

Clarion



What's Inside

Our issue is led with Rev. Eric Kampen's editorial, "Counting COVID as Joy." We are making our way towards the one-year-mark of our current pandemic situation. How do we as believers rejoice, finding comfort and true joy in a time of restrictions and suffering?

Rev. Jim Witteveen has written an article comparing utopian and biblical worldviews, and the serious challenges Christians face living in this world. We are also thankful to have permission to reprint an interview from *New Horizons* magazine with Dr. Carl Trueman about his latest book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*.

Issue 2 includes a Treasures, New & Old meditation, the Ray of Sunshine and You Asked columns, and a report on Barrhead congregation's farewell to Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde.

Laura Veenendaal

Clarion

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- | | |
|---|--|
| 25 Counting COVID as Joy | 36 An Interview with Carl R. Trueman |
| 30 TREASURES, NEW & OLD | 39 Farewell to the Vanderlinde Family |
| 31 Biblical Realism vs. Utopian Dreams | 40 RAY OF SUNSHINE |
| 33 FROM THE PUBLISHER | 41 YOU ASKED |

LEAD ARTICLE



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Counting as ^{COVID} Joy

What were your thoughts when you saw the heading? Did it cause you to wince, thinking that joy and COVID really do not fit in the same sentence? Or, upon brief reflection, did the heading, though a bit startling, make you think of a passage such as “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...” (James 1:2).

I would hope that it was the latter. It is that angle that will be the focus of this article. It merits reflection so that we may be strengthened in our faith as we continue to experience the effects of the COVID virus, even if not directly, but in the efforts made to contain it.

Much of what gives us joy in life has been taken away from us

James and Romans

To start, it will be helpful to quote the words of James in full. We read, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). Paul speaks in a similar way in Romans 5, "But we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:3-5).

Neither James nor Paul specify what trials or sufferings they had in mind. We might be inclined to think of trials related to our faith in the form of hostility and persecution. We need not limit it to that. The LORD tested Abraham by letting him experience famine not long after he entered Canaan. He tested Old Testament Israel in the wilderness by letting them hunger, to see what was in their heart (Deut 8:3). In sum, all difficulties in life can be seen as trials and suffering.

Difficulties due to COVID

When we think of our situation due to COVID, thankfully it is not the case of having to face hunger or be in want of the various necessities of life. We are also not faced with persecution for our faith. The gospel can still be proclaimed. Our trials and suffering are due to restrictions placed upon us by the civil authorities as they seek to contain the spread of the virus. We feel the impact mostly in our social interactions.

This past holiday season will have been rather bleak and lonely compared to other years, when Christmas and New Year's was the time for enjoying the company of family and friends. We also feel the impact in terms of worship as, at best, only a part of the congregation can gather for worship. In some parts of the country, this may not have been possible at all. Beside not being able to visit whenever we wish with whomever we wish, and not being able to worship whenever and however we wish, we can't go out for dinner or a coffee with others whenever we wish or go on holidays whenever and wherever we wish. Plus, we are expected to wear masks and practice social distancing. Our daily needs may be provided for, but our lifestyles have become rather cramped, as basic freedom of movement, so long taken for granted, has been greatly curtailed. You could say that we can do our work, but much of what gives us joy in life has been taken away from us. Except for those who have caught the virus and therefore suffer physically, or those who have had loved ones die of the virus, this is how we suffer through the pandemic. Not being able to do whatever and go wherever, that is our trial.

Where's the joy in this?

Just reading through a description of our trials and sufferings may cause a bit of a twinge as to the severity of our trials and sufferings. How does it compare to those who lived through two world wars? How does it compare to those who lived through the Barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, or who lived through regular Viking raiding parties? How does it compare to those who face hunger and starvation, or to those whose lives are threatened because they confess Jesus as LORD? How does that compare to the two Canadians who have languished in a Chinese prison for the past two years? We will leave aside the comparison for now as, for many, if not most of us, this is the most severe situation we have ever encountered.

How can we speak of joy in these circumstances, when so much of what gives us joy in life has been taken away?

