

# Clarion

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*Jesus went  
to the cross  
to save us and  
to make us  
right with God*

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# The Death of Jesus – A Pascalian Wager?

*Could Jesus Christ be absolutely sure that going to the cross was the right thing to do?*

The seventeenth century French Philosopher, Blaise Pascal, came up with the suggestion known as Pascal's Wager or Gambit: even though the existence of God cannot be determined through reason, a person should "wager" as though God exists, because so living has everything to gain and nothing to lose. So for Pascal, believing in God is a gamble, but one worth taking: if God does exist then the believer gains eternal life; if he does not exist then a person has wasted nothing – in the end he is just dead and ceases to exist. Imagine that our religion was reduced to this – a gamble! What piteous creatures believers would be.

It comes as no surprise therefore that Richard Dawkins has come up with an "anti-Pascal Wager" in his book, *The God Delusion*. He says that because there is only some small chance that God exists, then betting on his existence leads to squandering your precious time on worshipping Him, sacrificing to Him, fighting and dying for Him.

How blessed we are that our religion is not reduced to a Pascalian or anti-Pascalian wager. The authoritative, God-breathed Scriptures tell us that God does exist and that He sent his Son to redeem sinners. You and I don't have to lose sleep at night wondering whether this might be true. If there is one thing we know, then it is the fact that the triune God loves us deeply and will let nothing separate us from his love.

It seems that we are done with Pascalian or anti-Pascalian wagers. Apparently not. A while back I came across the suggestion that Jesus Christ's journey to the cross was a Pascalian Wager. In other words, could Jesus Christ be absolutely sure that going to the cross was the right thing to do, that it would save sinners, and He would be rewarded thereafter with

a resurrection from the dead? If He was right He had everything to gain. If He was wrong, well, what else could He do but take the path laid out for Him? In other words, Jesus Christ was not one hundred percent certain that if He died on the cross of Golgotha, He would be raised from the dead on the third day in glory. He was not sure that his death would do any good at all.

*The death of Jesus was not a Pascalian Wager. He knew it and we know it.*

In all fairness, we do appreciate that no one should minimize the sacrifice and suffering of our Lord and Saviour. Going to the cross was not an easy thing to do. For instance, we should not think that because Jesus Christ was God He did not suffer as a man would suffer. He was both God and man. Our confessions make clear that his sufferings were real and they were intense. That is firmly based on Scripture. Just before his crucifixion, we witness the Lord Jesus' prayer and emotions: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:42-44). Also, when He hung on the cross, He cried out with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46). Jesus Christ's suffering was so intense that He could hardly bear it. Every second on the cross was a constant agony and testing that would have challenged Him to the core of



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his being: did He really want to be doing this? But He did it because He wanted to redeem us and restore us as children of God. The more we see this, the more we value the precious gift of salvation in Jesus Christ, and the greater is our thanksgiving to God that leads us on pathways of holiness and obedience.

**A gamble?**

Now back to the question: was Jesus Christ taking a huge gamble when He committed Himself to go to the cross and die? To suggest that it was a gamble is a lie. Or at the very least, it is unawareness of the facts as they are clearly laid out in Scripture. Very early in his ministry, when Jesus Christ cleared the temple and the Jews demanded of Him a sign, He said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). John explains what Jesus meant, "The temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken." From the very outset of his public ministry the Lord Jesus knew and explained that He would die and be raised from the dead on the third day. In Matthew 16, after Simon Peter confessed "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God", then we read, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matt 16:21).

Jesus Christ had no doubt that his suffering and death, as an act of obedience to God, would be rewarded. In his high priestly prayer in John 17 He prayed: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:4). Last, but not least, when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

The suggestion that Jesus Christ went to the cross with doubts about what He was doing and what his death might accomplish is in conflict with Scripture and, specifically, in conflict with Jesus Christ's own words. He knew what He was doing, why He was doing it, and what the outcome would be. Listen to what He said in the passage about the Good Shepherd:

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and

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*Blaise Pascal*

I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father (John 10:14-18)

Jesus Christ lay down his life for his sheep because He wanted to and the Father told Him to do so, but He did it with the sure knowledge that He would take up his life again.

### **The big question**

The death of Jesus was not a Pascalian Wager. He knew it and we know it. The existence of God is not a Pascalian Wager. We know it from the Bible. There is only one huge question: why would a sinless Jesus go to the cross to suffer and die for a wretched sinner like me? How can it be that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21)? That is the wonder of God's grace – his undeserved love and favour. There is nothing about us or in us that makes us attractive to God. We did not deserve the fact that the Son of God emptied Himself and became man, humbling Himself to death on a cross. God did this because He wanted to. We even read in Hebrews 12:2: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus did it joyfully: He went to the cross because He longed to save us and make us right with God.

What a wonder of grace! What a miracle of love! Knowing this, with the eyes of faith we can go there to Golgotha and look at our dying, bleeding Lord. And we understand. We are convinced that in his extreme agony, Jesus loves us and is dying for our sins. Let us stand there quietly, knowing what He is doing for us. He is dying, but in three days He will be raised in glory. He will ascend to heaven to be crowned as King of kings. He will govern history so that one day He can return for us and take us to a Paradise Restored. We know all this because the Bible tells us so.





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**MATTHEW 13:52**

# “What We Deserve”

*We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.*

Luke 23:41

Perhaps you know the scene: two criminals, two very different characters. The first picks up the scornful blasphemy of the bystanders, but the other rebukes him. He defends the man at his side, “Don’t you fear God since you are under the same sentence?” (Luke 23:40). They were all three sentenced to death on the cross, cursed by God and men, for “anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” The second criminal recognized it. He feared God. He understood something of the awesomeness of what he was facing and he would not mock his Maker.

Would we dare call out like the first criminal? No, instead we hear the rebuke of the second criminal, “Don’t you fear God since we are all under the same punishment?” This criminal even admits his own guilt: “We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve” (v. 41). There he is, hanging on the cross at death’s door, beside the Christ, and he lays his guilt bare. He does not hide. Many people know their own guilt but they try every means possible to appear innocent or to hide the truth. But this penitent criminal gave it all up. He confessed his own guilt – even more, he accepted the consequences. It’s hopeless anyway to deny our guilt, to evade accountability before the all-knowing God. And how hard isn’t it for us to admit that we are completely undeserving of any mercy and blessing?

We are sinners and we were all under the same punishment, condemned to get what our deeds deserve. We should be condemned to hang on the cross, also under the curse of God. That would be just punishment.

But the criminal recognizes that Jesus is different. While they are getting what they deserve, Jesus has done nothing wrong. Even Pilate and Herod had determined that He was innocent. That didn’t matter to the first criminal. As long as Jesus could get him off of this cross, that’s what mattered. But this criminal sees Jesus’ innocence: “This man has done nothing wrong” (v. 41).

We need to have a sense of how appalling that is! Christ did not get what *his* deeds deserve; instead, He received what *our* deeds deserve! Humanly, that is a grave injustice. So while we may question God’s motives in our life, or question his purpose in what we must deal with, we should first think about our sin and what our sins deserve. What if we were punished justly, getting what our sins deserve? Just look at ourselves, at the mess we so often make of our life.

But because this criminal knows and has confessed his sin, he pleads with Christ, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (v. 42). He calls Him by his first name, Jesus, the name given to Him because He would save his people from their sins. The title above his head may have said “The King of the Jews,” and

the people may have been mocking Him as “the Christ,” but this criminal calls Him “Jesus, Saviour.” That is what he needs deliverance from: sin. He understands now that Jesus’ kingdom is not merely an earthly kingdom. Even though Jesus was suffering on the cross, mocked by all the people, He had the bearing of a true king. And He was the king of a much better kingdom, because He was not hung there to save these men from the cross, but to save his people from their sins.

That is the kingdom this second criminal wanted to be a part of. He pleads with Jesus: “Remember me.” That is, “Think of me too, when you come to the place you are going. For you are good and powerful and one day will vindicate your great name and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

You see, both criminals wanted to be saved from death, but how differently they sought their salvation. The first said, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” And the second said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” There can be a vast difference between “save me” and “save me.” “Save me from my suffering,” or “save me from my sin.” And Jesus’ reaction points us to the only way, “Today, you will be with me in paradise” (v. 43). Look in faith to Christ crucified as your Saviour *from sin* and you will see Him in Paradise!





