

# The FCM Informer

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## The Walk of a New Life

by J. Otis Yoder

For many, life is like a wild animal in a cage, walking back and forth, back and forth. The poor creature has no place to go and nothing to do but to walk back and forth the same way hour after hour.

Well for us that is not God's intention. He does not expect us to walk back and forth, back and forth like a wild animal in a cage. No! Jesus told us there are two definite ways. One is the broad way that leads to destruction. There is another way, the narrow way that leads to life.

I urge you as Jesus did to choose the narrow way that leads to life. Everyone can walk in that new life because God has provided that way. He gives the instruction defining THE WALK OF A NEW LIFE. Wouldn't you be glad to know how you can walk in new life? The instruction is given in Romans 6:1-7:

1. *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*
2. *God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*
3. *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?*
4. *Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*
5. *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.*
6. *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*
7. *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*

In these verses the Apostle Paul makes several strong APPEALS to urge us into the walk of a new life.

**THE UNTHINKABLE POSSIBILITY** is the first appeal. I want you to take a good look at Romans 6:1: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" This is the consideration: Does grace allow us to sin? Now this is the question. Return to Romans 5:20 for a related thought: "Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." So you see the reason why the Apostle raised the question in Romans 6:1, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Since grace abounded much more than sin abounded, then it might seem logical to sin so that grace might abound.

Some may well conclude that is correct but that is presumption because the Apostle immediately makes this response: "God forbid." May it never happen that anyone should consider that because sin abounded and grace did much more abound that therefore the more we sin the more grace there will be. Oh, God forbid!

He raises the contradiction: "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Death to sin makes living in it impossible, you see. So there is the unthinkable possibility.

To walk in a new life we must heed Paul's appeal: Grace does not grant us the right to sin.

*Continued on page 2*

### What's Inside?

The Walk of a New Life . . . . .	1
The Wood Shed and the Rock Pile . . . . .	3
Buyer Beware . . . . .	4
Seven Years Later . . . . .	6
How To Make a Good Pastoral Call . . . . .	7
The Congregational Meeting . . . . .	8

**THE UNSURPASSED REALITY** is the second appeal. Let's look at the meaning of baptism in verse 3: "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?" This is no half way act, my friend. True baptism means to be joined with Christ in His death. Now, we must understand that this is a spiritual experience. This is what we experience and appropriate by faith.

What is the extent of this identification? Verse 4 tells us: "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death." Observe the last two words, "into death." We are buried with Him by baptism into death. Death means burial and burial means resurrection. So "as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." I am talking about the walk of a new life. Burial means resurrection and resurrection means the glory of the Father. So we also as believers walk in newness of life.

To walk in the new life we must heed Paul's appeal: Identity with Christ brings us into new life.

**THE UNDERSTANDABLE FINALITY** is the third appeal. Notice very carefully the fact that is stated in verse 5: "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection," planted together and raised together.

Once we are raised with Christ we have a new existence. We do not live like we did before. We do not act like we did before. We do not talk like we did before. This is an understandable finality.

For God has made a wonderful provision for us, according to verse 6: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." That's a wonderful provision that God has made. We can by faith in Jesus Christ be crucified with Him. The old man, that is the tendency to sin within us, becomes immobile. It is rendered inoperative so that we should not serve sin anymore but we should be serving God fully. We are freed from the bonds that bound us. The bonds of sin are broken. We should rejoice then for he that is dead is freed from sin. Praise God!

To walk in the new life we must heed Paul's appeal: Union with Christ brings us release from the bonds of sin.

Friend, the walk in a new life is for you, as you take to heart these appeals. There is first the unthinkable possibility: grace does not grant the privilege to sin. There is the unsurpassed reality: identification with Christ in death and resurrection. Then there is the understandable finality: union with Christ releases the bonds of sin! Hallelujah! ■



*Continued from page 5*

### **Theology of personhood.**

Might part of our ongoing redemption as whole people mean understanding and embracing the obligations, responsibilities, and privileges that come with our unique role as God's stewards on earth? Treating the world less as a resource and mines, and more as a gift to preserve and cultivate?