We see it when we consider how a time like this is an opportunity to do some spiritual soul searching as to the health of our faith. Trials and sufferings are time to ask what we believe and how much our faith has been absorbed into our whole manner of life.

This is an opportunity to do some spiritual soul searching


We can do that by looking at our lives in terms of the words of LORD's Day 1, words learned since a young age, where we speak about our only comfort. That comfort, we confess, is that we belong, with body and soul, both in life and death, to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. We confess this is my only comfort because Jesus has paid for my sins and delivered me from the power of the devil. He preserves me so that without the Father's will not a hair can fall from my head. He assures me by his Holy Spirit of eternal life and makes me heartily willing from now on to live for him. In these words, we find an echo of what David says, for example, in Psalm 4:7, that the LORD has put more joy in his heart than when wine and grain abound. We can also think of the words of Habakkuk, who said that though the fig tree should not blossom nor there be fruit on the vines, and the fields yield no food, he would find his joy in the God of his salvation (Hab 3:17-18). Or we think of Paul telling the Philippians that he counted everything as worthless because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as LORD (Phil 3:8).

Self-examination

When we take these words about our only comfort and true joy, that of being children of God in Jesus Christ, and now look at ourselves, what are we learning throughout this COVID situation about our faith? Have the restrictions placed upon us to contain the virus flushed out that perhaps we thought too much that our life consisted in the abundance of our interaction with others and the abundance of opportunities to do whatever and go wherever, whenever we wished? Was our comfort and joy in life tied to having our winter break, our spring break, or our summer break? Was our comfort and joy tied to seeing everyone we used to see? This is not to deny that on a human level, all these things have their place and value. We are talking now about ultimate value. What is it that we absolutely cannot do without? If the COVID pandemic helps us figure that out, we can rejoice.

We will realize that there is only one thing we can't do without, and that is the LORD our God. We think of our confession that our only comfort is that we belong to Jesus Christ. That's also what led Paul to write as he did in Romans 8 about being more than conquerors through him who loved us. Because of that, he knew that nothing could separate him from the love of God in Jesus Christ. That confidence has given believers throughout the ages the strength to face harsh and cruel imprisonment, finding joy in their relationship with the LORD and knowing that one day they would join him in glory. As our LORD Jesus said another time, they can kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul (Matt 10:28). We are not even close to a situation like that, but it is good to be reminded of such situations to give us perspective and to let the situation we find ourselves in build us up in the hope of the life to come.

Purified and strengthened faith

When we reflect on the COVID situation, we should ask ourselves if the lesson about our only comfort, our only joy, has sunk in enough. If it has, it might keep us from just praying for a return to life as it was before. After all, that would just put us back to seeking our joy in the things of the earth and overlooking our true joy and comfort. If COVID has forced us to reevaluate our lives and realize our only comfort is that we belong to our faithful Saviour and made us find that he truly is our joy and our strength and all the other things are secondary, then we can count COVID as joy, for it has purified and strengthened our faith. 

Blessed Are the Persecuted

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of God.” (MATTHEW 5:10)*

The final beatitude which Jesus spoke is, in some ways, the most difficult one to understand. How can happiness result from persecution? Surely persecution is always unpleasant and difficult.

It is important to understand what Jesus is saying here. He gives a critical qualifier to those who are persecuted. People can be persecuted for all kinds of reasons. Some might be persecuted or mocked for championing a certain political cause, or for being fanatical or unwise, or for having a difficult character. Such people are not blessed because they are being persecuted.

Jesus is describing those who belong to the kingdom of God, those who are true Christians, and therefore it is those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake who are blessed. The reason for the persecution needs to be “righteousness” in order for the persecution to be a blessing and a sign of God’s favour.

The only man who lived a perfectly righteous life is Jesus Christ. And he endured much persecution and hatred as a result. There were many people who hated him precisely because he did what was right and good. They hated him because he exposed their unrighteousness through his own righteous living. His life was a bright light shining in this dark world.


