

Clarion



THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
Volume 60, No. 3 • January 28, 2011

*Keeping our bodies healthy and strong
(to the best of our ability) is being a
good steward of God's creation*

Inside this Issue

- Weighty Matters
- The Gospel According to Oprah





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Weighty Matters

*In our ever-deepening shame it is not
uncommon to feel worthless and depressed?*

How are your New Year's resolutions working out? As January comes to its end, so do most of our commitments made in bold determination New Year's Eve: *This year, I'm going to quit smoking! I'm going to pay off my debts and control my spending! Starting tomorrow, I'm going on a diet and lose weight!*

It seems so difficult for so many of us to keep the resolutions going, especially this last one. With food being such a big part of our day, with an appetite that cries out for more, and with eyes that see so many tasty treats, we find ourselves unable to stick to our plan. Before we know it, we're going for a second helping at dinner, a brownie with our coffee, or a bag of chips with our cold drink. The late night snack calls our name and seems to have our number – we just can't say "no!" The problem with food is that it tastes so good and goes down so nice!

Out of control

Only, as we all know, it goes down but not all of it goes out. The excess soon gathers around the waist, pads our thighs and back-side, and doubles up under our chins. For those who struggle with weight gain, we don't like the way it looks or feels. We want to be healthier, to look and feel better, to lose weight, but we are forever losing the battle. We take in more energy (food) than we output (exercise) and it shows. Diets typically last only weeks or days and then it's back to the old patterns. Many of us will have prayed about this struggle too, asking God to grant success but it seems so often to no avail. In the end, we can feel hopeless and desperate, like things will never change – even like they can never change.

In that downward spiral we begin to feel like a "loser" who can't control his eating and exercise. For many of us, this is a silent struggle because it's too embarrassing to talk about openly. We're easily ashamed of our weakness and get down on ourselves. This in turn often feeds the urge to eat. We eat in order to make ourselves "feel better" – only we end up feeling

worse than before! In our ever-deepening shame it is not uncommon to feel worthless and depressed. Once we're in that state of mind it is not surprising that we begin to retreat from social interaction and, worse, from interacting with God. After all, we think, there's no point praying – certainly not about *this* problem anyway. What difference does it make? So we stop asking the Lord for help. We instead make another resolution based on our will power but soon discover that there's not much power in our wills.

The spiritual side

If you can relate to the above description then you've already sensed there is a spiritual side to our struggle with food and weight gain/loss. Yet, it's an angle we may not consider deeply enough. If we think about it, the way we deal with our weight certainly affects *our* spirits, our mood, our view of self and even our view of God. On bad days the frustration may lead us to say or think: *prayer doesn't have any effect! The Holy Spirit isn't concerned about my weight!* Without realizing it, our spirit soon gripes against God's Spirit and that shows how deeply spiritual this issue really is. We either think God is unable or uninterested in helping us with this battle.

But could it be that we're fighting the wrong battle? Or fighting the battle in the wrong manner? If we look at the battle as strictly a matter of wanting to lose weight, and if we pray to God to help us take off the pounds so we can feel better, do we have our focus in the right place? Are we asking God for something he's promised to give us? The truth is, we do not find in the Bible a promise for God to help us lose weight. Nor do we find a commitment from the Lord to make us *feel better* about our body image. If we seek this kind of help from the Lord and are continually disappointed, we may well ask in desperation: can we really expect any help from the Lord in this wearisome struggle or must we go it alone?

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

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Never on your own

But a Christian has hope! One of the beautiful things about belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ is that we are never on our own. As Lord's Day 1 says, we belong to him "with body and soul" both in life and in death! We are instructed in the Bible to cast all our anxieties upon him for he cares for us (1 Pet 5:7). The Lord Jesus has promised to be with us till the end of the age (Matt 28:20) and has fulfilled that promise by pouring into our bodies (not just our souls!) his very own Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). All of this means that our covenant God is concerned also about our bodies. He is therefore committed to help us in all the struggles of our flesh.

But then we have to properly understand our struggle with food, exercise, and being over-weight and ask for the right kind of help. What has God in the Bible promised and what has he commanded in this area of life? We need to drill down into our brains and hearts and analyze why we are asking for help with weight-loss, help with exercise. Am I seeking to fulfill God's commandment? Am I leaning on his promise? Does my goal, my intention, line up fully with God's will as set out in Scripture?

What's Inside

In his first editorial as co-editor for *Clarion*, Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer addresses weight loss from a spiritual perspective. It is a timely topic, as many of us make New Year's resolutions that have to do with weight, diet, and exercise.

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam reviews *Should Christians Embrace Evolution? Biblical and Scientific Responses* (Norman C. Nevin, ed.) and find the collection of essays helpful and informative in answering the question: Is embracing the theory of evolution an option for Christians? Dr. Wes Bredenhof reviews *The Passionate Intellect* by Alister McGrath and finds the book lacking.

In his article "The Gospel According to Oprah," Rev. Klaas Stam discusses the underlying spiritual message that Oprah Winfrey lives by and teaches.