### **Theology of hope.**

God will ultimately redeem all of creation. How should our vision of the future condition our behavior – and our attitude towards consumption – in the present?

### **Theology of patience.**

Does our consumerism betray an unwillingness to wait for God's good future? Is consumerism a form of idolatry that doubts God's promise to be sufficient for our needs? Does our "hoarding" in the present indicate a lack of confidence in God's future?

It's not enough to throw up our arms and declare consumerism an unmitigated evil and a disaster for Christian faith. Consumerism likely won't disappear, and there are elements of consumption that are entirely appropriate. The real concern is how we can most effectively navigate the environment in which we 21st century Canadian Mennonite Brethren Christians find ourselves. At the very least, we must recognize the nature of this challenge. It will demand a willingness to wisely evaluate cultural trends, embracing some and rejecting others, with the intention of more faithfully embodying the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

*Reprinted with permission from the Mennonite Brethren Herald, January 2008.*

# The Wood Shed and the Rock Pile

by J. Ward Shank

There are two well nigh lost institutions, the wood shed and the rock pile. One is the symbol of correction wisely administered for misdemeanors around the home. The other is the emblem of discipline through useful and necessary labor.

The wood shed has remained unused in favor of the sweet reasonableness of the psychological approach, while soft twentieth-century living has taken care of the rock pile.

A boy otherwise available for an odd job cannot be had any more if he has to walk more than a quarter mile. He might agree to do the work if you promise to pick him up and return him home on the foam rubber cushions of an automobile. And even then his first question is likely to be, "How much doin' what?"

This generation has become accustomed to the rewards of Dad's prosperity. It is a rather pathetic state of affairs when the house and yard are so full of gadgets and playthings that it becomes a problem to know what to get little Johnny and Mary for their next birthdays. It takes a lot to amuse them.

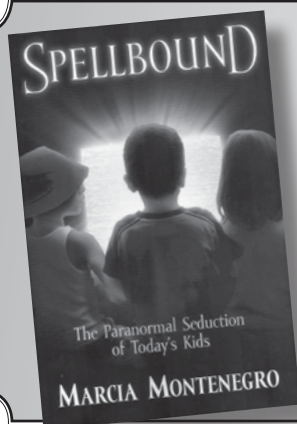
Then about the time of adolescence the problem becomes compounded. The habit of entertainment and indulgence must be still further satisfied. They know that Dad has prospered. It takes fast automobiles, electronic marvels, intensified sports, and an accelerated youth program to keep them occupied. The inner, or native, resources

are underdeveloped. And if Johnny and Mary don't get all they think the world owes them in privileges, they begin to demand things as by right. Getting bored between times, they may twist some coat hangers into grotesque shapes, knock out a few window panes, unhinge some gates, stop up some sink and toilet bowls and open the water taps, deface some walls, sneak off to the movies, or engage in some clandestine sex play.

Some early and wisely considered trips to the wood shed may help in some such matters.

An instructor at one of the military schools nearby told me a few years ago that the coal for their furnaces is purposely dumped 100 yards from the heating plant. Any "maladjusted" adolescents on their hands are made to work off their "hostility" for varying lengths of time by transporting coal to the furnaces by wheelbarrow. If too much coal accumulates at the furnace it is carted back to the stock pile again. We recognize the limitation of this method, but it does suggest something of the usefulness of a rock pile.

Johnny and Mary, of course, must now have all the advantages of education and modern living that Dad and Mom lacked in their own rock strewn youth. Aside from things like trimming a velvety lawn and operating the electric dishwasher, there simply are no rock piles. And there is no wood shed back of their oil or electrically heated suburban home.



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# BUYER BEWARE! Consumerism Contains Toxic Substances Harmful to Faith

by Jonathan Janzen and Ryan Dueck

*Editor's Note: The following article is taken from the Mennonite Brethren Herald of Canada. While we take exception to the "unqualified worldly" references, the principles taught are much needed in conservative Anabaptism today.*

We live in an age of unprecedented choice. Less than fifty years ago, much of life was chosen for us, and we simply had to "make do" with life the way that it came. Not so today.