Sinful man does not like his wicked deeds to be exposed for the evil that they are. Righteous and holy living exposes sinful living as dark. And light cannot mix with darkness. Living as someone who is righteous is difficult in a fallen and sinful world. It takes a lot of courage to do the right thing in a world which hates righteousness. It takes help from the Lord himself to stand up and be holy in an unholy world. The unholy mock and hate the holy. The wicked seek to undermine the actions of the righteous and make fun of them.

When we try to live righteous lives according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will receive insults and persecutions. Evil things will be said about us falsely. This is what Jesus tells us in verse 11; this will happen because of “me,” says Jesus.

But do not be discouraged or alarmed by this for this is what is to be expected when we shine the light in a dark world. All

this happened to Christ first. Jesus says that it is because of him that we will be hated (cf. John 15:18-20).

That is why those who are persecuted because of righteousness are those who are blessed. The apostles were flogged by the Jewish religious leaders because they preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. When they left the Sanhedrin after this treatment, they left rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering dishonour for the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 5:41). It is part of our task as Christians to endure suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 1:29).

What an honour and privilege it is to be united with Jesus Christ, to be those who bear his name on our foreheads, to be those who have been washed and purified by his blood. In the face of the world’s opposition, our Saviour exhorts us to rejoice and be glad because our reward in heaven will be great (Matt 5:12). Do not focus on the difficulties and sacrifices that need to be made but rather focus on the reward, on the blessing, on the privilege of sharing in Christ, sharing in his benefits and also in his suffering. It all belongs together and it all results in heavenly riches and blessings in God’s kingdom. It is only through suffering that we may inherit heavenly glory (cf. Acts 14:22). Suffering for righteousness’ sake shows that we belong to Christ. And when we are united with him, we are most certainly blessed beyond all measure, even unto eternal life. 

For Further Study

1. Are you suffering for righteousness’ sake?
2. How does this beatitude encourage you to do what is right?



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Biblical Realism vs. Utopian Dreams

Utopian visions throughout history

In 1516, Sir Thomas More, the English renaissance humanist, added a new word to the English language: "utopia." He combined two Greek words meaning "not" and "place" to create this new word used to describe a non-existent place, a society that a writer invents and describes in detail. Over the centuries, the meaning of the word has shifted, and when we think of "utopia," we generally think of it in terms of the modern dictionary definition: "A place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions," or "an impractical scheme for social improvement."

Utopian thinkers believe that the perfect society can be created, if only the right conditions are put in place. Enact the right policies, govern in the right way, arrange society so that it moves in a certain direction, and we can experience something approaching "heaven on earth" – peace, prosperity, and happiness for all. English philosopher Roger Scruton put it this way: "Utopias are visions of a future state in which the conflicts and problems of human life are all solved completely, in which people live together in unity and harmony, and in which everything is ordered according to a single will, which is the will of society as a whole."

God's Word gives us the answers to the most pressing questions that the world can offer

Throughout history, there have been many utopian visions that have captured people's imaginations, with their promises of a better world in which inequality is erased, suffering is banished, environmental degradation is reversed, a world in which conflict and strife become things of the past. The Marxist vision of history, with its idea that a perfect society can be achieved by means of an evolutionary process in which the state ultimately withers away and the goal of absolute equality is finally reached, is one such utopian philosophy.

Utopian thought today

But today's most influential utopian thinkers are active in the numerous organizations that work under the umbrella of the United Nations, working to influence policy-makers around the world. Using the language of "sustainable development," "social justice," "peace and security," and "equal rights for all," the modern-day utopians are working overtime to create the conditions for a society free of conflict, poverty, abuse, inequality, and discrimination. Planning, co-ordinated effort, political will, science, and technology are all being enlisted in the never-ending effort to create heaven on earth.

Meanwhile, another group of highly influential (and very wealthy) utopians work to promote "transhumanism," the melding of man and machine in the hopes of achieving eternal life here on earth. It sounds like the stuff of science fiction, but it is very real, and the resources being employed to develop

projects like Elon Musk's Neuralink (which is working to create an interface that will directly connect the human brain to computers) are almost unimaginable. Genetic manipulation, computer technology, scientific and medical advancements, and political and social programs are being brought together in an attempt to overcome the physical and societal limitations that have held us back until now.