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# The Future of Theological Education (Part 1 of 2)

One of the reports that Synod Burlington 2010 will be considering this coming May is the Joint Report of the Theological Education Committees of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the theological education of future ministers for the well-being of the church. Humanly speaking, as the seminary education goes, so goes the church. This is, therefore, a very important report as it seeks to set the direction for the future, not just of theological education, but of the church. The church in view is a church in which the URCNA and the CanRC will unite to form one federation.

Let us, therefore, consider this report. I will first give some background and then summarize the key issues and recommendations. Text in quotation marks or block quotes is taken from the Joint Report unless otherwise indicated. In a following article, I hope to give an evaluation of this document.

## Some background

The two committees had a considerable challenge to overcome. Back in 2005, the CanRC committee had proposed "the model of one federational Seminary, with two officially approved independent seminaries (without presumption as to which of the present seminaries would be which)." The members of the URCNA committee were unable to accept this proposal because they were not convinced that a federational seminary was biblically mandated. They also did not believe that this would serve the churches well. Since the CanRC committee had been mandated to maintain at least one federational seminary, the committees were at an impasse.

The CanRC and URCNA synods dealt with this stalemate in their 2007 synods. The CanRC synod held in Smithers, British Columbia, changed the composition

of their committee so that the Theological College was no longer represented. Synod also tweaked the committee's mandate so that some perceived it as providing more flexibility in the position of the CanRC committee. The full decision can be found in the Acts of the Smithers synod, Article 103. The URCNA synod held at Schererville, Indiana, responded to the impasse by making no changes to the mandate it had given to its committee. The Schererville Synod, however, did:

- a. affirm the six points of agreement which had been established by the committees in January of 2004;
- b. affirm the position of the URCNA committee that a federationally controlled seminary was not biblically mandated; and
- c. affirm that the churches continue to follow Article 3 of the URCNA Church Order which requires a man's consistory to assure that he receives a thoroughly Reformed theological education.

What were the six points of agreement which the Schererville Synod affirmed? These were as follows:

1. It is the task of the churches to train ministers;
2. Ministers of the churches must receive sound Reformed theological training;
3. As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers;
4. Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education;
5. It is acknowledged that active involvement of the churches is required for the training of ministers and to protect the confessional integrity of such training; and
6. The churches, (i.e., the URCNA and the CanRC), should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches.

The URCNA and CanRC Theological Education Committees sought to build on these points of agreement in the meetings that were held leading up to their joint report. At the same time there is the

clear acknowledgment in the report that much of their "discussion and the decisions which arose from those discussions were made in an attempt to maintain our unique preferences in a unified federation."

The URCNA see theological education as a consistorial matter in the first instance, as required by their Church Order. "It is entirely up to the consistory to see to it that a Reformed education is obtained. At the same time, the Classis plays an important role by providing concurrence to the declaration that a man is declared a candidate for the ministry, having been properly examined by the Classis ... There does not appear to be any desire among the United Reformed congregations to establish an officially-controlled seminary. The current arrangement seems to be serving the URCNA well" (Appendix 2 of the Joint Report). Indeed, "this approach to theological education reflects the URCNA emphasis on the authority of the local consistory, and on the importance of local consistories in governing the pulpits of the URCNA federation." The seminaries most often used by the URCNA are Mid-America Reformed Theological Seminary and Westminster Seminary California.

As is well-known, the CanRC approach is quite different. The theological education of future pastors is a federative matter as required by Article 19 of our Church Order. The Board of Governors is appointed by a General Synod and it oversees the teaching in the College. Extensive reports to the churches and to each General Synod ensure that the churches are fully informed and involved in the affairs of their school.

Both the URCNA and CanRC agree on foundational principles for theological education but they differ in applying these principles. How then can theological education function in a united federation which brings the URCNA and the CanRC together? Let us consider the main proposals of the Joint Report.

### **Matters agreed to in the Report**

There were three areas that needed agreement: curriculum, financing, and governance. Agreement on the basic requirements for a theological curriculum was achieved. The main schools used for preparing ministers of the Word were all found to meet this standard.

With respect to financing, the current situation in the URCNA is one of considerable disparity in terms of supporting theological education. It was agreed

that "the financial support of theological education ought to be formalized within the united federation. Such formalization would involve identifying the costs associated with training men for the ministry and assessing all communicant members a portion of that cost. These monies would be used to support all the institutions approved by the united federation. The way in which these monies would be dispersed would be determined by a Standing Committee for Theological Education to be established by the General Synod of our united federation." It was also agreed that "there should be an equitable formula by which the churches would fairly and evenly support the seminaries that have the endorsement of the joint federation, whether federational or independent."

With respect to governance, it was quite a challenge to come up with an agreement and in the end no real agreement was reached. The first tentative agreement was as follows.

The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton would be governed by one of the regional synods under consideration in the proposed church order (cf. PCO Art. 21), presumably the regional synod which would represent the Canadian churches of a united federation. At the same [time – cvd], the independent model for theological education would receive financial support and acceptance in the united federation. According to this approach churches could send their students to Mid-America, Westminster California, or the Theological College in Hamilton ... Financial support for each institution from the churches would be entirely voluntary. What is more, there would be an acknowledgement of each seminary's support structure and membership base. Only the governance of the Theological College in Hamilton would be officially administered by and subject to an assembly of the churches.

Appendix 4 to the Joint Report gives more details. A commitment will be sought from the former Canadian Reformed Churches "to support the seminary on an assessment basis. In addition, all churches in Canada that were formerly United Reformed will be invited to support the seminary in Canada; however, it is understood that such support will be determined locally and rendered on a voluntary basis."

However, this tentative agreement met considerable opposition when the seminaries involved were

consulted via their principals. It was felt that the URCNA would never agree to a regional synod and this model "would give greater place and priority to the Theological College in the united federation. In short, it was a federational seminary, even though it was only governed by a Regional Synod."

In response to these concerns, the following proposal was discussed.

Consideration be given to a voluntary association of churches within the federation which would be given the opportunity to unite together for the purpose of governing and maintaining the Theological College in Hamilton. This association of churches would not be an official organization of the united federation and would take upon itself all responsibilities for the Theological College. Essentially it would be a coalition of the willing churches which would agree voluntarily to support the "federational" seminary and further in their discretion (collective or otherwise), independent seminaries.

This proposal, however, faced opposition from CanRC quarters. It was "the independent model in another guise" and not likely to win favour in the CanRC.

The committees were once again at an impasse.

## Conclusion and recommendations

In a final meeting of the two committees, it was agreed to send the following conclusions and recommendations to the churches.

1. We are thankful for the harmony and brotherly manner in which we could work together, even in the circumstances where polarized and strongly cherished and held positions did not allow for easy or readily compromised solutions.
2. We are thankful for the providential care of the Lord over our deliberations in the many times we took to traveling to undertake the work.
3. As a fully independent model is not acceptable to the CanRC and a fully federational model is not acceptable to the URCNA, the only real viable choice of governance for theological education in a united federation would be a model where the united federation would operate with a model of two independent seminaries endorsed and approved by the general synod of a united church (i.e., Mid-America and Westminster California), with one federationally governed seminary

(the Theological College in Hamilton) by way of a Regional Synod of Canada, or if deemed appropriate, by the general synods of the united federation meeting from time to time.