Issue 3 includes a Canticle by Rev. George van Popta, a League Day Report, two letters to the editor, and our regular columns Treasures New and Old and Ray of Sunshine. We also have a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

Subscription Rates for 2011

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
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U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$67.00	\$ 90.00
International	\$95.00	\$145.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra. GST/HST – No. 890967359RT

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities.

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Motivation

It's time for self-analysis. We need to ask ourselves: why do I want to lose weight? If I want to lose weight simply to improve my looks or impress the people around me, will the Lord give that request a hearing? The motivation there is my personal vanity and not only does the Lord *not* cater to our vanity but he condemns it as worldly (1 Pet 3:3, 4). Such a prayer will *not* be accepted by God.

Can we really expect any help from the Lord in this wearisome struggle?

If I want to lose weight to make myself feel better about my appearance, to feel good about myself, does that agree with God's Word? Certainly the Lord considers us valuable and people of worth, but does God base that worth on how we look and feel? The Lord is clear that he does not judge our value by exterior looks (1 Sam 16:7) or whether we feel confident in ourselves (Luke 18:9). The Bible rather teaches that in myself, I – as a fallen sinner – am worthy only of condemnation and that we are to humble ourselves on account of that fact (Luke 18:13).

Any value I have depends entirely on my connection to my Maker and Saviour. It is God alone who *assigns* me my worth. It is God who *places* value upon me – first as a work of his hands, created in his image and then especially as a redeemed work of his hands, being re-created in his image through the work of his Son! (Eph 4:22-24). Because of this, I and all God's people are truly precious.

Living as God's image

And that's where God wants our focus to be, on living as his image for his glory! This applies to all areas of life including also the care of our physical bodies. In the beginning God created us in his image and *commanded* us to be *stewards* over all creation on his behalf. We were instructed to rule over the animals and subdue the earth as God's managers, reflecting his character in the way we did so (in holiness and righteousness). We were *commanded* also to represent him to all creatures as his appointed rulers. Everything man needed to do that task was liberally supplied and *promised* to him by the LORD.

Part of managing creation for Adam and Eve would have been managing their God-given bodies. We can be certain that Adam and Eve in paradise did not have

a problem with either over-eating or being over-weight. They would have managed their food intake and their exercise (likely by way of physical labour) in such a way so as to keep their bodies healthy and fit. Their appetite would have been perfectly controlled by their heart which wanted only to manage all the resources of creation to the honour of the Creator. There would have been no waste or gluttony but joyful eating in thankfulness to match the need. Keeping one's body healthy and strong (to the best of our ability) is being a good steward of God's creation and thus obedient to his command.

Renewed focus

It is now obedience to this command which God has and is renewing in us through the Spirit of Christ! We are called and equipped to be God's stewards once again – also of our bodies! God's purpose in Christ is to retool our spirits to once again reflect his image in this world. Part of doing that is to serve as faithful stewards of all he gives to us, including our bodies!

Sin has corrupted our flesh so that our heart produces evil desires and it's out of those desires that we tend to act – and eat. I'll come back in another article to legitimate exceptions to this rule but for most of us the battle of the bulge is first of all a battle of the heart because out of the heart comes thoughts, words, and ultimately actions (Matt 12:34,35). For a lot of us, eating more than is healthy and choosing to exercise less than is good for us is a result of sinful desires rooted in our hearts – more on that in a future article too. Stay tuned!

But *this* is the specific fight God calls us to fight! He *commands* us to live as his image and he *promises* to help us do so – that is to be the focus of our prayers and our lives! He will certainly hear and answer all prayers that appeal to him in faith on this basis. When I by God's grace set out to honour the LORD in my body by watching what I eat and how much I exercise; when I seek to combat my inner impulses toward vanity, laziness, selfishness, carelessness or other idols of my heart, God promises to help with all the resources of his Holy Spirit who lives in us. As surely as the Lord Jesus has purchased us with his blood, so surely will he renew us by his Spirit to more and more flee from sin, obey his commands, and be shaped into his image (see Romans 6). Can things change in this battle? They can and will because Jesus Christ has won the victory over sin!

Our task is to pray and work along these lines, keeping in step with the Spirit. Then those New Year's resolutions will turn into new creation *realities* as God helps us manage our health for his glory. 



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The LORD My Helper

MATTHEW 13:52

"My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."
Psalm 121:2

Psalm 121 is probably a well-known psalm and a much-loved psalm. Its frequent statement that the LORD watches over us is very comforting. But the very fact which makes this Psalm much-loved also leads to questions. Sometimes terrible things happen, and we ask: "Was the LORD not watching over me?"

This psalm is a song of ascents. It was sung as the Israelites travelled up to Jerusalem on special occasions. That trip was fraught with danger— wild animals, bandits, rough terrain, and intense heat. The travellers must have wondered whether they would make it to Jerusalem.

As the psalmist approached Jerusalem, he saw the hills surrounding Jerusalem rise up before him in the distance. Those hills signified the dwelling-place of the LORD and reminded the psalmist of covenant fellowship with the LORD. There the blood of the sacrifices flowed, pointing to the blood of Christ. Then the psalmist asked himself, "Where does my help come from?" (v. 1). And he told himself as a statement of faith, "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (v. 2).