Utopian vs. biblical worldviews

As the Western world has increasingly turned its back on the Christian faith and its understanding of the nature of human life, the fallen human condition, the limitations inherent to a fallen world, and the reality of eternity, utopian thinking has become more and more influential, in many ways. How can we respond to the serious challenges that the modern-day utopians are making against the biblical, Christian worldview?

In the first place, the Christian worldview is not merely pessimistic and negative. Neither is it fatalistic, leading us to say, "This is just the way things are, and there's nothing we can do about it, so there's no point in doing anything." No, our understanding of the world is, first and foremost, realistic. God's Word gives us the answers to the most pressing questions that the world can offer – answers that cannot be found anywhere else. It offers the true explanation for the existence of suffering and death in this world: "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin" (Rom 5:12).

It explains why human beings have never been able to live in peace: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel..." (James 4:1-2).

And it explains why we seem to be unable to care for our natural environment, and the negative results of sin for the entire created order: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8.19-21).

God's Word also explains that the problems that humanity has faced since the fall into sin will not go away until the end comes, and Christ returns. Poverty will always be a fact of life in this fallen world: "For you will always have the poor with you, but

you will not always have me," the Lord Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 26:11. And in the wisdom that God gave him, Solomon explained it perfectly: "It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted" (Eccl 1:13b-15).

All of this means that this-worldly utopian visions, based as they are on a worldview that denies the existence of sin, misunderstands human nature, and most importantly attempts to deny the existence of God, are doomed to fail. They begin from the wrong starting point, and from there they put into action plans that inevitably lead to disaster, as history proves. Every utopian experiment, from the socialist communes of the nineteenth century to the communist and fascist regimes of the twentieth century, has ended in abject failure. But ultimately, those historical failures are supporting evidence that prove the truthfulness of God's Word.

The Christian vision


Utopia is, as Thomas More said, "no place." It has not, does not, and cannot exist. The Christian vision is not utopian, because it looks to perfection not in this life, but in the life to come. United to Christ by faith, we look forward to the day "when all things are subjected to him," when God is "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

And as we do that, we don't give up on this world, to let it flounder and sink, because we imagine that it's all doomed to fail anyway, and that any effort we make will ultimately be useless. We are being renewed in the image of our Saviour, and his Spirit empowers us to live lives of faithful obedience, with the right goal and the right purpose. As we live obedient lives, we will never make this world a perfect place. We will never be able to create a world of perfect equality, absolute lasting peace, and the complete preservation of nature in its unspoiled state. Those goals, as attractive as they might appear, are unachievable. But as we live to glorify God, we will also do whatever we can to be good stewards of the creation that he has entrusted to us, and we will seek to love our neighbours, and treat them as we would have them treat us. "Cosmic justice" is not achievable "under the sun" (as Solomon says). But real justice is.

As followers of Christ, our hope is in him, and not in this world. While the utopian thinkers of this world think and speak and plan in the grandest, most ambitious way, the problem is that

We do not look to perfection in this life

their vision is actually too limited! Not wanting to recognize the glory that awaits the children of God, not wanting to submit to God's reality, but desiring to create their own reality, they have limited their goals to this life, and to this life alone. Rather than looking to the Creator, they look to the creation, and restrict their vision to the physical, material world in which we live. When your vision of life is limited to the brief span of time that we spend on earth in this life, your best-laid plans are bound to fail, and you are doomed to a life of frustration. But when you seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, all of these things will be added to you (Matt 6:33). Our ultimate goals are not directed at the improvement of the human condition in this life; but when our ultimate goal is to glorify God, our obedience will lead to positive change - not because that is our goal, but because it is a "side effect" of a God-directed life.