4. For this model to gain approval or acceptance from the URCNA the members of the URCNA will need to adopt in part the federational model by way of a regional synod overseeing a federational seminary (not to mention actually adopting a church order model which includes the concept of regional synods), together with financial assessments to the churches to support the federational model.
5. For this model to gain approval or acceptance from the CanRC, the members of the CanRC will need to adopt in part the independent model which calls for endorsement of independent seminaries, and voluntary financial support.
6. There is agreement on the core elements of the required curriculum, whatever the model (see Appendix 3 attached).
7. Although we do not bring specific proposals, if the proposed hybrid model is adopted, we would envision a blended system of voluntary contributions and assessments to support the federational seminary and the independent seminaries, and are confident that a counsel of experienced wise men could develop an equitable manner to do so.
8. The synodical directions, the distinct historical experiences and the preferences for the two distinct models, do not allow the two committees to make a joint submission for consideration beyond that set out above.
9. The two committees are of the view that they have wrestled with the distinctives thoroughly and sufficiently and that this report, inclusive of its appendices, is intended to serve the churches by laying out the clear alternatives and assist for fulsome and considered reflection and discussion in the churches regarding this matter.
10. That the respective synods receive and approve of the work of the committees and declare that their mandates have been fulfilled and are at an end.
11. That the respective synods receive, approve and adopt the recommended model as set out in Recommendation 3 above and direct and serve the churches in that regard.

In the next article, we will reflect on this report and evaluate it.







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# Inerrancy – Lessons from History (Part 3 of 6)

In our last instalment, we saw that the Belgic Confession contains the doctrine of inerrancy in seed form. One cannot argue against inerrancy on the basis of this creed. This time around we want to begin looking at the history of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) as it pertains to biblical inerrancy.

Any discussion of this topic inevitably has to deal with the infamous Report 44. This report was prepared for Synod 1972 and it dealt with “The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority.” It set the stage for much of what went wrong with the CRC in the following decades.

## Origins of Report 44

However, before we can look at Report 44, we need to consider how this report was commissioned. It is actually rather surprising that it has its origins partly in an overture from the Fruitland CRC to Classis Hamilton in 1968. The Fruitland CRC, under the leadership of Rev. Louis Praamsma (a well-known CRC conservative and father of writer Christine Farenhorst), overtured Classis Hamilton:

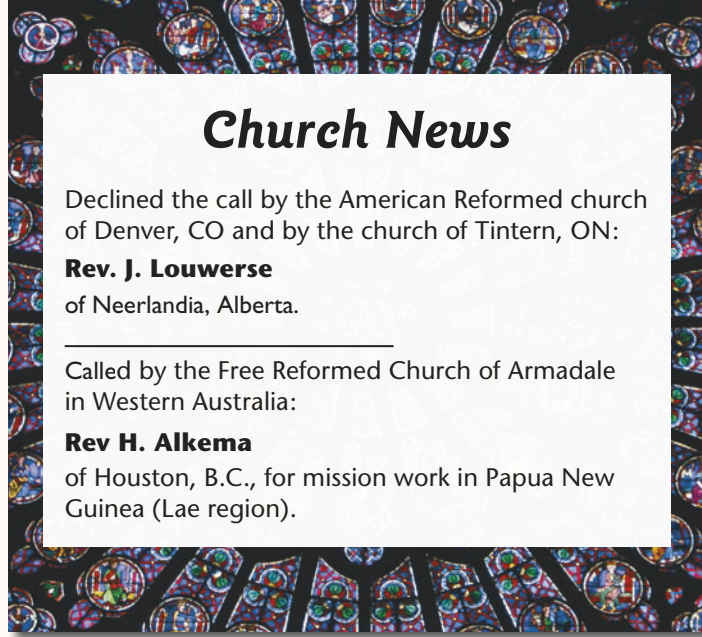
The Fruitland Christian Reformed Church overtures classis that it instructs its member of the board of Calvin College and Seminary to raise the question in the next meeting of the board, whether it is still advisable, and profitable to our churches, to commend the students of Calvin Seminary to continue their studies at the Free University of Amsterdam.

The Board of Trustees was dismissive of Classis Hamilton and so Fruitland overtured Synod 1968 directly asking them to appoint “a committee to study in the light of Scripture and the Creeds the teachings made public by some professors and instructors in our Dutch Reformed sister-church, of which evidence has been given in the overture of Classis Hamilton to the board of Calvin College and Seminary of Jan. 17, 1968.”

What were some of these teachings that Fruitland was concerned about in the *Gereformeerde Kerken*? H. M. Kuitert was teaching that Genesis 1 should be understood as speaking figuratively. He didn’t think it mattered whether Adam was a historic figure or not, but landed on the side of “not” at any rate. With regards to the New Testament, Kuitert said that one must distinguish between the “witness and the sound-board.” He wrote, “This implies the subjectivity of the witness and implies in the same breath some ‘wrapping-material’ which is not the matter itself.” In other words, we must distinguish between the message of Scripture and the means by which that message is delivered. Moreover, there were many other such teachings that were deeply concerning not only to Fruitland and Classis Hamilton, but also Classis Alberta North (which submitted a similar overture to Synod 1968). Classis Illiana also submitted an overture to Synod 1968 supporting Fruitland and Classis Hamilton.

What did Synod 1968 do with these overtures? The overture of Fruitland for a study committee was denied. The Synod didn’t think it was respectful or appropriate to investigate the teachings of men in their sister churches and it also assured Fruitland that it had full confidence in the discernment of the professors at Calvin. The overture of Classis Alberta North advocating for the expression of concern about some teachings emanating from The Netherlands was also denied. The grounds were similar, though the Synod added that “normal, official channels” should be employed to voice these concerns, such as the Inter-Church Relations Committee and the fraternal delegates.

However, Louis Praamsma and the Fruitland church didn’t give up. We’ll come back to them shortly.



## Church News

Declined the call by the American Reformed church of Denver, CO and by the church of Tintern, ON:

**Rev. J. Louwerse**  
of Neerlandia, Alberta.

Called by the Free Reformed Church of Armadale in Western Australia:

**Rev H. Alkema**  
of Houston, B.C., for mission work in Papua New Guinea (Lae region).

### The CRC and Scripture in the 60s

Stepping back from the synodical story for a bit, we need to look at some of what was being written about Scripture in the CRC during the 1960s. It should be noted that these things were written by men who expressed loyalty to the Reformed confessions. However, as we survey some of these viewpoints, we can easily understand why Louis Praamsma and the Fruitland CRC (and others of like mind) were becoming increasingly concerned.

Rudolf Bultmann was a German theologian who attempted to "demythologize" the New Testament. Bultmann worked with a distinction between what actually happened (history) and what we believe (faith). The historical reliability of the Bible was not only called into question, but considered to be relatively unimportant. In an article in *The Reformed Journal* in September 1963, Bastiaan Van Elderen (a professor at Calvin Seminary) had expressed appreciation for Bultmann's contribution to biblical hermeneutics.

John Timmer and William La Fleur were CRC missionaries in Japan. In a July/August 1966 article in *The Reformed Journal*, Timmer and La Fleur argued that the book of Isaiah should probably be regarded as having multiple authors and having been written either during or after the Exile in Babylon, a staple position of higher critics. They argued that holding to the old position (which also happens to be the position of the New Testament) is "consonant to a large degree with the modern and Western value placed upon individual creativity." Again, I would draw your attention to the fact that these men expressed loyalty to the Three Forms of Unity. After all, there is nothing in the Three Forms that binds anyone to believe that Isaiah had only one author.

Academics also contributed to this latitudinarian drift. In the same issue of *The Reformed Journal* (July/August 1966), Peter Berkhout urged his readers to accept theistic evolution. With words that sound familiar, Berkhout wrote, "Whether we like it or not, we will have to put the old wine, the truth of Scripture, into new skins. Our young people are clamoring for it...You cannot suppress truth forever."

In 1968, the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship invited Dr. Arnold De Graaff and Dr. Calvin Seerveld to give some lectures on "Understanding the Scriptures." These lectures were

later published in a booklet with that title. There are a great many troubling statements in this booklet, but let's just take two. According to De Graaff, the Psalmist intended "to preach, and not first of all to relate historical events. Generalizing, we can say that we cannot deduce a history of Israel from the O.T., just as little as we can reconstruct the life of Jesus from the gospels." In other words, disregard history and concentrate on the message. He went on to insist that the creation account in Genesis is not to be taken as literally true. He explained further,

This does not imply that Genesis is irrelevant for geology or biology, on the contrary, in a very special way the creation story serves as the religious basis and directive for the Christian biologist's and geologist's theorizing. It does mean that the references to God's creating do not answer our scientific, biological or geological questions, just as little as the Bible answers the questions of the historian or the anthropologist. The Bible is just not that kind of a book. It is not a textbook for any science, not even theology! The Scriptures "only" intend to recite God's mighty acts in Jesus Christ through whom he created and re-created his world. And this recital is inscripturated for our edification, in order that we might take it to heart and thus find eternal life. That is how the Scriptures want to be read.