The use of the covenant Name of God – LORD (Yahweh) – indicates that the LORD is a present help because his Name means "I am who I am." The LORD's Name points to his faithfulness toward his people and that they can count on him. As such,

he who watches over us neither slumbers nor sleeps (vv. 3, 4) and he watches over our coming and going both now and forevermore (v. 8).

God is with us. We know that this is possible only because God sent his Son into the world to reconcile us to himself. Christ is the Immanuel – God with us! Shortly before his ascension, our Saviour said, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20).

Therefore, the LORD preserves us. No less than six times the psalmist uses a word which means "watch over," "keep," or "preserve" (vv. 3, 4, 5, 7, 8). To drive the point home the psalmist uses the common biblical imagery of shade, which points to protection and safety: "The LORD watches over you – the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night" (vv. 5, 6).

But does this mean that we are guaranteed no harm? We should not read this psalm in isolation from other parts of Scripture. The Bible tells us that God has his purpose for trials and difficulties in the lives of believers (e.g., Job). Psalm 121 teaches us that nothing happens to us by chance or accident. Our foot does not slip by accident because the LORD is inattentive; the LORD watches over us (v. 3). No one and nothing can take our lives without the LORD's will (v. 7).

As we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism, ". . . leaf and blade, rain

and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come to us not by chance but by [God's] fatherly hand" (Lord's Day 10, Q&A 27). Nothing just "happens" to us!

Let's also remember that the preservation of our lives is more than that we are still alive and well. Our lives have a direction and goal: this life is the beginning of eternal life. We are pilgrims on the way to the new earth! God preserves his children for arrival at that destination. We confess this in the fifth chapter of the Canons of Dort, which deals with the preservation of the saints. A believer need never doubt whether he or she will survive the spiritual journey of life. The LORD will keep you from all harm that would prevent you from reaching the destination. That destination is the New Jerusalem, the place where "the sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat" (Rev 7:16).

To underline the confidence which we may have, the psalmist points to the fact that the LORD is powerful: he is "the Maker of heaven and earth" (v. 2). Whenever God wants to remind us of his power, he points to his work of creation. Is anything beyond the ability and control of him who made all things? We are safe with the LORD. So each believer may confess: "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth." 



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The Gospel According to Oprah

One of the best-known television celebrities in our time is a woman who has her own show and is presently embarking on a network of her own. I refer, of course, to the greatest of female talk-show hosts, Oprah Winfrey.

Oprah is the consummate American success story. Actually, the name she was supposed to get was *Orpah*, whom we know from the book of Ruth. Giving biblical names was quite common among her people. But the spelling of the name was entered incorrectly as "Oprah" and she has made this name into a household concept. There's something mystical about the name *Orpah*.

Oprah is a multi-talented woman with an incredibly powerful stage presence. She is able as interviewer to make people "open up." She has a keen sense for the emotional side of life and seeks out those who have conquered obstacles or distinguished themselves. Actually, the Oprah Winfrey Show is not the worst that television has to offer. Who would not like Oprah? She is sensitive and caring, warm and generous, and an exemplary humanitarian.

Is there a darker side?

Now why would anyone have an eye for the darker side of Oprah's life? Does there really have to be a darker side? Is this, perhaps, another wild goose chase by Klaas who is in a fowl mood? Not really. Why criticise a woman who does so much to help others? Well, I have not criticized Oprah. . . yet.

I must admit to my shame that I do get a little irritated sometimes by the fact that Oprah tends to lavish gifts on her unsuspecting audience. It is almost too good to believe. For the final season premiere of the Oprah Winfrey Show she invited all her guests to go to Australia for a grand feast. Three hundred people at \$10,000 a pop is not a small sum. But then again, Oprah is the richest woman on earth. Her spontaneous giving does not really make a dent in her immense

fortune. This finely-produced woman is all-business. The Australia trip will give Oprah Inc. many grand dividends.

I have more concerns, however, about some *spiritual* things. First, I read an article in *Nederlands Dagblad* (July 2, 2010) which reviewed a recent biography of Oprah by Kitty Kelley. Second, I found a rather interesting book by Josh McDowell and Dave Sterrett, titled "*O God: A Dialogue on Truth and Oprah's Spirituality*" (WND Books, Los Angeles, 2009). All this was certainly enough to set me thinking.

Is Oprah deeply religious?

Oprah's real DNA father, a barber, who was a very strict man, is quoted by Kitty Kelley as being quite concerned about Oprah's religion. "She does not believe anymore that Jesus Christ is her Saviour. I did not raise her this way," said her pop.

Well, it happens that our adult children have different views than those of their forbears. Not always easy for parents (or grandparents) to accept. What exactly does Oprah believe? According to McDowell and Sterrett, a feisty evangelical duo, Oprah's faith is a mixture of ideas from various traditions. This is not surprising. We live in an age where religion has become a "smoothie" blended together from all kinds of sources. Smoothies go down easily and leave no bitter taste.

