, especially at the senior (Grade 11 and 12) level.

The first criterion that I would use to select students is personal talent or ability. In many ways this is the easiest one to quantify. If I am selecting students for a basketball team, I can measure the amount of free throws or layups that the athlete can make, or the ability to dribble the basketball well. If I am selecting for a track and field team, I can measure the distance of a throw or a jump or the time required to run a certain distance, and make a definitive decision based on the statistics. Using these statistics can make team selection decisions the easiest to justify. For example, the ten athletes who make the highest percentage of shots will be chosen for the basketball team, or the three athletes who run the 100m the quickest will represent the school at the track meet.

Another way of using the concept of talent or ability is by observing the athlete's performances in a competitive setting. I can make certain projections about the athlete's talent based on that information. Obviously, some talent will be based on previous experience in that athletic activity. Someone who has played a sport for many years should have a certain level of ability in that sport, and this may put them ahead of an athlete who is new to the sport. The concept of game sense can also be applied here. This is the ability to recognize the flow of the game and to understand when to perform a particular action. An athlete should know, for example, when to move to a particular spot on a basketball court in order to get a steal, or when to "kick" during a 1500m race in order to maximize his finishing position. Again, having experience in a particular sport should increase an athlete's game sense, but there are some athletes that seem to have that innate sense of what is going to happen and what their reaction to that

event should be, and then go and perform an action based on that event, for instance, moving to where a ball is being passed in order to intercept it.

The second aspect to consider in team selection is effort. This criterion is more difficult to quantify than talent, but is no less important to team selection. Many naturally gifted athletes never improve because of their inability or unwillingness to put the effort into improving. Learning a student's personal effort becomes clear early in the tryout period. Regardless of the sport, the coach will use various warm-ups and drills during the tryout period. Does the athlete participate in the drills with their full effort or are they chatting with the person beside them and giving desultory effort? Do they attempt to maximize the drill in terms of getting the most out of it for themselves or are they cutting corners and trying to get away with the minimum? In situations where two athletes are similar in talent, the level of effort will play a large role in determining who gets selected. Admittedly, there are athletes who put a lot of effort into an activity but do not use this effort efficiently. I remember a baseball player who ran the bases with every fibre of his being, but may have been one of the slowest runners that I have ever seen. Effort in isolation is not sufficient, but in conjunction with the other criteria, it can sway a selection in that athlete's favour.

An athlete with a positive attitude is more interested in helping out the team than in seeking personal success.

A third criterion is what I like to call "coachability." What this means is how well an athlete can work with comments, criticism, and the like made by the coach, and thus change or adapt his or her play. A coachable athlete is one who can take the comments made by the coach and apply them to the skill that they are attempting to use. They are able to understand the ideas expressed by the coach and to visualize how to apply them. They accept the comments made by the coach in a respectful and humble manner and do not feel that they know everything and cannot improve in any way. A coachable athlete is willing to learn and is constantly looking for ways to improve talents and abilities.

The final criterion is attitude. This is the broadest of the categories, but in many ways can be the most important of them all. This can be seen through having a positive attitude, by displaying sportsmanship, in being punctual, in being resilient in the face of challenges, in confidence, in being willing to accept whatever role he/she is given on the team. An athlete with a positive attitude is more interested in helping out the team than in seeking personal success. When a coach is looking for team members they are most likely looking for athletes who will be a positive influence on the team and on their peers, and who will not need to be micro-managed constantly.

Results

So where does this all lead us? As coaches, we should be clear with those who are trying out and let them know what criteria we are using in making the team selection. By this I do not mean that we have to have available every piece of data or impression that we make during the tryout period, but we should have clear reasons as to why an athlete was chosen or not chosen for the team, as difficult as that may be. Although it may be a so-called gut reaction that makes the decision for us, we should ensure that we understand the reasons for that gut reaction.

As athletes, take the coach's comments and work with them. Take a look at how you are acting and be sure to give your full effort during the process. Be punctual, listen attentively to the comments, do each drill to the best of your ability, and encourage those around you to also do their best. These behaviours will be noted by the coach. If you don't make the team, do not give up on the sport. Look for ways to improve your personal skills and try again the following year.