It was these sorts of positions (and many more could be cited) both in North America and in The Netherlands that led growing numbers of people in the CRC to be concerned about the direction of their church. Despite professed loyalty to the Reformed confessions, there was a discernible latitudinarian drift, especially among the neo-Calvinistic academic community. During the 1960s, this drift manifested itself in the acceptance of higher critical views of Scripture. By necessary implication, this was also a clear rejection of biblical inerrancy.





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# Canticles

## It's Midnight in the Garden

This song is based on the several gospel narratives about the passion of Christ in Gethsemane. It is set to the contemplative tune, VIGIL. I was inspired to write it by an old Dutch hymn, 't *Is Middernacht en in de hof*. May *It's Midnight in the Garden* be a blessing to you this Good Friday as you reflect upon what the Lord did for you.

Note: You can view more of George van Popta's canticles at <https://sites.google.com/site/canticles99/>.

## It's Midnight in the Garden

1. It's mid - night in the gar - den; our Lord has fall - en prone.  
 2. It's mid - night, He's in an - guish; His sweat falls to the earth.  
 3. It's mid - night, deep - est sad - ness en - gulf's the Ho - ly One.

With an - guished prayers He cries out; He strug - gles all a - lone.  
 His per - spi - ra - tion's blood - ied; He's trou - bled near to death.  
 And yet He prays, "O Fa - ther! O God, Your will be done."

It's mid - night, how He's suf - fering; His friends are fast a - sleep.  
 It's mid - night, He is bur - dened; our sins caused Him His grief.  
 It's mid - night and the Fa - ther now strength - ens His dear Son.

They can't keep watch one hour; their sleep is ver - y deep.  
 God's wrath poured out up - on Him to bring us full re - lief.  
 Our Lord goes on to vic - tory. Dear friends, the bat - tle's won!

Text: © George Ph. van Popta, 2009

VIGIL  
7 6 7 6 D



Keith Sikkema  
and  
Arthur Kingma



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# Stewards of the Grace of God: CRTA Convention 2009, Fergus, ON, October 28 and 29, 2009

Mr. Shawn Wolski (Timothy), chair of the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association's executive, welcomed all to the 2009 Convention. After reading and reflecting on two passages, 1 Peter 4:1-11 and Matthew 25:14-30, Wolski introduced the theme of the convention: "Be Stewards of the Grace of God" – a very fitting follow-up to last year's theme, "Life in Abundance." Mrs. Inge DeVisser (Covenant) led us in some singing, introduced the convention committee, and reminded us to thank our God for his gifts already visible here.

## Devotional

Rev. D.G.J. Agema, part-time lecturer at Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College, based his devotional on 1 Peter 4:10: "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (NKJV). He began by connecting his topic not to Halloween but to Reformation Day, when we reflect on the mighty deeds of the Lord in reforming the church. From the Reformers' motto *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola scriptura*, Rev. Agema

focused on the term *sola gratia*. He had us share with one another what "by grace alone" means and how it would function in our lives. After our sharing session, Rev. Agema provided us with some historical context of the word *grace*. He explained that until the Reformation, people were taught to be saved by works. The Reformers rediscovered that *grace* means receiving forgiveness of sins *without deserving it*.

In the Bible, the word *grace* is used in many situations. In the Pauline salutation "Grace and peace to you," *grace* is further developed in each epistle. In Acts, *grace* can also refer to all God's work (my *grace* is sufficient for you); or it can indicate that someone stronger than you comes to help the weaker and undeserving one: God, in Christ Jesus, comes to us, undeserving sinners. The reformers broke free of the medieval notion of *grace* versus nature; instead, *grace* restores nature (by destroying sin) to the way it was in Paradise. Rev. Agema urged us to see *grace* as "amazing, special, and broad." We frequently reduce *grace* to forgiveness, but it includes our whole life. *Grace* is more than a spare tire or an emergency kit; it involves "the air we breathe and the path on which we travel." It is our life in Christ.

In the second section of his address, Rev. Agema led us in an analytical reading of the theme text. He pointed out that the *grace* of God is the starting point for all our actions; it is manifold (varied and rich); it is placed as gifts in the hands of stewards; and it is to be administered to one another. We must share these gifts fully and completely.

The context provides more understanding to this passage. Because the believers in Asia Minor were suffering, Peter continually directed them to focus on Christ alone. Several times Peter urged them to be clear-minded and self-controlled. If the believers' minds were focused on Christ and their actions were guided by this focus, then the believers would be able



to show love to one another, demonstrate hospitality to one another, and administer the gifts of grace to one another. The same message applies to us.

In the last section of the devotional, Rev. Agema urged us to put this theme into practice. As teachers and fellow pilgrims, we must start with the grace of God in Christ: it is the basis of our service. To be good stewards, we must first of all stand amazed at what God wants to do with each one of us, weak sinners. Second, we may never separate our gifts and talents from the grace of God, thinking that we own these gifts. If we do, we will estrange each other because of our gifts and hinder the grace of God. Third, we must minister our talents and gifts to others. We should think, "Wow, God gives sinful me his grace which I may minister or deacon to others, and wow, God's grace comes to others through me." We are to be deacons, table servants, who ensure that each one receives gifts according to their needs. In our classrooms and staffrooms, therefore, we must readily and cheerfully administer our gifts as evidences of God's grace to each one in need.

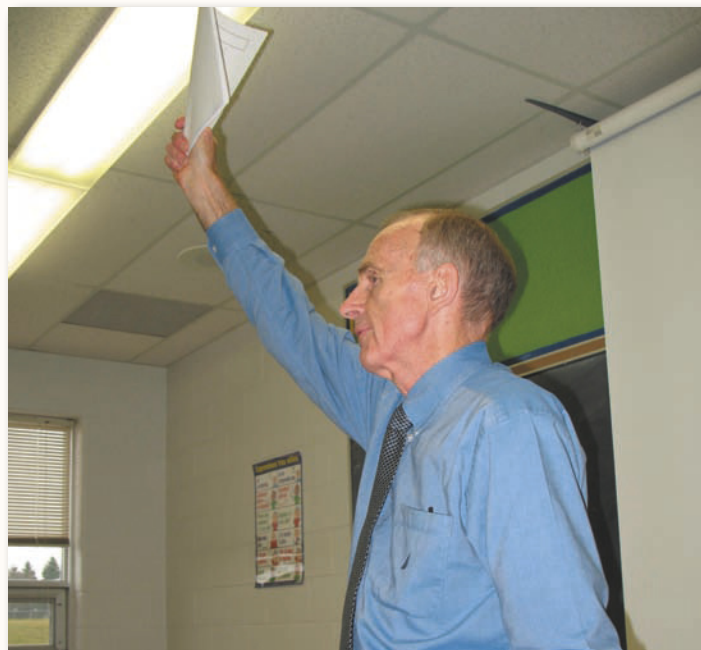
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*We may never separate our gifts and talents from the grace of God, thinking that we own these gifts*

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After this inspiring devotional, we learned our theme song, "Use the Gifts You Have Received," written specifically for this convention by Tim Nijenhuis (Guido). We then enjoyed coffee and other refreshments, socialized with the other 150 teachers, and headed off to our various workshops. Workshops were on the topics: Teaching Guidance in Grades 7 and 8; Current Events: a vital link (to our curriculum); Covenant Children on the Playgrounds of our Schools; The Confessional Character of Reformed Education; Teaching Evolution: Why and How; All about Professional Portfolios; and Anger Management.

Another round of workshops was offered to us after we ate a hearty sub and salad lunch. Topics included: Computer Technology through the Eyes of Faith; School buses: A Pain?; Depression and Suicide in Teens; Look Out and Look Up: Curing Frustration in Vocation; How is your Creative Writing?; and Strategies that Enhance Learning.