Today we can style our lives. We can choose where we live – Niverville or New York. We can choose our jobs – farmer or filmmaker. We can choose whom we marry – a Korean from Flin Flon or an opera singer from China. We even have choices regarding children. We can have them naturally, we can adopt from almost anywhere in the world, or we can avail ourselves of artificial reproductive technologies.

Books, cell phones, clothing, computers, food, housing, movies, music, politics, sexual expression, TV, travel – our world bombards us with a stunning array of more and more ever-changing choices. We are urged to have it all, to "visit Paris in the fall, watch the Yankees play ball," to consume, consume, consume.

The fact that even Christians grumble about being too busy, too tired, too overworked, too disconnected from the family, that we have too much stuff and need to have regular garage sales, demonstrates we have "bought into" our consumer society; our patterns of consumption define how we think and act.

But before we condemn consumerism, let's do two things.

First, let's acknowledge there is nothing inherently wrong with consumption. Obviously, we must consume water, food, shelter, and air to survive. Genesis tells us that God made us to be consumers of a specific kind. The world contains good things that we are to tend and use gratefully and responsibly.

Secondly, let's define our terms clearly. Other "isms" – materialism (he who dies with the most toys wins) and individualism (I am numero uno in the universe, free to do what suits me) – are related to, but not the same as, consumerism. There are plenty of crossovers between these "isms," but they represent distinct approaches to life. If we are to take from them what is good and reject what is

corrosive and unbiblical, we need to carefully dissect these mindsets.

Consumerism denotes a "lens" through which we look at the world, the idea that individual preference and choice are the defining and most important factors in all areas of life. The decisions I make, the lifestyle I create, are based on what I want. Indeed, many of us think we can decide what we want and how we want it, and when we don't get it, we feel frustrated and shortchanged. No doubt we've recently heard someone say:

"You have no right to tell me what to do/say/wear/think."

"Be true to yourself."

"You can become whatever you want."

"That music doesn't speak to me."

"We're looking for a church that meets our needs."

The outlook of consumerism rests on several assumptions. It declares that the customer is always right and that "the market" decides what is good. Individuals, each making their own purchases, shape that market. Sure enough, it's often the most popular, cheapest, and easiest to get items that are deemed the best. From these two assumptions emerge two ways of thinking: 1) anything and everything can be bought; and 2) the value of something is determined by its price. Together, these assumptions yield a portrait of human life where autonomous individuals collectively decide what is important or valuable in life – it's the "sovereignty of the squalling infant."

Consumerists assume comfort and convenience are the highest goals; anything unpleasant – sacrifice, suffering – are resisted. Consumerists assume the values they have are perfectly fine – they don't need to be corrected, just satisfied. This means that consumerists are mostly interested in getting what they want, as quickly, efficiently, and cheaply as possible. This attitude is closed to new adventure; confrontation, or humility, new ideas that do not "suit or benefit me" simply are not tolerated.

Remember: consumerism is not the same as being a consumer. We should be responsible consumers when buying groceries or a car. But consumerism is problematic because what started out good went wrong. In modern-day Canada, it conditions how we understand all of life. To a man with a hammer, it is said, everything looks like a nail. To 21st century consumers – you and me – all of life looks like a shopping mall.

## **The challenge of faith**

Not surprisingly, elements of consumerism are corrosive to authentic faith. In a consumerist society, religion becomes a commodity – something we add to our lives to “make me feel good,” or “make me a better person.” We begin to pick and choose from this or that religion, selecting “whatever works for me” in the ongoing quest for personal fulfillment and self-discovery. Indeed, the basic question a consumerist asks is, “do I want it or not?”

Protestant Christianity itself, perhaps unwittingly, has contributed and continues to contribute to consumerism. Reformers like Luther, Calvin, and early Anabaptists emphasized the right and obligation of each person to read the Bible for themselves. This ability to choose – to set one’s own interpretation of Scripture against church tradition and authority – dramatically altered the shape of Western history.