It is the message of the gospel that offers hope to a world that seeks its purpose in the wrong place, which constantly pursues a futile and unreachable goal. It is the message of the gospel that offers liberation from the endlessly shifting and ultimately unachievable dreams of the utopian thinkers, which can only end in destruction, frustration, and despair. In the end, it is only the realism of the Christian faith that can provide the antidote to utopian idealism. 



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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Gerrit (Gerry) Kuik

(1924-2021)

In the first issue of *Clarion* from Volume 22 of 1973, the editors announced: "Our magazine has been taken over by a new publisher, Premier Printing Ltd. (G. Kuik) of Winnipeg... Being owner of a successful printing business, brother Kuik has been placed in a good position to work towards the realization of one of his ideals: the best possible periodical for our entire Reformed community." In his grace and wisdom our Father called home to himself Gerrit (Gerry) Kuik very early in this new year, at the age of 96.

We recall with thankfulness how it is that God indeed placed Gerry in this position and blessed the use of this gift. Gerry was born in Ruinerweide in 1924, and as a young boy attended church at Berghuizen, a Secession congregation instituted by Rev. Hendrik de Cock in May of 1835. Around age 15 he began studying and apprenticing in the field of print, launching a career in print that would last 65 years.

During World War II he became involved in the Dutch resistance movement, printing literature prohibited by the Nazis and distributing food ration cards. He was captured, interrogated, and jailed, but for some reason released. The stress and memories of the war – especially the loss of his older brother at a concentration camp – made a deep impression on him.

After the war he found employment with a start-up printing company and worked there until he emigrated with his parents and siblings. They arrived in Homewood, Manitoba, in July 1950, and took up working for a local farmer in the grain and sugar beet fields. Already in the fall of that year he was back in printing, working for a printshop in Carman, and then for another in Winnipeg when he moved his family there in 1958. In 1962 his previous employer encouraged and generously supported him in starting on his own, and Premier Printing was born.

The early years after immigration were years of hard manual labour, privation, and isolation, and yet years of blessing and sustenance from their gracious Father. The family had expected to end up in the Lethbridge area where they knew there were like-minded Reformed believers. Instead, they were in Manitoba and could not find a home in the existing churches. So Gerry was sent on behalf of the family on a cross-country trip by bus and on foot to investigate a move. In Lethbridge, the brothers discussed the area around Carman, the agriculture and job opportunities, and the availability of housing there. Their evaluation of the situation sent Gerry on the long trip home with counsel to stay in Manitoba and work on attracting new immigrant families to the area. Unbeknownst to him he had missed the birth of his first-born child, who was already three days old when he finally arrived home.

So in God's providence the family was convinced it should remain. Gerry became a "fieldman," matching aspirant emigrant families with farmer sponsors, and helping landed immigrants to get settled, buy furniture or vehicles, and adjust to a new culture. An influx of like-minded believers allowed for the momentous occasion of the institution of a Canadian Reformed Church in Homewood, some 13 months after the family's arrival, in August 1951.

These early experiences of isolation, of the vastness of the new country, of the joy of unity in faith and of the fledgling federation of churches remained with Gerry after God had placed him in charge of a successful printing company. He noted in the

third issue of *Clarion* 1972: "May this magazine be the medi[um] that binds us together and may it be a tool for the preservation of our Reformed faith."

In their first year after immigration, the family only had a few sermons with them, having expected to join the congregation in Lethbridge. Surely they would have longed for more good material from the old country. This experience too must have stuck with Gerry (since he himself would have read the same sermons for his family on multiple Sundays). In the 70s, he saw a need for good literature in the English language. In addition to *Clarion* he arranged for the translation, printing, and publication of numerous books from writers in the sister churches in the Netherlands. In the mid-seventies he engaged another Dutch immigrant, his new son-in-law Bill Gortemaker, to join the team and manage this project. Over the years, many good – though certainly not always financially profitable – Reformed books were supplied for the enrichment of readers.

These core values still guide the production of *Clarion*, publishing efforts, and support of other kingdom causes in which Premier Printing has been privileged to play a part. We are thankful for the heritage we have received and pray that God will continue to bless our service of him for the good of the churches.