On the second day, Richard Hoeksema, principal of Maranatha Christian School, reopened the convention by reading the chapter about spiritual gifts and being parts of one body: 1 Corinthians 12. As before, the singing of various songs resounded in the school gym and the Lord's blessing for the day was asked in prayer. On this day, the staff of Guido de Brès Christian High School joined the other teachers at the conference.

### **Teacher as pedagogue**

Christine van Halen-Faber, principal of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College, spoke about "The teacher as pedagogue: How can we be good stewards of God's gifts?" This topic tied in with this year's and last year's convention themes. Just like Hansel and Gretel left pebbles to find their way back, teachers leave pedagogical pebbles: what will the students remember of their instructions? Dr. van Halen outlined pedagogies of nurture and care, such as those of Nel Noddings and Max VanManen, and further illustrated the nurturing pedagogy of Scripture. It stresses the unique nature of each child, its relationship with God and the neighbour, and the covenant context in which teacher and student are co-heirs of God's gifts. The teacher (or pedagogue) is a leader and steward serving others with the gifts of God's grace and nurturing those gifts in students. Teachers must be shepherds, not robbers, and students follow the voice they know by means of God's abundant provision of grace. VanManen describes pedagogical practice as tactful. Pedagogical tact preserves the learner's space, protects what is vulnerable, and strengthens what is good. It is acquired in thoughtful practice and professional development; it requires



perfectly in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Him alone that the *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola scriptura* of the Reformation come to Maranatha. After a coffee break, teachers broke into several role-play groups to practice the ideas presented in challenging real-life scenarios. While some groups simulated staff meetings or planned Remembrance Day assemblies, one group worked out the theme of “unity in diversity – diversity in unity” in works of art.

### reformedteacher.net



At the previous CRTA convention, Phil Houweling from Australia had introduced [reformedteacher.net](http://reformedteacher.net). Harold Sikkema updated us on the progress made with the development of this resource site for English-speaking Canadian Reformed educators and learners around the world. In addition, the site wants to be a framework for online professional development courses. Teachers were encouraged to get on board: they are the wings of butterfly in the logo. Testing of the site is scheduled for December and workshops are offered to local schools starting in February, 2010.

### Workshops and closing

After a good soup lunch, with more enthusiastic singing, teachers were invited to join in any one of eight workshops on the following topics: Teaching Discernment; Extra Curricular, Extra Fun!; Constructivism in the Reformed Classroom; History, the Queen of the Humanities; Visual Arts; How to Improve French Conversation Skills; Changing Families and Parental Schools; Teaching Music Theory; and Strategies that Enhance Learning.

The convention was closed by the chairman, who thanked all the organizers for using their gifts in service to others. We read Psalm 150, sang the theme song, and offered our thanks and petitions to God in prayer. It was a great conference, with much to ponder and to bring into practice.

Note to readers: If you would like to know more about one of these topics, send Otto Bouwman an email and you will be connected with the requested presenters.

*The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman [obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us](mailto:obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us).*

knowledge of the “who” of the teacher and the learner and the “how” of student learning.

People are different, and Dr. van Halen gave several windows to show that. Keirsey’s theory of temperament notes that some people observe through the senses and others through intuition. Further, some process and decide through thinking and others through feeling. Another way of illustrating this perfect artistry of God’s manifold gifts of grace is by different characters, in which some can be characterized as guardians, some as idealists, some as rationalists, and some as artisans. One can stand in awe for the God who made each of us as unique individuals, gave us gifts in perfect measure, and requires our contentment with what He gave us (Hymn 48).

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*The covenant community is a  
community of learning in which we  
practice pedagogical tactfulness in our  
walk and talk*

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Students are also different in how they learn and respond. The theory of multiple intelligences identifies nine different ways of “being smart.” Teachers recognize visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic learners, as well as sequential, relational, analytical, and dynamic responses. With such great variety of gifts, each group of students is different, and teachers cannot teach them the same way. There is an ongoing dynamic of learning in schools, in which students and teachers learn from each other. The covenant community is a community of learning in which we practice pedagogical tactfulness in our walk and talk. In light of 1 Corinthians 12, good stewards seek the most excellent way of love. This love is given to us

### **Our Worship, Abraham Kuyper (ed. Harry Boonstra), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.**

**Additional Information: Paperback, 411 pages, \$30.00 USD**

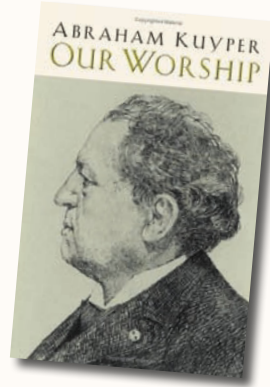
Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) is not as well-known as he used to be. In years gone by, he and his views were much discussed – few people were neutral about this giant of a man. For many in our circles, he was the source of a wrong turn in Reformed theology in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Regardless, there is no doubt that he was hugely influential as a Dutch pastor, theologian, educator, politician, and author. Among his achievements were leadership in the Doleantie of 1886 and holding the office of Prime Minister of The Netherlands from 1901 to 1905. He defined what it means to be a prolific writer and this particular book under review appeared in 1911, relatively late in his career.

The book was originally entitled *Onze Eeredienst* and consisted of a compilation of articles about public worship initially published in the periodical *De Heraut*. This translation was commissioned by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship at Calvin College/Seminary in Grand Rapids. It was carried out by a capable team of translators and, for the most part, the translation is smooth and in good English. Harry Boonstra did the editing work and this included pruning about thirty percent of the original Dutch text. In other words, *Our Worship* is not a direct or full translation of *Onze Eeredienst* but a translated abridgement. Boonstra also provided an excellent introduction which places Kuyper's book in its historical context.

As far as the content is concerned, Kuyper takes us through a Reformed worship service and discusses all the different elements. The book begins with some preliminary considerations about worship and then proceeds to begin with the benediction, moving through to the salutation. Along the way, Kuyper offers his thoughts on anything and everything. Towards the end of the volume we find chapters dealing with baptism, profession of faith, Lord's Supper, excommunication and readmission, ordination/installation, and marriage.

*Our Worship* is interesting from an historical point of view. It is remarkable how much things have changed since the days of Kuyper. For instance, one today can hardly imagine a worship service with thirty children being baptized in one service (p. 236)! The book is also still relevant and helpful for contemporary reflection on our Reformed worship services. As an

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example, Kuyper gives some thought to the mechanics of corporate prayer – how can we best pray along with the minister? He also discusses the important matter of God's presence in public worship – is God present in the worship service in a way

that He is not elsewhere? Kuyper makes the case that He is (p. 112). In another place, he defends the priority of psalms in Reformed worship (p. 39).

There is a lot to commend this old/new volume. Yet there are a few misgivings. As mentioned above, Kuyper discusses baptism in one of the chapters and there his concept of presumptive regeneration resurfaces. The starting point of Kuyper's reflections is also problematic. He gives no attention to what the Three Forms of Unity teach on this point in HC LD 35 or BC 7 and 32. Instead, he takes his starting point and guiding principle in the nature of the worship service as an assembly of believers. His perspective is useful in many respects and is not to be discarded, but his prioritizing of this fails to do justice to the Scriptures as the ultimate authority for Reformed worship. The nature of the assembly should not be the starting point for Reformed worship.

Also, since it is a later development in Reformed liturgics, Kuyper does not discuss the covenantal structure of our worship. While he does touch on the covenantal nature of worship (relating as it does to his starting point), this does not bear fruit in the area of how the worship service is to be dialogically organized. Had he been able to make use of those insights, one wonders whether he would still insist on having the votum as the first element in the service – after all, if our worship is covenantal, and God has the first word in the covenant of grace, should He not also have the first word in our worship?

Those points notwithstanding, the publication of this abridgement is a wonderful contribution to the study of Reformed worship. Rounding out the volume are a number of responses. John Bolt's essay on "All of Life is Worship?" was especially outstanding, dealing with the neo-Kuyperian concept that everything we do is worship. The Calvin Institute of Christian Worship is to be commended for the publication of *Our Worship*. It's an engaging read that brings us into contact with an important figure from our heritage.