The explosion of Protestant denominations since the Reformation has produced a smorgasbord of choice for any North American interested in church. If someone doesn’t like what one church teaches, there’s another one down the street that’s probably more to their taste. Combined with a political climate of religious tolerance, churches today, like any other institution, must “compete” for market-share.

In other words, the church presents choices now that were nonexistent to our ancestors. Those of us who attend church are forced to be consumers simply because of our historical and cultural location. Surrounded by choices everywhere, when deciding which church to attend, we apply roughly the same criteria we use when picking a movie at Blockbuster: What do I want? Will it meet my need for excitement, entertainment, escape?

## **Taking the next step**

So where does that leave Christians? We are confronted with a dramatically different picture presented in the Bible. Scripture insists that human desires are affected by sin; that religion is not just a private, personal matter, but should lead us to care for the poor, protect the weak, and “give ‘til it hurts;” that virtue and mature holiness are often hard fought victories. Not surprisingly, a gospel centered on the cross is less likely to get a hearing in a consumer-oriented culture.

What can we do to counteract the negative effects of consumerism? First, let’s analyze how “the system” forces us to be consumeristic.

For example, particular uses of media and technology are generation-specific. People in their 20s are more likely to use text messaging and Facebook to communicate with others. They are less likely to use the tools, like letter writing, that older generations continue to use. Consequently, younger generations are communicating less and less with those who are older, and vice versa.

Technology works in combination with other factors, like free market economies and democratic political systems, to segregate communities and elevate individual rights above all else. So while Mennonites are properly committed to building Christian communities, our cultural system(s) undermine them. Understanding societal trends is an important step towards learning how we might better embody kingdom values.

Second, we need to think about how we (unintentionally?) perpetuate the system. What do we communicate, for example, when PowerPoint announcements are displayed during the offering? Isn’t it strikingly similar to TV commercials? More importantly, does it divert our attention from an important act of worship? As we pass the offering plate, is there a hidden message that we’re just “depositing” our money?

We need to become aware of how the medium shapes the message. By using the grammar of advertising – the “language” of consumerism – to communicate the gospel and order our life together, we are, in subtle yet profound ways, treating faith like a commodity.

Churches have also perpetuated a consumer mindset by offering multiple styles of services: liturgical, contemporary, family-friendly, seeker-center. By catering to audience tastes or demographics (note the consumerist language: “offer,” “service”), do we imply that discipleship is about my needs being met on my terms? To be sure, making people feel comfortable and welcome is good, and there are many people who have met Jesus as a result. But once people are comfortable, how do we call them to sacrificial discipleship without looking like we’re using “bait-and-switch” tactics?

## **Towards further discussion**

Finally, Christians can resist consumerism by recovering aspects of theology that have been lost, obscured, or ignored. North American evangelicals in general and Mennonite Brethren in particular, have adopted methods and technologies that, to some degree, are self-defeating partly because important features of Christian theology have been pushed to the side. The following are a few broad themes to stimulate further reflection:

### **Theology of mission/calling/work.**

God’s first commandment is in Genesis: as his stewards we are to make shalom, to improve the world. Do we work to accumulate “stuff,” or might our work play a part in kingdom-building?

### **Theology of creation.**

What is non-human creation (trees, water, air, animals) “for”?

*Continued on page 2*

# Seven Years Later

*Name Withheld by Request*

Pentecostal girl, as I watched you tonight, I wished for an opportunity to talk with you. I watched your beautiful face as you sang and worshipped. You reminded me of myself seven years ago. And then, after church, I watched you as you got into that car with a boy who does not know God. Oh, yes, he was at church tonight. He even went to the altar and shed a few tears. I am sure that you would not accept the idea that, for him, this is just a means to an end.