Our feisty duo suggests that Oprah's belief is dominated by *pantheism*. Now here is where it gets complicated. Pantheism states that "*God is everything and everything is God.*" All things have a divine spark or a godly core. This is especially true of human beings. Practically this means that we can achieve anything we want, overcome all odds, and reach all goals. All you need is the will to succeed and the right circumstances. Oprah herself and her many guests are living proof of the fact that we can overcome. This song is, "We shall overcome someday." The gospel according

to Oprah is that if we want it badly enough and try hard enough, we can rise above our pitiful humanity and be an inspiring success.

It is not easy for *Les Miserables* to achieve this height. But it is possible. Oprah and her guests will not tolerate failure. There may be setbacks in life, but we do not have to fail forever. We must examine ourselves constantly. We must learn to forgive others. Then we can move forward to grasp whatever is ours. Oprah's gospel is a mixture of old positive thinking theories and New Age ideas.

Can I do all things?

Oprah's approach reminds me of that of Robert Schuller, who distinguished himself in the television program *The Hour of Power*. Schuller's thinking is: if you can imagine it, you can also do it. If you build it, they will come.

Who would not like Oprah?

Schuller once preached on Philippians 4: 3, "I can do everything. . . ." In this sermon he extolled the virtues of positive thinking. There are no limits to human possibilities. We can do everything. Liberated mankind can achieve whatever height he wants.

Schuller conveniently forgot that the text says much more, something very different, in fact, "I can do everything *through him who gives me strength.*" Believers can succeed in their endeavours only through the power of God, the grace of Christ, and the help of the Holy Spirit. We look to God and not to ourselves. What Schuller preached was not the gospel of salvation, but the ancient lie of the Serpent: do whatever you want and you will succeed; "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). At bottom, this is also the gospel according to Oprah.

The glitter and the glamour

Once again, I must say that I am impressed by Oprah's show. The glitter and the glamour that shine throughout her program are quite impressive. I think that many church members like Oprah's style and poise. It's kind of nice to have a dose of Oprah before the kids come home and supper must be cooked. At least we are elevated to a higher plane and have our batteries recharged.

But we should not be fooled. It may all seem very innocent and absolutely positive, but the underlying philosophy is the poison of paradise. I write this not to disparage Oprah, whom most will describe as "cool." I write this only so that we all may discern more clearly what lies under the glitter and the glamour.

Oprah's gospel is a mixture of old positive thinking theories and New Age ideas

When Paul writes to the Philippians, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength," he means that he can tackle difficult times as well as enjoy good times, because the LORD is his refuge and tower. Perhaps we can all learn from this to look beyond the glitter and the glamour of this world to him of whom it is written, "His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire" (Rev 1:14).

C



reviewed by Wes Bredenhof



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***The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind*, Alister McGrath, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010**

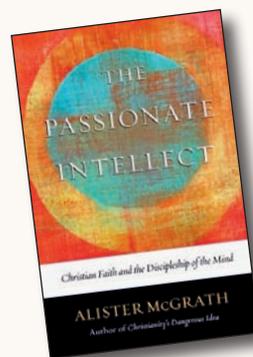
Additional Information: Hardcover, 210 pages, \$24.50

Back in the mid-1990s, I reviewed a book which began with the memorable words: "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." If you don't recognize them, they're from Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. In the years since, many authors have echoed Noll's lament. Others have sought to remedy the situation. *The Passionate Intellect* can be considered another attempt at rectifying the intellectual laziness of many Christians today. The author's purpose is to do this with an eye to engaging challenges to the Christian faith in the public square.

McGrath is the author of many books and articles. He speaks widely at conferences around the world. Trained in molecular biophysics, chemistry, and theology, he's currently the chair of theology, ministry and education of the Centre for Theology, Religion and Culture at King's College, London, England. He is also the head of that institution. McGrath has served as an assistant pastor in an Anglican church and his wife is also an ordained Anglican minister.

The Passionate Intellect is based on previously unpublished lectures and addresses on the subjects of theology, apologetics, and cultural engagement. The first part of the book deals with "The Purpose, Place and Relevance of Christian Theology." This is the better part of the book. One of the highlights is chapter 4, exploring the connections between Martin Luther and C. S. Lewis with regards to suffering and a "theology of the cross." There are differences, but also some commonalities: "For all their differences, Lewis and Luther both believed that we dwell in a world of shadows, which will one day give way to the brilliance and clarity of heaven" (68). Both Luther and Lewis came to understand that the best theologians are forged in the furnace of suffering and hard experiences. If you were to buy this book, pay the most careful attention to this chapter.

The second part is titled, "Engaging With Our Culture," and this section is more outwardly focussed and relates to apologetics. Here too, McGrath has some helpful and engaging points. For instance, I appreciated his critique of several aspects of the new atheism of Hitchens, Dawkins, etc. He describes his own personal journey to the discovery that atheism is



a belief system rather than "a factual statement about reality" (106). He notes, "The new atheism conducts its polemic against a notion of God that bears little relation to that of Christianity" (111). He takes on Dawkins' theory that "belief in God is a delusion caused by 'memes.'" He identifies this theory as entirely based on speculation (115-118). Also, throughout the volume, McGrath correctly notes how Christianity offers the most "comprehensive, coherent, and compelling account of reality" of all worldviews and belief systems.