As parents, understand that the selection process is a difficult one for the coaches and realize that the coaches are doing their best to select the best team that they can, taking into consideration the criteria they have (hopefully) shared.

The tryout period can be a stressful one, but with open communication and with a willingness to work together, the results can be positive for all coaches, students, and parents involved. True, not everyone will be selected to the team, but all can learn and develop through the selection process, and thus grow in caring, understanding, empathizing, and character building.

Sources:

Two team selection criteria documents were used in preparing for this article. The first was the Fremont High School team selection criteria to be found at http://www.coachingtoolbox.net/blueprint/basketball-team-selection-criteria.html and the second was provided by Nick Janzen at Linden Christian School in Winnipeg, MB. C

Stories from Years Gone By: Cuba Our Private Mission Field (Book 3), Leendert Kooij (Toronto, ON: Leendert Kooij Records and Books, 2012)

Available from:

Leendert Kooij Records and Books
90 Topcliff Ave, Toronto, ON M3N 1L8
416-636-9779
landmkooy@rogers.com

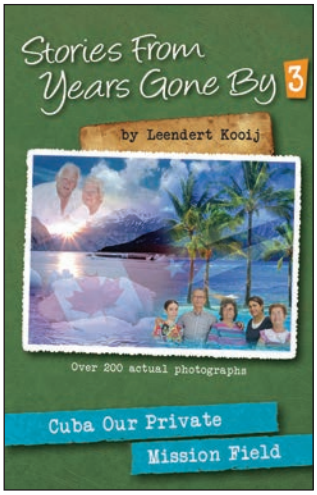
In the fall of 2012, Book 3 of Leendert Kooij's series *Stories from Years Gone By* became available. Like Books 1 and 2, this book again has a number of stories about the past and yet they are again very much connected to the present. It seems that Book 4 is already in the works. But this third book is rather unique: It is all about Cuba! So. . . very much a present day subject.

The story

In January of 1988 Leendert and Maria visited the Island for the first time, and true to tradition they went looking for a church. After a lot of asking and searching they ended up at an *Iglesia Methodista* (Methodist church). The pastor knew no English and Leendert and Maria no Spanish. But with the help of a little Spanish–English Bible and by using a variety of different texts they were able to communicate. For example, the inventive nine-year-old daughter found some verses about food and was able to invite them to stay for lunch.

Everything was very primitive. The pastor himself had spent time in jail for his faith. Christmas celebrations were forbidden. The pastor showed his guests a hymnbook of which the soldiers had ripped out the first fifty Christmas carols. And as it turned out there were only a few hymnbooks and also only a few Bibles. That visit of Leendert and Maria was a true miracle for the pastor and his family and a big eye opener for their guests.

There was a need for everything. They were just about "at the end of their rope" and seemingly ready to give up. They became church planters, staying for two years in a certain place, after which they were moved to another town or city to start all over again. The con-



gregation where they were now had forty members and after two years: 200. . . plus a number of house churches in the surrounding area. Everything had to happen in a round about way since no open church work was tolerated (the blessings of Communism). On New Year's Day Fidel Castro would give a long winded speech and both teachers and students had to write an essay about that! We simply have no idea what it is like to live under that kind of dictatorship. And everywhere you are faced with dire poverty. The monthly income for everybody including doctors was about 200 Cuban pesos, which in American money would be ten dollars! And during that first visit of Leendert and Maria to Pastor Rene Quintana and his wife Marylis, together with their two daughters Mirta and Milca and Marylis' mother, they were rudely and very firmly confronted by their plight. Leendert and Maria also met all kinds of other Cubans, each one with their own stories, which you can find in the book.

For the next twenty years Leendert and Maria visited the Quintanas, following them from one congregation to the other right across the Island of Cuba. After that first visit they went back every year with six or eight suitcases full of much needed goods and supplies as well as many hymnbooks and Bibles. How they got all that stuff through customs is a story in itself - you can safely call it a series of true miracles. Every time they went through customs under high pressure, wondering if it would go smoothly. Maria was always very handy in sidestepping the strict controls, but Leendert also started to get the hang of it. During one of his last visits (after Maria died), Cuban Customs had installed a brand new x-ray machine to look through the suitcases. There seemed to be no way out! But at the very last moment, just before his suitcases entered the machine, there was a total blackout, and after a considerable wait he was allowed to grab his suitcases and bring them safely on board the waiting bus. This was no accident! Leendert and Maria became best friends

with the Quintanas and that friendship has lasted for more than twenty years!