Seven years ago I was in your shoes. I had known God since my early teens, and had grown up under God-anointed preaching and teaching. I didn't lack boy friends or dates, as is so often the case with Pentecostal girls in churches where the girls outnumber the boys. Some very wonderful, consecrated young men came my way. But Satan, who watches diligently and waits patiently to ensnare a soul, saw me one day as I was, lukewarm. Oh, I was still going to church and playing my accordion and singing and doing all the right things outwardly. But I had never really had that special moment with God when His will and mine were made one.

I met him at work. And before long, without anyone else's knowing it, I felt I couldn't live without him. He knew about Pentecost, and when he went to church with me, he went to the altar and cried.

And so I married him, while my family and those who loved me wept and agonized.

It was just six months later that I realized my soul was in danger and that I had to have a touch from God. I prayed through and got a grip on God. Then the battle began. No, he wasn't going to church anymore. I could count on my fingers the number of times he went during the last seven years. Before I married him, the thought of living without him was unbearable. "How lonely it would be!" I thought. But now I know what loneliness really is, and I'd like to tell you about it.

Loneliness is receiving a blessing from God and going home to a man you can't share it with. He isn't interested; he's watching television.

Loneliness is going to a church social alone and watching the young couples enjoy God's blessings together. You can go alone or stay home alone; he has other interests.

Loneliness is feeling the urgency of Christ's coming and knowing that the one you love most on this earth is

not ready, and shows no sign of caring.

Loneliness is seeing two children born and knowing that if your influence is to outweigh his, it will be a miracle.

Loneliness is going to a General Conference and seeing young couples everywhere who are truly one and dedicated to God's work. And there goes the young man who loved you once and wanted to marry you. He's preaching the gospel now, and he has never married. Oh God! Help me! I mustn't think of it!

Loneliness is lying awake struggling with the suspicion that he's unfaithful. Then comes the unbelievable pain of knowing for sure. He doesn't care if I know. She even calls me on the phone. After a time, he makes no effort to break it off. I vow to do everything humanly possible to keep this marriage together. I will love him more and pray for him more. Seven years of my life are involved in this! There's a little girl and a little boy!

Loneliness is now. My children and I will go home to a dark, empty apartment that will be my home until the lawyer says it's all over. I, who have always been afraid to stay alone, now welcome the peace and solitude.

As I look in the mirror; I see that seven years haven't changed my face so much. But inside I am old, and something that was once alive and beautiful is now dead.

Of course, this is not an unusual story. The remarkable thing about it is that I am still living for God. I am thankful for my family and their prayers of intercession for me.

Oh, I am praying for you, Pentecostal girl! Please believe me when I tell you that no matter how wonderful he is, how loving, how tender—you cannot build a happy life upon disobedience to God's Word. You see, no matter what the future holds for me, I have missed His perfect will for my life. I will never stop paying for breaking a commandment of God! Don't let it happen to you!

This is the story of my sister, and of the tragic mistake she made. It ended (?) in the divorce court this week. There is no way to put her suffering into words, but perhaps this will save some girl from making the same mistake.

*Reprinted with permission from America's Christian Newspaper, Dec–Jan 2008*

# How to Make a Good Pastoral Call

by Mel Shetler

All of us leaders are making hospital visits or call on people in our church who are sick or facing crises of some sort. Most pastors struggle with effective consistent visitation. I have listened to countless stories over the years of members talking about some kind of situation in their family in which the pastor did not show. I am sure if you ask some folks around here they could tell you how they felt let down by me. I am aware however that it can't always be me. But it does need to be someone. Here are some guidelines to help make effective pastoral calls.

### **Don't scold people for not letting you know.**

Numerous times I have heard pastors scold the person in the hospital bed for not telling them they were going in. That became the opening issue. If you didn't find out, so you didn't. Get over it. Don't take it personally. Try to be an inviting person that welcomes people to call. Make sure you have a simple practical procedure in place so that people will feel comfortable to share with you. Our hospital chaplain tells me that many people don't want their pastor called because they think he is busy and doesn't seem to have time for them at other occasions, so why call him now.