After his retirement Gerry continued to be involved in kingdom causes and enjoyed visiting with the many friends he had met along the way. Though his mobility became more and more restricted, his mind remained sharp and he maintained a keen interest in the goings-on in the world, the churches, and the business. In his last years God blessed him with a contentment and peace which sustained him also in his last days. He was eager and ready to depart and be with Christ, and passed away peacefully.

We praise God for the blessings we have received in our father, grandfather, and founder of our business. As the editors mentioned already some 50 years ago, we see how God placed him in a position to be of service to the churches, and blessed his efforts. It is God who was pleased to use an unworthy servant for his glory. We are comforted by the same faith and confidence that sustained Gerry through the joys and sorrows of the years allotted him.

William Gortemaker

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: An Interview with Carl R. Trueman



On November 24, 2020 Crossway released *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* by Carl Trueman, OP minister and professor at Grove City College. This article originally appeared in New Horizons magazine, December 2020. It is reprinted with permission.

NH: How did the book come about?

Rod Dreher of the American Conservative and Justin Taylor of Crossway asked me if I would write an introduction to the thought of Philip Rieff, the great analyst of modern therapeutic culture. At the same time, as a historian I was becoming interested in how the statement “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body” had suddenly become so important and so plausible in our culture. And as I started to research the former, it became clear that I could actually expand the project into an application of Rieff’s thinking in a manner that would help me explain the latter.

NH: Who was Rieff and why is his cultural analysis helpful?

He was a scholar at the University of Pennsylvania who applied Freudian thought to cultural analysis. Rieff saw Freud as locating human identity in psychological categories and happiness in sexual fulfillment, but he then proceeded to show how these ideas have come to grip the modern moral imagination where identity is closely connected to sexual desire and the purpose of society has become therapeutic: society exists to enable

individuals to be psychologically (i.e., sexually) fulfilled. This helps to explain why identity politics has placed sexuality at the centre of political life. But Rieff goes further to argue that cultures depend upon setting boundaries to behaviour. As society slowly but surely abandons all sexual taboos, it makes itself profoundly unstable. That is the situation we now find ourselves in. The people and institutions who are supposed to maintain society as a stable entity – political leaders, artists, writers, universities etc. – are all committed to precisely this overthrowal of moral tradition and thus to further destabilizing culture.

NH: What audience did you have in view in writing the book?

My target audience is that of the thoughtful, engaged person who wants not simply to lament the changes we see in the culture around us, nor to engage in standard polemics, but rather to understand why these changes are happening and how we are all in some sense implicated in them. The book is not a simple read because analysis of culture requires engagement with history, philosophy, politics, and psychology, among other things. So, the reader looking for easy and straightforward answers will be disappointed. But I am particularly hoping that Christians will find the book helpful in understanding why our culture appears to be changing so rapidly and what we might expect in the future. To understand something is always the first step to overcome the temptation to panic or despair.

NH: Modern society rejects the biblical understanding of humanity made in the image of God. Is this why the old arguments about culture no longer work?

To a large extent, yes. Of course, one of the reasons why Christian arguments worked to some extent in the public square long after Christian orthodoxy ceased to be the default position of culture was the fact that there was still an assumption that there was such a thing as human nature. Rousseau, for example, regarded ethics as grounded in sentiments, but he avoided subjectivism by assuming that human nature was something shared by all. Kant does a similar thing as a means of granting his categories universal, stable status. Then, in the nineteenth century, the very notion of human nature comes under explicit scrutiny. We find Hegel and then Marx historicizing it and thus making it something dynamic and historically relative. Darwin reduces the difference between humans and animals to mere stages in a non-teleological evolutionary process. More significantly, Nietzsche calls the bluff on all metaphysical claims and thus tears away the ground for seeing knowledge as anything more than a contingent construct, a point which of course includes human nature and anything built thereon. What we are seeing today is arguably the cultural outworking of this collapse in human nature. There now seems little upon which to agree to build our ethics beyond respect for the individual. Hence, in sexual ethics, consent is virtually the only criterion left by which an act can be morally assessed.