### ***Praise Him with Stringed Instruments: Psalms of Geneva with String Orchestra***

**Arranged by Kent Dykstra, Distributed by  
Preta Enterprises**

This recently produced recording is sure to become a favourite for many listeners, both those who sing the Psalms to Genevan melodies in their worship services and those who wish they could. The quality of the compositions, the music, and the recording combine to make this a CD that has little hope of collecting dust on the CD rack, or finding rest on the iPod, as the case may be.

Listeners will hear creative arrangements of thirteen psalms, familiar and less familiar, ranging from the plaintive to the military, from the pensive to the festive. On the artistic insert one can find brief notes for each selection on that particular psalm, the composition, and featured players. The sections vary in length from 1 minute 26 seconds to 4 minutes 14 seconds.

The composition for Psalm 2, as a sample, is introduced as follows: "As the shreds of mist dissipate over the battlefield, envision the column of soldiers approaching, led by the rider on a white horse, with pennants fluttering in the wind, singing a war psalm of the Prince of Peace." The music delivers.

A colourful array of musical styles is put to service, including the medieval dance in Psalm 114, the baroque style in Psalm 38, and the twentieth century Glassian



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method in Psalm 7, inspired by Marion Mozetich's *Postcards from the Sky*. How's that for musical catholicity in a Lord's Day 21 sort of way?

The composition for Psalm 1 stirs up the soul's longing for a walk with God such as Adam and Eve must have once enjoyed. Psalm 81 gets blood flowing and feet tapping by placing us in the audience of Miriam and the women she led in song "with tambourines and dancing."

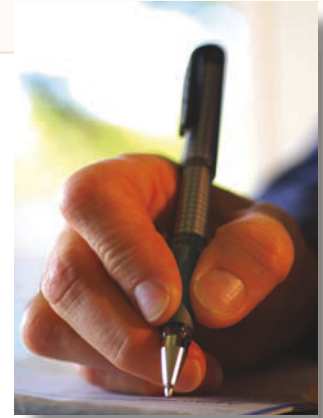
The fine and imaginative arrangements are the work of Kent Dykstra, who started arranging Psalm tunes for school band in 2001. The production of this CD took place last summer on the third anniversary of the Reformed String Camp, which every summer brings together musicians from across Canada. A selection of fifteen musicians who had participated in the camp during the preceding days of July 2009 got together one more time for a full day of recording.

That the same year marked the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth is hardly a coincidence, considering that it was he who originally commissioned the composition of the Genevan Psalter.

I heartily recommend this recording.







## Letter to the Editor

This is in regards to the editorial Dr. Van Dam has written about science and ideology, particularly concerning the area where he discusses global warming. While Dr. Van Dam's thesis is correct in that science has to be, at all times, framed within our biblical worldview, I have a few issues not just with his claims about climate trends, but with whom he decides to take sides with and the implications an editorial like this has.

First, he says that scientists have "ideological interests to make their findings fit their theories." This does not stop him from siding with an acknowledged minority on the issue who also has ideological interests (some might say more so, because oil and gas companies are well-known to sponsor these sorts of studies in the United States), and making dubious claims about a global cooling trend. He stresses the point by using "Climategate" as evidence that the science of climate change is deeply flawed. For one, no issue is raised with the fact that these are *stolen* emails, which brings into question their authenticity; the exact language and meaning of the emails is also not regarded. But the most important fact not acknowledged is that the CRU at East Anglia is not the only research institute doing studies on climate change; the IPCC is not even the only one. Many research facilities – NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration, the United States Global Research Program, and many others – are all coming to the same conclusion: climate change fueled by greenhouse gas in the atmosphere is happening and average temperatures are rising. These institutions all work independently from the IPCC. Scientists overwhelmingly accept it as fact, and yet all the focus is on reinforcing the minority viewpoint. Written by someone in Dr. Van Dam's position an editorial like this only serves to reinforce people's existing views, but within a "biblical" framework. Stripping the topic of nuance and making it a black and white issue does nothing for Reformed Christians wanting to learn more about the issue, because they are not learning anything but vague talking points. He says this is "not the best place to go into detailed arguments," but if one is to make these sorts of claims, detailed arguments are more than necessary.

The editorial in question stresses that scientists are not to be trusted because of sin, even though every human is sinful, even those who counter climate change science. He has, in effect, said that one side is better than the other, even though they are all composed by humans who are prone to sin.

There is no real reason to have, as a Christian, an issue with the science, and yet editorials like Dr. Van Dam's and articles found in *Reformed Perspective* and *Christian Renewal* are turning the issue into something that Christians have to unilaterally accept as untrue.

With these kinds of articles and editorials, there is the creation of artificial reasons that have more to do with ad hominem attacks, unsaid political leanings, and, yes, the ideological interests of the writers and magazines than with the Bible. "Environmentalism" is often characterized as a blind religious following and this keeps many people from trusting climate science. But with editorials like Dr. Van Dam's, global warming denial is intermingled with our faith and the "counter"-science is asked to be followed without question. Dr. Van Dam may not have had the space in the article to delve into the issue as long as he wanted to, but blanket statements only legitimize an existing point of view instead of examining an issue with clarity – let's not get bogged down on them in the valuable spheres of knowledge magazines like *Clarion* provide for Reformed Christians.

Yours in Christ,  
Steven Spriensma, Grimsby, Ontario

## Response

1. My concern was not to determine who, at the end of the day, will be right or wrong. I did, however, note that the earth has actually been cooling in the last number of years (and not warming as was originally claimed). Furthermore, I did warn that we question scientific claims that do not seem to jive with reality or the best available evidence. For that purpose I used the example of what has been called "Climategate." Rereading the article will make this clear.

2. I am sorry that brother Spriensma thinks I affirm that "scientists are not to be trusted because of sin." I never said that. I did say that "scientists are human and can be driven by ideological presuppositions that colour and influence the way they interpret the evidence." This was said in the context of the danger of science going beyond the available evidence.

CVD

## Dear Editor,

Re: *Science and the Age of the Earth*, by Cornelis Van Dam, 59 *Clarion* 82 (12 February, 2010)

I read Dr. Van Dam's article, "Science and the Age of the Earth" in the current edition of *Clarion* with interest. In it he refers, *inter alia*, to Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics* (2.499). Bavinck does indeed say there that the days of Genesis 1 are to be considered days and not to be identified with the periods of geology. However, he goes on to say that they have an extraordinary character and then explains that at least the first three days differed significantly from our days and "hence were extraordinary cosmic days" (*loc. cit.*).

Significantly, a few pages earlier on, Bavinck notes: "It is nevertheless remarkable that not a single confession made a fixed pronouncement about the six-day continuum, and that in theology as well a variety of interpretations were allowed to exist side by side" (2.495-6). He refers to Augustine and Aquinas to support the point.

I submit, therefore, that Bavinck speaks in a much more nuanced way about the topic than Dr. Van Dam seem to suggest in his article and I regret that he failed to make this clear.

By way of a more general comment, there have been several articles in *Clarion* in the last few issues that have supported a young earth theory. That is not objectionable in itself, but I submit that you should also give others who take a different view opportunity to express it in the pages of *Clarion*. It seems to me insupportable that academic debate on this issue should be foreclosed by publishing only one view. A one-side view can easily lead to it becoming a quasi dogma in the churches. If that should happen, an extra-confessional binding statement can surely not be far behind. Both would be regrettable in my opinion. Our confessions do not, as Bavinck notes, pronounce on this issue, and rightly so. We should allow each other some room for interpretation.

Faithfully,  
Albert Oosterhoff

## Response

My purpose in referring to Bavinck was not to give a detailed explication of his view of the creation days but to note that he believed in a young earth. Dr. D.A. Young rightly acknowledges this in his article which I referred to. My point was to show how a geologist like D.A. Young is so sure of his old earth position that he affirms that if only Bavinck had more geological knowledge, he would agree with an old earth position. But, I ask, is there only one way to interpret geological

data? The plain testimony of Scripture should be taken into consideration when interpreting geology. This was also Bavinck's point, as a reading of his *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.501-507 demonstrates.