Yet I have some reservations that prevent a whole-hearted recommendation. First off, McGrath does not see Darwin's evolutionary theory as being inconsistent with Christian belief. In a recent *Clarion* article with some colleagues, we argued quite the opposite. One cannot hold to Darwinian evolution and have a high view of Scripture. The two are mutually exclusive.

That brings me to a second reservation: how does McGrath view the relationship of Scripture to apologetics? It's not clear to me from this book and that makes me uncomfortable. This is not to say that he ignores Scripture or biblical teachings. Rather, my reservation is with the fact that he does not come right out and say that the Bible must be the foundation for faithful Christian apologetics. Perhaps this is why we don't hear anything from McGrath on the effects of sin on the human mind and reasoning and even imagination.

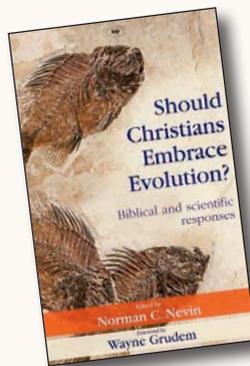
Finally, in chapter 10, McGrath portrays Jesus Christ as the ultimate pacifist: "He was the object, not the agent, of violence." Wasn't whipping money-changers out of the temple a bit on the violent side? Doesn't he reveal himself in Revelation 19 as the rider on the white horse "who judges and makes war"? Revelation 19:15, "Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. . . He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." McGrath asks, "Does the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ command anyone to kill in his name?" (156). Um. . . yes. Unless he is a Marcionite, McGrath should have Exodus 12 in his Bible. The LORD sends his angel to kill all the first-born of Egypt. There are other examples.

McGrath is at his best when dealing with Lewis and Luther. If the whole book was along the lines of chapter 4, I would be pleased to recommend it. Unfortunately, McGrath falls into a similar pit as Noll did in *The Scandal*

of the *Evangelical Mind*. He sees the problems rightly, but his solutions are often lacking. The "passionate intellect" must be informed by Christian presuppositions firmly grounded only in the Word of God.

Book Review

reviewed by Cornelis Van Dam



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Should We Accept Evolution?

Norman C. Nevin, ed., *Should Christians Embrace Evolution? Biblical and Scientific Responses*. Foreword by Wayne Grudem. Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press 2009

Additional Information: 220 pages; \$16.15 CDN

More and more Christians, scientists and otherwise, are accepting evolution as God's way of creating the world and all it contains. Such trends have also influenced Reformed circles. The so-called new atheists even charge that if you don't accept evolution, you're opposed to science. Indeed, last year Richard Dawkins branded a Christian evangelist as an idiot for trying to refute Charles Darwin's theory.¹

Is embracing the theory of evolution an option for Christians? Is it necessary? The loud and clear answer this book gives in its concluding chapter is "a resounding 'no' – absolutely not" (210). Both biblical scholars as well as scientists, specialists in their fields, have contributed to this helpful and informative collection of essays. The message throughout this book is that there is no reason why Christians should submit to this theory. As a matter of fact, submitting to Darwinian evolution would result in denying key biblical truths. One has to choose between the trustworthiness of the Word of God and evolutionary theory.¹

The cost of theistic evolution

Proponents of accepting evolution as God's way of bringing the present world about think they have found the solution to accepting Scripture as God's Word and accepting current scientific theory as well. However, matters are not that simple. As this book explains, to accept theistic evolution means denying

the biblical doctrines of the unity of the human race, the uniqueness of human beings, the special creation of Adam and Eve in the image of God, the goodness of God's original creation, and the teaching that death and suffering are the result of sin. Furthermore, since theistic evolution postulates pre-Adamite humans and the reality of human death before Adam and Eve, one can no longer assert with Scripture that as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, so the new creation and life comes through the second Adam Jesus Christ (Rom 5:12-21). To accept evolution as a model to explain Genesis 1 means denying what Scripture says about creation, fall, and redemption. The Darwinian evolutionary worldview and the biblical one stand opposed to each other.

As the book rightly points out, "if the authority of Scripture is to be observed then any theological model must begin with an exegesis of the relevant biblical texts and not a scientific paradigm" (12).

The biblical account

The first half of the book, therefore, addresses exegetical issues such as the literary features of Genesis 1 and its original ancient near eastern context. Also the historicity of Adam as the first human is discussed and the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:22 reaffirmed. "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man." Questions, such as whether God is deceiving us by apparently making the world look older than it actually is, are addressed with the timely reminder that the theories of science should be tested against the standards of God's special revelation as given in the

Bible. What I particularly appreciate is that the authors respect the text of Genesis as it stands and do not try to make it say something which it does not say. There is also a fitting reminder of the implications of Hebrews 11:3. "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible."

All of this does not mean that the book is rather simplistic in approaching the subjects in discussion. Not at all, for the tough scientific questions are also addressed. The second half of the book is written by scientific specialists who address the issues in their areas of specialization.