NH: You argue that behind the American society that now sees biblical beliefs about sexuality as hateful, even immoral, is a shift in identity. Can you explain?

The key figure here is Freud. His basic idea, that we are all at base defined by our sexual desires, has come to grip the moral imagination of modern society. In part this is because it contains a kernel of truth: sexual desires are among some of the most powerful impulses that humans experience. In part, it is because pop culture, from commercials to the mainstreaming of



pornography, has served to press home the centrality of sexual desire to human existence.

What all this has done is change sex from something we do to something we are. And that has obvious implications for how the wider world perceives Christianity. I object to homosexuality because it involves acts of physical union that God has declared illegitimate. In doing so, I am objecting to forms of behaviour. But society sees such objections not so much as a moral commentary on actions as a repudiation of a person's identity. This is why arguments that draw parallels with Christian objections to premarital heterosexual intercourse do not deflect accusations of homophobia. In the mindset of the current culture, there is no parallel between the two things because one is a categorical repudiation of an identity, the other merely a repudiation of an inappropriate expression of an otherwise legitimate identity. It also makes the distinction between hating the sin and loving the sinner implausible to the secular mind: where sex is identity, the sin and the sinner are one and the same, and they cannot be separated even at the conceptual level. That is why terms such as homophobia and transphobia have emerged as culturally potent.

NH: The Bostock ruling by the Supreme Court occurred after your book was at the publisher. How would you evaluate that ruling in light of what you argue in the book about identity?

It is entirely consistent with the trajectory that I outline in the book. It acknowledges in legal precedent that which is already part of the political and cultural imagination of contemporary America: that sex and gender are entirely separable and that individuals can choose their own identities and, where these conform to the spirit of the age, demand that the law compel others to recognize our choice as legitimate.


Justice Gorsuch's legitimization of transgenderism as law will have an impact on later judgments. It is inevitable that it will both encourage others to challenge established precedents with regard to the rights of religious organizations and strengthen the general case for an increasingly narrow reading of the protections provided by the First Amendment.

NH: How should Christians navigate the current culture?

First, we need humility. The culture of individual autonomy and expressive individualism that has allowed for things such as transgenderism to emerge is our culture, too. We need to examine ourselves to see how this has affected our attitude to authority, to others, and to the structures of accountability in which we are placed.

Second, on a pastoral level, we need to educate people to think ethically. My experience of teaching college students is that many young Christians believe the Bible; they are just not sure what it says about sexual and gender issues. That may seem odd to those of my generation, but the world is so powerful and relentless in the messages it sends that we need to think long and hard about how to communicate Christian ethics, and patterns of Christian ethical thinking, to people in the pews.

Third, we should expect to be put under pressure by the wider culture in ways that we have not experienced in the past. Social media has all but obliterated the private sphere. It will be increasingly hard to keep our religious and moral convictions as matters of personal, private choice. The days in which personal convictions on sexual morality were considered irrelevant to public, social existence seem to be coming to an end.

Fourth, we should keep our eyes on Christ and the promises made in him to the church. It is a hardy perennial of church history that every generation thinks that the world is going to the dogs and the church is in serious trouble. That fact alone should relativize the current situation. Then, when we recall that God will build his church, that the gates of hell shall not prevail, and that Christ has already broken the real power of the rulers of this world, we should be encouraged. This is not to say that we should not take the current situation very seriously – the human carnage of the sexual revolution is not something to be taken as a light or trivial thing. Real people made in God's image are suffering because of it. But we should still regard it as something over which God is sovereign. It will not ultimately prevail. 

By Danny E. Olinger

Editor of New Horizons magazine

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Farewell

to the Vanderlinde Family


Rev. Vanderlinde accepted a call to the Nooksack Valley American Reformed Church in the beginning of the year. Wheels were set in motion and the family had to wait for paperwork to be ready for a move into another country. Then COVID hit. This put everything into a tailspin. Will they go? When will they go? In the middle of September, they were informed that their paperwork was in order and the border would be open to them in October.