CVD

## P.S. by the Editor

As has always been the case, the editor, often along with the editorial committee, determines what is published with a view to the edification of the readers. I am somewhat surprised by your comment that no different views have been published in light of the fact that your sister, Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff, has published numerous articles in *Clarion* which had a decidedly different emphasis. Furthermore, *Clarion* is open for discussions of exegetical issues on the basis of Scripture as normative.

JV

## Letter to the Editor

In the *Clarion* of January 29, 2010, Dr. Van Dam reminds us of the well-established fact "that a scientific consensus may not be the truth or the best way of interpreting the evidence. Scientists have ideological interests to make their findings fit their theories." As illustrations he mentions the controversial claims that the earth is gradually warming up and that organic remains have been found in dinosaur bones. In both cases the controversy is in part about what the facts are. Does the earth get warmer? Are the remains in the dinosaur bones organic?

I will not enter into the debates about global warming and soft tissue in dinosaur bones. My first point is that these belong in the realm of speculation and controversy. No one pursuing responsible journalism would base important decisions about the value of knowledge – scientific or otherwise – on fringe opinions and fringe theories. It is true, as Dr. Van Dam observes, that the views of scientists can be coloured by ideologies. But one wonders why he singles out scientists. We all are fallen creatures. That includes theologians. But Dr. Van Dam has no attention for the possibility that they too are suffering from the pressure of ideological interests when it comes to such matters as the age of the earth or the use of fringe theories to make the point that science is fallible. The history of Scripture exegesis demonstrates that ideologies have shaped the interpretation of texts just as the history of science shows that ideologies have influenced the interpretation of nature.

For my second point I begin with Abraham Kuyper. He introduced the notion that scholarship is influenced by beliefs of various kinds. Christians in the Reformed tradition welcomed this idea. But for

some, referring to the “presuppositions” of scholarship has deteriorated into a facile way of dismissing unwelcome results of scholarship. Kuyper was ahead of his time with respect to the role of background beliefs in scholarship. This notion is now generally accepted by historians and philosophers of science. But the role of background beliefs in science cannot be a reason to dismiss scientific knowledge for the knowledge processes that underwrite science also operate in all other knowledge acquisition including Scripture interpretation. Dismissing knowledge because it has been shaped by background beliefs would make it also impossible to know God and his works.

Neither can the influence of background beliefs on scientific knowledge be taken as an invitation to pick and choose those fragments of knowledge one considers compatible with Christianity and try to build an alternative Christian science on it as the scientific creationists are attempting. For one, Christians differ amongst themselves as to what those background beliefs might be and the spectre of relativism is at the horizon. For another, the history of science shows that many of the background beliefs offered by Christians as Christian beliefs about nature were plain wrong.

Finally, with Dr. Van Dam I believe that we are all fallen creatures. But on this basis I suggest a different approach to scientific knowledge. Christians are morally obliged to pursue truth whether in studying nature or Scripture. This includes cultivating a critical attitude towards the hidden beliefs that may distort one’s understanding of a topic. After all, Christians believe that God created a reality that exists independent of what people may think about it. Honouring the Creator with the knowledge of that reality demands the very best we can do. Obviously, our very best is not perfect, given our fallen condition. But this limitation does not license Dr. Van Dam’s reliance on the role of ideologies to discount the science he does not like. Science is self-correcting for two reasons. First, the work is done in community whose members hold a diversity of background beliefs. If these beliefs were not screened out one would not have the benefit of the scientific advances that Dr. Van Dam acknowledges. Secondly, theories and explanations that are not informed by the facts do not last. Scientists living in different eras have different background beliefs and they are likely to correct each other. Therefore, it would be prudent to take a wait and see attitude rather than move to weighty conclusions about the suspicious nature of science.

Discussions about theology and science or about Scripture and science often suffer from unwarranted

assertions. On the one hand, biblical text or theological doctrine is extended beyond its legitimate reach. On the other hand, the interpretation of nature in science is stretched beyond what it can bear.

Given these circumstances it seems best from a Christian perspective to suspend judgment and wait for more clarity. Christians are called to respect the natural world God created. They are called to avoid distorting their understanding of nature such as seen in attempts to conform it to a so-called plain, but questionable, interpretation of Scripture about nature or history. Likewise, Christians are called to respect Scripture by not forcing an exegesis that conforms to current scientific perspectives and theories. In practice this often means that there is more integrity in leaving apparent conflicts unresolved than in attempting to solve them to the detriment of our understanding of either Scripture or nature.

*Jitse van der Meer*

## Response

Since Dr. van der Meer deserves a response, let me briefly mention the following.

First, by stating that an issue like climate change belongs “in the realm of speculation and controversy,” Dr. Van der Meer underlines the very point I am making, namely, that “an ideology is being promoted which is not sustained by the facts.” Governments are being urged to spend billions on the basis of climate data which is interpreted through the lens of an aggressive ideology. Dr. Van der Meer may dismiss the climate change claims as fringe opinions and theories, but the reality is that governments are listening because the claims are considered scientific.

Second, I obviously agree with our brother that we are all fallen creatures and that presuppositions play an important role, also in theology. But the article was about science.

Third, Dr. van der Meer’s assertion that science is self-correcting is only partially true. After 150 years since the publication of Darwin’s theory of evolution, this theory is more and more treated as if it were a settled fact in spite of considerable scientific evidence that militates against it. At the very least this theory should be treated far more critically if Dr. van der Meer is correct. The reality is that in many instances a scientist can literally shut down his career if he challenges the theory of evolution.

Fourth, Dr. van der Meer urges that we “suspend judgment and wait for more clarity.” This is good advice when it concerns theories and speculations not backed by facts whether these speculations concern Scripture or the natural sciences. But, one should realize that the information that Scripture gives and the results of scientific investigation do not stand on

the same level. Scripture gives divine revelation; the natural sciences do not. Scripture is the standard of truth; current scientific theory is not. This may seem obvious, but there is an influential school of thought among scientists within the Reformed world which, simply put, claims that science gives ongoing revelation from God. Science is therefore needed in order to understand Scripture properly. If that is what Dr. van der Meer has in mind with respect to waiting for more clarity then I disagree. Certain facts concerning origins and the natural world are abundantly clear from Scripture. We do not have to wait for more clarity from "revelation" from science. To mention a current example: from Scripture it is

clear that Adam was the first human and that there were no pre-Adamites. A consistent Christian scientist will not speculate about a pre-human ancestor of Adam and Eve and wait for more clarity from science on this issue. Rather, he will try to understand and interpret the available scientific evidence with the presupposition that what the Bible teaches about human origins is true.

CVD

Note: For more on creational revelation, see J. Douma, *Another Look at Dooyeweerd*. Premier, 1976, pp. 28-34; also important is N. H. Gootjes, "What Does God Reveal in the Grand Canyon?", *Clarion* 42 [1993] 155-157, 178-181, 203-205, 335.

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

## Press Release

### Press Release of Classis Niagara held on January 13, 2010

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. D. De Boer welcomes all the delegates as well as Rev. Ludwig and Rev. Den Hollander as Regional Synod East deputies and in particular Candidate Ken Bergsma. He invites all present to sing Ps 118:1, 2 and reads Ephesians 2 and leads in prayer.

The credentials are examined and found to be in order. Classis is declared constituted and the officers suggested by the last classis take their place. Rev. D. De Boer as chairman, Rev. Wynia as clerk, and Rev. S.C. Van Dam as vice-chairman. The agenda was adopted.

Candidate Ken Bergsma then presented himself for his peremptory examination according to Article 5 C.O. After it was determined that his documentation was in order, Classis proceeded to examine Candidate Bergsman. He presented his sermon proposal on 1 Peter 2:4-10. In closed session, Classis considered the sermon proposal to be sufficient and continued with the examination. Examinations were conducted in the areas of Old Testament exegesis and New Testament exegesis. Rev. J. Dykstra of Wellandport URC gave fraternal greetings on behalf of the United Reformed Churches of North America and spoke words of fellowship. Rev. Van Dam responded on behalf of Classis with words of appreciation.

After lunch, the examination of Candidate Bergsma continued in the areas of Doctrine and Creeds, Church

History, Knowledge of Scripture, Ethics, Diaconology and Church Order. Classis went into closed session to discuss the result of the examination. Candidate Bergsma did not sustain the exam.