The scientific evidence

The biblical basis of modern science is explored, as well as Intelligent Design. Since the most convincing evidence for theistic evolution has been seen in data that seem to point to a common hominid ancestor for man and apes, this field is explored in several essays. The upshot of the often technical discussions is that there is not sufficient evidence to make claims of common ancestry. There are better ways of explaining the data.

Some examples of conclusions made include the following: "It would now be incorrect to suggest that 'fossil genes' represent evidence of evolutionary history. Publications describing biological roles for the non-protein coding DNA are appearing regularly in scientific literature" (150).

"What is certain. . . is that the wide variety of chromosomal variations that clearly exists between the human and chimpanzee, dictate against the thesis that these species have common ancestry" (157).

"With increasing frequency, papers are published describing the complexity and information-bearing properties of non-coding regions of the genome, once

dismissed as 'junk' DNA. It is here that the profound limitations of Darwinism, with its assumed common ancestry, will be clearly demonstrated" (186).

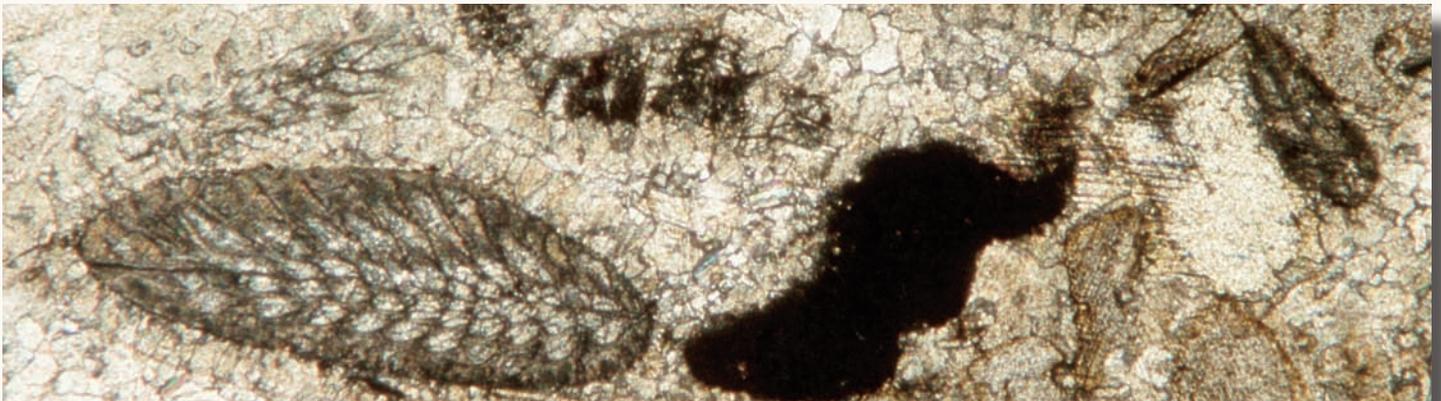
In conclusion

In the concluding chapter, it is noted that "theistic evolutionists have failed to demonstrate a theology consistent with the supremacy of Scripture. They have reinterpreted Scripture in order to harmonize it with current understandings of the evolutionary paradigm. This approach has the potential of making our theology dependant on the changing perspective of scientific understanding as opposed to the unchanging character of the eternal word of God" (210).

There is enormous pressure on scientists today to conform to the reigning paradigm of Darwinian evolution. Not to do so invites ridicule, harassment, and being bypassed for promotions or worse. However, as the last chapter illustrates, particularly regarding the theory of common ancestry, there are more and more scientific reasons to question the evolutionary hypothesis. The question raised is to the point: "Why, with so little evidence to support biology's evolutionary doctrine, would we completely revise orthodox theology to embrace such an unimpressive scientific position?" (219). "It appears that the only possible reason is the fear of appearing intellectually inferior to the academic consensus" (220). The price of succumbing to Darwinian evolution theory is too high. It entails a denial of the authority of Scripture and the elevation of current scientific hypotheses to the position of absolute and definitive authority.

I highly recommend this book!! It is a must-read.

¹ See http://articles.cnn.com/2009/11/25/tech/darwin.dawkins.evolution_1_selfish.gene.evolution.molecular.evidence?_s=PM:TECH



Forty-ninth Annual Women's League Day

We could not have asked for a more beautiful way to start our forty-ninth annual Women's League Day, hosted by Hamilton. A beautiful fall drive, witnessing God's magnificent creation, could be enjoyed by some 425 registered women. All the Ontario Canadian Reformed Churches were represented and we had women from Streetlight Ministries, from some surrounding United Reformed Churches, from Grand Rapids, Blue Bell, Denver, and one lady from out west, to enjoy two speeches, meet and greet old and new sisters in the Lord, and enjoy an abundance of food and drink.

We began our day by raising our voices in song followed by prayer being led by the League President, Jane Oosterhoff. She then led us in the reading of Leviticus 16:11-14. We continued the tradition of singing our League Song, "Sing God's Glory." We then once again opened God's Holy Word to read a portion of scripture followed by singing another Psalm before Jane introduced us to our morning speaker, Dr. C. VanDam.

Prayer as an incense offering

We enjoyed a very informative speech by Dr. VanDam. Here follows a brief summary of his speech.