After a number of years, Pastor Renee was moved to another congregation. The church was in deplorable condition with big holes in the roof and floor. The cost for repairs was 800 dollars, but there was no money. So back in Canada Leendert talked to Pastor Marie Wiersma of the Britt Community Church, which the Kooij family attended when at their summer home, and they donated the money for the church to be rebuilt.

For Leendert and Maria Cuba became their "private mission field." That is what this book is all about. Captivating! The book is illustrated by over 200 actual photographs selected by Milca.

In closing

Here are some fragments of poems by Leendert Kooij about Cuba.

Cuba what a lovely country. . . Cuba what a sad reprieve
Cuba. . . full of dreaming people. . . Full of people who believe
Cuba, full of contradictions. . . Full of hope, yet full of fear
Always hoping, always striving. . . Even when there's no one near.
What is really going on there. . . What will happen in the end
When is all this suffering ending. . . When will vibrant life descend?
What a wild and turbulent his'try. . . When you study Cuban's past
Yet the people are long suff'ring. . . Longing to be free at last.

And Leendert ends the book with the lines of another poem:

I am still a work in progress. . . As I gladly carry on
Till the Lord will call my number. . . Till my work on earth is done. . . .
Every season has its pleasure. . . And I think I've had them all!
With God's help I keep on going. . . Fearing not and standing tall!

C

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BIRTHS

Children are a heritage from the Lord. Psalm 127:3a

With thankfulness to the Lord who made all things well in His time, we announce the birth of one of His children whom He has entrusted to our care

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February 13th, 2013
8 lbs 1 oz

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william_faber@telus.net

Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14b

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, we announce the birth of two more covenant children

HAILEY ELIZABETH
and
LAUREN MARIE

Born July 10, 2013
Darryl and Corrie Lof
Two little sisters for *Jenna*
Two granddaughters for
Jake and Liz Lof and John and Jennefer Vandervliet

BIRTHS

From the fullness of grace we have received one blessing after another. John 1:16

With thankfulness and joy to the Lord we welcome into our lives another daughter and sister

JAELYN DEBRA

Born on: June 28, 2013

Ryan and Bethany Vandelft

Proud big sisters: *Ashtyn and Kiersten*

12th grandchild for Jack and Adria Demooy

6th grandchild for Tony and Karen Vandelft

6th grandchild for Richard and Gert Visscher

Address: 7490 Huisman Road, Lynden, WA, USA 98264

How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth! Psalm 47:2

With thankfulness to the Lord, we announce the arrival of another son, whom we have named

SAMUEL JOHN

Born June 6, 2013

Thankful Parents:

Neal and Alisa Gelderman (nee Krabbendam)

Little brother for:

Matthew, Elizabeth, Rebecca, Lydia, and Nathaniel

Another grandchild for Albert and Sylvia Gelderman and Michael and May Krabbendam

36236 Shadbolt Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V3G 3C4

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

With thankfulness to the Lord for his continued blessings, we announce the birth of our son

RYAN LOGAN BOUWMAN

Born on June 16th, 2013

Harold and Jocelyn Bouwman

A little brother for: *Alyssa and Kennedy*

3rd grandchild to Jake and Anita Bouwman

4th grandchild to Ray and Jenette Schoon

29 Maude Lane, Guelph, ON N1E 0G3

Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the Lord or fully declare his praise? Psalm 106:2 (NIV)

With thankfulness to the Lord for entrusting to us another of His covenant children, we joyfully announce the birth of

JEANA DIANE

on June 5, 2013.

Henry and Leanna Lanting

Sophia, Theressa, Garrett and Adrianne

Jeana is the 24th grandchild for Bert and Theressa Lanting and the 13th grandchild for Gerry and Sophia Schuller

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

1973 ~ September 5 ~ 2013

Give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:4b, 5

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents

DICK and ZINA VANDEVELDE (nee Meerstra)

as they celebrate 40 years of serving the Lord together. We pray that the Lord will continue to guide and keep them each day so that they may continue to serve Him faithfully.