The chairman asks the questions re Article 44 of the Church Order. The church at Smithville asks advice regarding matters of pastoral oversight. In closed session, advice is given.

The report of the church at Smithville regarding the request for financial assistance for the year 2010 for the church at Blue Bell is received. Classis decides to grant the church at Blue Bell its request and assesses the churches at \$32 (CND) per member. The report from the church at Spring Creek examining the classical archives is received. The archives were found to be in good order.

The convening church for the next classis is Grassie and the date is set for March 24, 2010. The suggested officers for the next Classis are: Rev. J. Huijgen as chair, Rev. D. De Boer as clerk, and Rev. D. Wynia as vice-chairman. Observers to the next classis will be invited. Personal question period is made use of.

It is determined by the chairman with thankfulness that nothing censurable was said or done during the meeting. The Acts of Classis is presented and adopted. The press release is presented and adopted. After inviting the delegates to sing Ps 121:1, 4, the chairman closes the meeting with prayer.

*For Classis,*

*Rev. S.C. Van Dam, vice-chairman at that time*



# News from the Women's Savings Action

## Collection

This year marked the fortieth anniversary of the Theological College and with it the fortieth anniversary of the Women's Savings Action. We are very thankful to the Lord that what began forty years ago as a small plant has now grown out to be a sturdy tree. As long as there is a Theological College to train ministers for service in the churches, there will be a need for a library with up-to-date books and periodicals, the tools of any student, professor, and minister. It is therefore with great joy that we can tell all of you that this year, on the fortieth anniversary, we were able to hand the Principal of the College a cheque for \$40,000, the largest contribution the Women's Savings Action has ever given for books in the library. We had to dip into our reserve somewhat to do this, but it was possible nevertheless. In the past book year, which ran from July 2008 to June 2009, a total of \$33,673.77 was collected, down somewhat from the previous year, when almost \$38,000 came in. But taking into account the difficult times many of us have had in the past year, it is incredible that so much was given by the brothers and sisters in our churches. Again we thank all of those who collected the funds for a job well done and we thank all of our donors for their generosity. We hope that under the blessing of the Lord this work can continue into its forty-first year and beyond.

## Virtual tour

Those of you who have access to a computer can also take a look in the library. You can see what the library looks like; you can also search the library holdings to see what books there are about a particular subject or from a certain author. If you go to [www.theologicalcollege.ca](http://www.theologicalcollege.ca) you can find all kinds of information about the College. Under "General Information" there is an item "Photo galleries" which includes seven pictures of the library. The first, the second and the sixth one show the downstairs area with the books that can be taken out and study carrels for students who need a quiet place to study. Pictures three, four, and five show the upstairs area, where the reference books are, the magazines, more carrels and also a large table for those students who don't mind a livelier atmosphere. The last photo shows the entrance to the library, with a commemorative plaque for the Women's Savings Action.

Contributions for the year July 1, 2008 - June 30, 2009  
(With comparative figures for the previous year)

Congregation	2009	2008
Abbotsford	70.00	1580.00
Aldergrove	1620.00	1385.00
Ancaster	891.69	1091.37
Attercliffe	842.50	745.00
Barrhead	390.00	572.50
Brampton	300.00	260.00
Burlington/Ebenezer	1338.40	1253.00
Burlington/Fellowship	295.00	125.00
Burlington/Waterdown	985.00	815.00
Calgary	488.23	930.61
Carman/East	638.00	500.00
Carman/West	381.00	575.00
Chatham	1046.48	694.50
Chilliwack	705.00	608.00
Cloverdale	650.00	240.00
Coaldale	500.00	807.50
Dunnville/Wainfleet	--	316.00
Edmonton/Immanuel	2032.00	2657.50
Edmonton/Providence	120.00	1017.00
Elora	499.75	591.70
Fergus/North	159.00	146.61
Fergus/South(Maranatha)	403.00	536.00
Flamborough	276.00	--
Glanbrook	806.38	988.94
Grand Rapids	237.61	--
Grand Valley	314.93	341.29
Grassie	117.31	454.75
Guelph	779.50	1555.53
Hamilton/Cornerstone	1576.83	1659.42
Hamilton/Providence	273.83	200.00
Houston	--	--
Kerwood	225.00	785.00
Langley	2145.00	1985.00
Lincoln	1080.25	1165.77
London	--	--
Lynden	481.97	874.90
Neerlandia	662.00	260.00
Orangeville	250.00	369.95
Ottawa	120.00	150.00
Owen Sound	--	770.00
Smithers	869.00	432.60
Smithville	1931.00	1567.00
Spring Creek	216.10	773.00
St. Albert	1655.00	1640.00
Surrey	636.00	828.00
Taber	--	--
Toronto	570.57	337.00
Vernon	535.00	262.00
Willoughby Heights	1210.00	1316.00
Winnipeg/Grace	--	510.00
Winnipeg/Redeemer	1145.00	1240.00
Yarrow	125.00	85.00
Royalties Selles	1079.44	--
<b>Total Collected</b>	<b>33673.77</b>	<b>37998.44</b>

Under "Library" there is the library catalogue and other information about Reformed literature. Of special interest to those of you with piles of old *Clarions*, *Reformed Perspectives*, etc., will be the Reformed Periodical Index, which makes it possible for anyone to search where in these magazines there are articles about a certain subject in *Clarion*, *Reformed Perspective*, *Preach the Word*, *Koinoinia*, *Diakonia* (incomplete), and *Lux Mundi* (incomplete). The website is definitely worth a visit (bookmark it), especially for those among us unable to visit the College in person.

## Conclusion

Professors and students use the library almost daily and enjoy the pleasant facilities and the wide choice of books. If you are ever near the Theological College,

give them a call, and you will no doubt be able to see the library for yourself. See your Women's Savings Action dollars at work!

The Board

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## Clarion Advertisements

### Advertisements:

*Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.*

## BIRTHDAYS



### Mom's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday

1920 ~ February 19<sup>th</sup> ~ 2010

Psalm 27 is Mom's favourite singing Psalm, especially Verse 2:  
*One thing have I desired of God as favour,  
That I may always in His temple dwell  
To view the beauty of the Lord my Saviour,  
And in His house to seek His holy will...*

**RENKE POST (nee Klaveringa)**

For 90 years the Lord has blessed our Mother, with good health, and great joy! She has been an inspiration to all of us with her firm and simple faith, and we pray for continued blessings for her in the coming years.

Gerrit Spanninga†, 1<sup>st</sup> husband of 38 years  
Herman Post†, 2<sup>nd</sup> husband of 10 years

Waterdown, ON: Janna and Bart Douma  
Orangeville, ON: John and Hilda Spanninga  
Waterdown, ON: Roy and Yvonne Spanninga  
Owen Sound, ON: Harry and Janny Spanninga  
Orangeville, ON: Rita and Jerry Keep  
Markdale, ON: Henk and Mary Post  
Alma, ON: John and Ina Post  
Regina, SK: Ben Post  
Elora, ON: Jeannette and Andy Nijenhuis

Mom is also blessed with 35 grandchildren and 60 great-grandchildren!

7900 McLaughlin Road South, Apt. TT316,  
Brampton, Ontario L6Y 5A7

## WEDDINGS

With thankfulness to God the Master of all plans, who has brought us together, we

**ANNETTE VAN DER VEEN  
and**

**JUSTIN GIJSBERTUS VEENENDAAL**

together with our parents, invite you to join us as we exchange our wedding vows, D.V. March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at 11 am at the Free Reformed Church of Byford. Refreshments will be served after the ceremony.

All welcome

Future Address: 34 Howitzer Turn, Byford, WA 6122

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

### 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary

1960 ~ April 16 ~ 2010

*May the LORD bless you from Zion all the days of your life. . .  
Psalm 128:5*

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father the children of

**JACK and EVELYN HERES (nee Brink)**

joyfully announce their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary. We pray the Lord will continue to guide and keep them in His care.

Dad and Mom have been blessed with 6 children, 16 grandchildren and 1 great-grandchild.

One daughter and one grandson are with the Lord.  
134 Pemberton Avenue, North York, ON M2M 1Y7