How do you plan an event for something your church has only had to prepare for one time in its history, especially considering the current situation in our world with COVID-19 and the restrictions surrounding that? After a flurry of emails and messages between Consistory, Church Life Committee, and the Ladies Aid, the answer was: a come and go evening on October 9, 2020.

The evening was attended by young and old. Opportunity to speak personally with the minister, his wife, and children was

enjoyed by all. Mingling was so nice after months of limited contact with everyone.

Although we did not have anything formal planned due to the nature of the evening, we did present the family with some gifts from the congregation. Earlier this year each of the members was given a square for a quilt that they could add their name(s) to. This was sewn into a beautiful quilt by sister Doornbos. It was presented to the family at the event along with an aerial photo of the church building.

As a congregation it has been such a blessing to not only see growth in the family (they added three more children to their fold) but also growth in the pastor. We are sad to see you go but know that this is God's plan for you and for us. May the Lord richly bless you in your new congregation and home. You will be missed here in Barrhead. 



Ronald deWitt

Hello everyone,

I would like to introduce myself. I am Ronald DeWitt. I live at the Twin Oaks Home in Burlington, Ontario, with my housemates David and Derrick. I work at Bibles for Missions thrift store three to four days a week and one day a week assembling and delivering the Burlington Post (with some help of course). I am very grateful to God that I am in this home and not living by myself. I am very stable on my current medication and can function as "normally" as possible. Since I am overweight, my new year's resolution is to go on a diet and lose about forty-five pounds! Anyways, God's blessings in the New Year.

Ronald deWitt

February Birthdays

3 Ron deWitt will be **48**
 3217 Twin Oaks
 Burlington, ON L7M 3A8

6 Trevor Buys will be **41**
 c/o Anchor Home
 361 Thirty Road
 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

12 Connie VanAmerongen will be **56**
 c/o Anchor Home
 361 Thirty Road
 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
 e-mail: conniev1965@gmail.com

YOU ASKED

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'VE BEEN WANTING TO KNOW? An answer you've been looking for? Ask us a question!
Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander, denhollanderw@gmail.com 23 Kinsman Dr. Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0


When Will the Lord Jesus Christ Crush the Head of Satan?

In Genesis 3:15, the LORD said that he will put enmity and that the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, will crush the head of the serpent, Satan. Did that happen on the cross of Jesus? And if so, why does the preaching seldom mention that great victory? True, he did so for our sins and paid for all of them. But he also crushed the head of Satan, or did this happen at a later date, in his resurrection or when he threw Satan out of heaven?

At the cross the Lord Jesus certainly was victorious over Satan, as he remained faithful and obedient to God the Father despite the fierce attacks of the devil and his demons while he was forsaken by God. In his resurrection, also, he was victor over death and the grave, and Satan who held the power of death could not hold him. Yet, these victories in the battle between the seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the devil, were not yet the times when he crushed the head of the serpent, the devil, as promised in Genesis 3:15.

The Scriptures, indeed, reveal to us that eventually the head of the serpent will be crushed. From the book of Revelation to John (20:9, 10) we learn, "But fire came down from heaven and consumed them, and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." In his letter to the Romans (16:20), the apostle Paul also mentions it as an event that is still to happen, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." It will happen "soon," he says, indicating as well that it is still a future event.

It's important for the church of Christ today to realize this, as we learn from Revelation 12:12, "But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because

he knows that his time is short." Then the devil (dragon) went off to make war on the rest of her (the woman's) offspring. The apostle Peter also warns the church for this final battle (5:8): "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...." The serpent and his seed haven't been crushed at all yet, if that were the case the devil wouldn't have a chance anymore to attack the seed of the woman, the church of God and her children. Rather, the serpent and his seed are becoming more and more dangerous, since they know that the time is short. The Lord Jesus, too, instructed his disciples to pray, "Deliver us from the evil one!" The devil, the world, and our own flesh continue to attack us! Yet, as Paul encouraged and comforted the Romans, he will soon be crushed! 



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