With love from your children and grandchildren

Vernon, BC:	Pete and Marilyn Vanderdeen *Sierra, Rebecca, Levi, Asher*
Smithers, BC:	Derek and Steph Vandevelde *Katie*
Carman, MB:	Steve and Cecilia Vandevelde *Evan, Emily*
Smithers, BC:	Glen and Ivy Vandevelde *Sarah, Jethro, Myca, Tyrel, Joel*
Richmond Hill, ON:	Philip and Rozina DeBoer *Nathan, Melanie, Matthew, Daniel, Jennifer, Evelyn*
Smithers, BC:	Edward and Christina Verhelst *Jamie, Bradley, Michael, Mark*
	Dave and Julie Krabbendam *Norah*

2647 Newens Road, Smithers, BC V0J 2N6

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

1963 ~ September 6 ~ 2013

. . .give thanks to him and praise his name for the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:4-5

As children and grandchildren, we give thanks to the Lord who in his goodness, love and faithfulness allows our parents and grandparents to celebrate 50 years of marriage.

GERRY and ALICE VANDEBURGT (Zwaagstra)

With love,

Langley, BC:	Gord and Carol Vandeburgt *Jasmine, Austin, Joshua, Sterling*
Spruce Grove, AB:	Carolyn and Jason Klaver *Meghan, Dawn, Justin*
Burlington, ON:	Doug and Karen Vandeburgt *Leah, Joel, Seth, Levi, Eden*
Langley, BC:	James and Michelle Vandeburgt *Noah, Ryan, Sara*
Langdon, AB:	Ray and Sharon Vandeburgt *Kierra, Malachi, Nikko, Alexis*
Aldergrove, BC:	Ben and Kristy Vandeburgt *Isaac, Owen, Jaxon*

22572-72 Avenue, Langley, British Columbia V2Y 2K4

55TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

1958 ~ September 6 ~ 2013

Let love and faithfulness never leave you. Proverbs 3:3a

Praising God for His great love and faithfulness, we joyfully announce the 55th Wedding Anniversary of our dear parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

YUL and COBY KRIKKE

May our heavenly Father continue to bless them and may all their generations praise His Holy Name!

With love,

Marian Meinen
- *Jonathan and Andrea,* Locklann
- *James and Kim,* Mckenna, Barrett, Cadence, Brynn
- *Greg and Jourdan*
- *Daniel*
- *Matthew and Ainsley*
- *Benjamin*

Debby and Bob Lodder
- *Alyssa and Eric Brown,* Maddy, Joey, Evan, Lucy
- *Kyle and Katrina,* Mica, Hadley, Lleyton, Bennett
- *Rianne and Jon Kruyswijk,* Ally, Mya, Jace
- *Reece and Krissy,* Rylea
- *Julia*

John and Tammy Krikke
- *Mike and Carissa*
- *Nadine*

Ray and Leona Krikke
- *Justin*
- *Amanda*
- *Melissa*

Paul and Shauna Krikke
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- *Conner*
- *Brittany*

Mark Krikke and Kirsten Vreugdenhil
- *Aidan*

Mailing address:
275 Main Street East, Suite 514, Grimsby, ON L3M 5N8

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

September 8, 1978

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

With thankfulness to our faithful heavenly Father, we announce the 35th Wedding Anniversary of our parents and grandparents

PETER AND ALIE SIKKEMA

Ancaster, ON: Lynsie and Mark Alkema
Cohen, Lucas

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

1289 Walkers Line, Burlington, ON L7M 4N7
asikkema@cogeco.ca

1973 ~ August 25 ~ 2013

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. John 1:16

Rejoicing with our parents and grandparents on the occasion of their 40th Wedding Anniversary!

WILLIAM and ELISABETH DYKEMA (nee Smouter)

We are thankful for their faithful example of a Christian marriage and we pray that God will continue to uphold them in His care. Praise God for His blessings!

With love from your children and grandchildren,

Dunnville, ON: Rachel and James Kingma
Lucas, Elisabeth, Lilia, Ayanna, Shiloh

Breslau, ON: Catie and Roger Leistra
Silas, Asa, Sullivan, Seth

Wellandport, ON: William and Leanne Dykema
Brenna, Lenaya, Audrey

Beamsville, ON: Anna and Collin Brasz
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"But I, when I awake,
shall see your face
in righteousness and glory.
LORD, with your likeness then before me,
how rich and full my joy shall be."