Prayer is speaking to God. But what is involved in prayer? What is expected? What does God delight in? What are prayers to be like? They are supposed to be like an incense offering. If we know what was involved in the incense offering, we will know what is expected in our prayers. With the incense offering there was a perpetual smoke and smell from the burning of incense and this aroma was pleasing to the Lord. It brought God rest and peace. It spoke of a good relationship between God and his people. It was a symbol of prayer to God and indicated peace. God wants to hear from us in our prayers. He delights in our prayers. Through our prayers communion is made possible with God. Prayer is the opening of our heart and mind and giving to God everything. There were precise rules for the



incense offering and we must not under estimate the glory of God then, when it comes to our prayers. God is the same today as yesterday and he is strict with what he expects from our prayers. He wants them to be holy. Prayer must be said with a contrite heart or it is not pleasing to the Lord. It is our comfort then that our prayers are made holy by the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We can be assured that God will hear our prayers for the sake of covenant peace!

Following Dr. Van Dam's speech opportunity was given for round table discussion. Those who had further questions were given the opportunity to write down their questions and Dr. Van Dam was given the opportunity to answer some questions. Through his part of the morning Dr. Van Dam gave further instruction on how important it is that we as Christians go through life with God and mold our lives to his Word and Spirit. The Spirit has a very active role in prayer as it is the Spirit that helps us in our weakness when we do not know what to pray; He will make our requests known to God.



There are so many things and people to pray about. A few practical examples to help remember who/what to pray for/about is to look through the church bulletin and take time to think of those mentioned in the bulletin. Pray for the minister and other office bearers. Pray for those outside of the congregation and do not be ashamed of the One who gave his life for you! Pray for the government and pray for other people's repentance, too. The reasons to pray are endless. Mrs. Inge deVisser taught us a beautiful little song based on Psalm 103:1 that we even managed to sing in a round. "Praise the Lord all my soul, Praise the Lord all my soul, And all that is in me praise his Holy Name!"

Jane Oosterhoff thanked Inge deVisser for this encouraging speech and then proceeded onto our general announcements. With thanksgiving to God, Jane announced that we collected \$2024.00 for the mission work among the natives in Smithers. The ladies of Hamilton were thanked for all their hard work in putting together yet another successful Women's League Day, with a special thanks to the pianists, Lindsey Seiders and Debbie Alkema. The babysitters were also thanked for their work and willingness.

The torch was then passed onto Spring Creek, who will host our fiftieth Women's League Day. See you all then! God bless!

C

Our League President thanked Dr. VanDam and we sang Hymn 47 followed by prayer and our lunch instructions.

Afternoon session

The afternoon session began by the singing of "O Canada" and a game of Bingo to get us moving and talking to other people. Jane Oosterhoff then got us all singing Psalm 63 and led us in the reading of Luke 11:1-13. She gave an introduction to Inge deVisser, who claims to be married to the best man of the world!

Mrs. Inge deVisser gave us a very beautiful speech connected to our topic on prayer. She spoke to us about the love that God has for us and that because he loves us, he listens to our prayers. Our prayers are pleasing to him. Our prayers are precious and through prayer

we are connected to the Lord. It is good for our souls to praise the Lord. There are burdens in our lives and they are there so that we can see him. One way to carry those burdens is by prayer. We must pray continually.





Rev. George van Popta
is minister of the Jubilee
Canadian Reformed
Church at
Ottawa, Ontario
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Canticles

I Will Praise You LORD, My Saviour

1. I will praise You LORD, my Sav - iour, for You are so good to me.
2. Since the LORD is my sal - va - tion, prais - es to my God I sing.
3. Thank the LORD, so good and gra - cious; call up - on His awe - some name.
4. Shout a - loud, O you His chil - dren, you who are His peo - ple dear.

You have shown to me Your fa - vour, and have made Your an - ger flee.
He's my strength, my ex - ul - ta - tion; glo - ry to His name I bring.
Praise Him for He is so glo - rious; all His might - y deeds pro - claim.
Sing for joy, O you of Zi - on; praise His name to far and near.

I am filled with con - so - la - tion; sure - ly God is my sal - va - tion.
Filled with joy you will draw wa - ter, free - ly giv - en by the Sav - iour.
Praise the LORD to ev - ery na - tion; laud His name with great e - la - tion.
He's the Ho - ly One of Is - rael; He is faith - ful to His peo - ple;

No more will I be a - fraid; I trust Him, my on - ly aid.
from sal - va - tion's spar - kling wells, which all mis - er - y dis - pels.
Tell the world our God is great, for none e - quals Him in state.
Great a - mong us is our God; we will spread His fame a - broad.

Ray of Sunshine

Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

My name is Trevor Buys and I was the latest addition to my family, arriving in February 1980. I have two sisters and seven brothers.

I had a hard time hearing and from the time I was four or five years old I've been wearing hearing aids. Because of this predicament, I've never been very good at speaking, which is why at one time I learned sign language but was also given speech therapy.