### **It is one of the responsibilities you can share as a team.**

It may be one of the pastor's specific responsibilities to do the visitation. If you are that pastor be sure you represent the team in the calls you make. It is not that the other pastors don't want to make the call; they are respecting your role. You are key in extending the team spirit on that visit. If they are upset because the other pastor didn't come, you no doubt did not do a good job. Where you share the responsibility good communication is important so you can give the best pastoral care. In a time of crises or when someone is near death senior pastors need to be involved. The other pastors should not feel threatened or get hurt by this. People will find it hard to handle if the senior pastor does not get involved in those times. There may be times if the team is not too large for the pastors to share this responsibility together.

### **Know when to stay and when to leave.**

To sit with a family while their loved one is in surgery can be very helpful. They will always remember how you

took time for them. When someone is in pain and uncomfortable and they feel responsible to keep a conversation going with you, the quicker you leave the better. Pray that God will give you insight on how to be an extension of His grace and learn good visitation manners.

### **Bring cheer and hope to the bedside.**

It's not about you. It is not a time to recount when you or someone you knew had this same problem. It is a time to listen and learn. After you have listened bring an encouraging word from the Bible if the setting is appropriated. Don't take a long time but something fitting for the situation. Always pray. You may be the only one in their care team that prays for them. If you don't, no one will.

### **It is better to visit everyday for a short time rather than one long visit.**

People look forward to that brief visit that encourages them. It's like their devotional; you bring them to God, cheer them up and don't over stay so they want you back. You have the great privilege to be part of God's healing team.

*Reprinted with permission from  
Brotherhood Beacon, Dec. 2007.*

## *An Invitation to a Live History & Theology Seminar*

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# The Congregational Meeting

By Aaron Lapp, Jr.

Today people “do” their hair; they “do” their laundry; they “do” their windows; they “do” their garden; and they even “do” church.

How church is “done” becomes very important. Rivalry surrounding religious issues draws out the strongest of inner impulses. Witness what is happening in Iraq and Israel, for examples.

Church life has the potential of providing the strongest graces for living and for dying. Interestingly, it also seems to be the cause for some of life’s greatest dissatisfactions. People with such diverse feelings sit side by side to worship every Sunday.

Some people go to church quite like spectators at a sports event. They watch the proceedings, take sides, and in their hearts either cheer or boo as they see it. Scarcely does it ever occur to them that worship and handling of God’s Word is intended to put them in touch with God. It is little more than a performance to be judged on the basis of emotional appeal.

Others go to church much like traders go to market. They “buy and sell and get gain,” looking for social and emotional profit. An unwanted “Thus saith the Lord” statement, well, they just don’t “buy it.” For such listeners, profiting is difficult. Complaining is natural.

But, fortunately, many also come with honest and sincere hearts. They are hungry. They sit up to the table and consider the “meal” the best of the week. For them, the Lord’s Day is better than work day, play day or pay day. Being in God’s house is the best part of the whole week.

Some Christians fail to take their Christian lives seriously enough to live for God seven days a week. Did you ever hear of Sunday Christians? They are cozy with Satan’s rebellion against God. They are already in Satan’s camp; but he gives them time off to go to church. They go as spectators or marketers, but don’t get involved or participate much. Their motto: Try to enjoy what you can and be free to complain about what is not to your liking.

The Sunday morning church service should be a time to remember, to renew, and to rally. Try it yourself. Make an effort to give, not only receive. Do you know why Old Mother Hubbard had no bone in her cupboard? She had put none in. Church life is that way, too. Nothing put in, nothing to take out.

Sunday morning services are a time to remember, to renew, and to rally.

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1. We stir our senses to remember:
  - God’s mercies
  - our salvation in Christ
  - the Holy Spirit, our comfort
2. We sense our need for renewal:
  - out of complacency
  - into a fresh experience of God’s love
  - up to a new level of dedication
3. We support our church’s rally:
  - with joy and expectancy
  - from a supply of gratitude
  - by intending to be helpers

The Bottom Line is that congregational life is not measured by duration, but by donation. What truly matters in life is not what one tries to get, but what one is willing to give.

*Reprinted with permission from Calvary Messenger,  
May 2006.*