– Psalm 17:6 (*Book of Praise*)

After a lengthy illness, the LORD promoted to eternal Glory
his faithful servant

JOHN JANTINUS KUIK

Dearly beloved husband of
Ardis Elbertha Kuik (van Donkersgoed)
of 60 years.

Caring and loving father, grandfather, and great-grandfather of

Winnipeg, MB: Ronald Kuik
Bonnie Kuik
Edmonton, AB: *Candice Kuik*
Braxon
Dustin Kuik
Winnipeg, MB: *Aynsley Kuik*
Shania Kuik
Langley, BC: Jake and Darlene Kuik
Arin John and Kristy Kuik
Deanna Kuik
Ardis and Jason Vander Horst
Calgary, AB: *Miranda Kuik*
Langley, BC: *Corinna Kuik*
Winnipeg, MB: *Alinda and Paul Mulder*
Janessa Mulder
Lorne (D.J.)
Kendall Mulder
Daniel Mulder
Julianne Mulder

Fondly remembered by family and many friends.

John chose the text for his funeral service: *Romans 8:34-39*

Rev. R.J. den Hollander officiated.

Ardis Kuik
#107-45 Leveque Street, Winnipeg, MB R2J 1N3

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Eben-Ezer Christian School in Chatham Ontario invites applications for the **2013-2014** school year for the position of

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Eben-Ezer Christian School offers grades JK-8 with an enrolment of approximately 40 students, and five teachers.
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Chatham has much to offer the prospective applicant, being a smaller community, but within an hour's commute to larger centres.
The cost of living is significantly lower than many Canadian cities.

Chatham has a vibrant congregation of approximately 300 members. If you would like further information about school operations and opportunities, please contact

Janice Vanderveen, Ed. Com. Chair
sjvanderveen83@gmail.com
30634 Brick Road, Thamesville, ON NOP 2K0

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of Calgary, Alberta, Canada
invites applications for the
2013/2014 school year for the position of

Calgary™ Heart of the New West

PRIMARY GRADES TEACHER

Tyndale Christian School currently offers grades K-12, with an enrollment of approximately 85 students, and 6 full-time staff.

If you would like further information about the opportunities, school operations, or living in the beautiful Calgary area; please contact the board chairman:

Mr. Bart Ludwig
Home: 403-936-8616; bart.ludwig@gmail.com
Or the principal: **Mr. Ed Hoogerdyk**
Home: 403-285-4680; ed.hoogerdyk@gmail.com

Applications can be sent to:
Debbie Chin, Secretary of the Board
5851 22 Avenue NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 2C1
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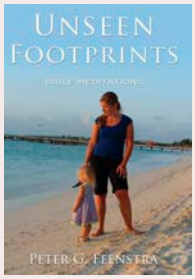

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Ontario

Sept 09 : ORCS, Mt. Elgin. 09.00 am
Sept 10 : NRC, Markham. 07.30 pm
Sept 11 : FRC, St. George. 07.30 pm
Sept 12 : Maranatha CRC, Woodstock. 07.30 pm
Sept 13 : Jordan Chr. School, Jordan. 02.00 pm
Sept 14 : Guido de Bres Chr. High School, Hamilton. 07.30 pm

Manitoba/Alberta/British Columbia

Sept 16 : Redeemer Can Ref Ch, Winnipeg, MB. 07.30 pm
Sept 17 : Carman E Can Ref Ch, Carman, MB. 07.30 pm
Sept 18 : Bethel Free Reformed Church, Monarch, AB. 07.30 pm
Sept 20 : FRC, Chilliwack, BC. 07.30 pm

Michigan, USA
Sept 25 : Providence Chr School (Stud.) Kalamazoo. 10.00 am
: Providence Chr School (Open), Kalamazoo 07.30 pm

We expect more presentations to be scheduled.

Check our website www.coah.org for more information

We hope to welcome Mr. Riko Viviers from Yakutia, Siberia to share his experiences as a missionary in Siberia, Russia.

PM 40063293