When I was younger I spent many hours listening to Christian and other tapes and learned many hymns and songs. Similarly to my siblings I had to participate in many household duties such as wash and dry dishes, keep my room tidy and dust it from time to time, set the table, fold laundry, help mow the lawn, rake grass and leaves, and shovel snow in wintertime. Sometime my Dad would even let me handle the snow blower, which made me feel quite proud.

Even before I was finished with my schooling I started to work in a greenhouse where I would put plastic pots in plastic trays. Sometime the boss would let me do other simple jobs as well. I've been there for over ten years and have my first pay cheque still hanging up in my room.

After I finished school, I started to work here two days a week and during the rest of the week I spent one morning in the library sorting and straightening out children books. On two other mornings I volunteer in a senior citizen home clearing breakfast tables and replenishing the creamer/milk dishes. I'm also a pro at folding carton boxes for recycling purposes. On Friday afternoons I spent some time in the Bibles for Missions store, where the highlight is to drink a cup of tea with the other volunteers.

Back in January 2010, just a week before my thirtieth birthday, I again became the latest addition, but this time at Anchor Home on 30 Road, and moved into a beautiful room. I was very happy that the Board and staff would accommodate me here, as I was able to carry on with all my assignments. I feel very much at home here and get along fine with everyone. One of the residents made a poem about me which describes me very well:

The "YES" Man. That is just who I am,
Really glad to be living at "ANCHOR HOME" too.
Every day God takes good care of me;
Very glad to help out wherever I can.
Oh, yes! My Saviour Jesus died for me;
Rarely will you see me without a smile!

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in this month of February. We wish you all a blessed day together with your family and friends.

May he be our guide and source of strength in all we do each day anew.

Birthdays in February:

- 6** **TREVOR BUYS will be 31**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
- 12** **CONNY VANAMERONGEN will be 46**
361 Thirty Road, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
conniev1@hotmail.com
- 18** **CORA SCHOONHOVEN will be 60**
93 Oxford Street, Richmond Hill, ON L4C 4L6
- 24** **FRED LUDWIG will be 59**
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON NIA IT8

A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms
8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
Phone: 905-957-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Dear Editor,

It was wonderful to read articles that help us to focus on the true meaning of Christmas and to remember that every year is a year of our risen Lord. It is encouraging to receive blessings from our brothers and sisters. I very much enjoyed reading the "Year-end" edition of the *Clarion*, until I came to the last page.

It seems that *Clarion* as well as Premier Printing Ltd. has allowed the signs of the times to enter into the magazine. I am certain that the greetings are well meant and that the correspondents of *Clarion* and the workers at Premier themselves are not responsible for the phrase "Season's Greetings." But I must say that I find that phrase offensive.

Especially as Christians who seek to serve God to the best of their abilities we must strive to use words and phrases that reflect that we belong to our risen Lord. Christmas is not just a season, like spring, summer, fall, or winter. Rather Christmas is the reason for celebrating that the Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. This celebration is not bound to a season or a time of the year. Christmas is life changing and must alter our thinking, because Christ is the centre of the celebration. Merry Christmas!

Rob Bonefaas

Response

As the Editor I am not involved in the layout of *Clarion*; however, I do want to express appreciation for all of the folk at Premier Printing who do their best to bring you the best. In addition, they extend to all of us, readers, writers, and editors alike, the greetings of the season which have everything to do with joy, peace, and the great news of our Saviour's birth. This is something that they have been doing in every year-end issue that I could find and I fail to see the problem with it.

Dear Editor,

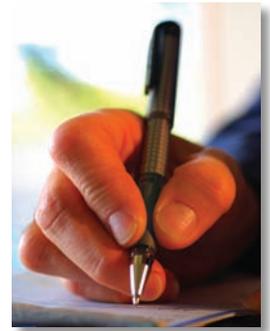
In the recent Year-End edition of the *Clarion*, you published a book review by Dr. F. Oosterhoff in which she recommends the book by Eric Metaxas titled *Bonhoeffer, Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy; A Righteous Gentile vs. The Third Reich*. In her review, Dr. Oosterhoff relates to us the history of Bonhoeffer's life, and also his theological views. While I have no problem with the material concerning Bonhoeffer's life, I must express some concern about her conclusion

that "the essence of Bonhoeffer's 'prison theology' is biblical."

Dr. Oosterhoff explains that Bonhoeffer was influenced by the piety of the Moravian Brethren, however she neglects to mention some of the other key influences on his life. Bonhoeffer studied under such German liberal theologians as Seeberg, Lietzmann, Lutgert. He was also influenced by Harnack and Bultmann, and throughout his life he never departed from higher criticism. He encouraged the "demythologizing of scripture" - that is, essentially calling miracles and direct revelation "myths," intended to convey a moral or ethical truth. Bonhoeffer is actually classified as a neo-orthodox theologian. He embraced the teaching of Karl Barth and his dialectical theology, stating that God is unknowable - "wholly other" and "wholly hidden" - and therefore we should not concern ourselves with trying to know him, nor can we say anything about him, positively or negatively. Bonhoeffer explains and defends dialectical theology in his book titled *Act and Being*.

Dr. Oosterhoff also says that Bonhoeffer held "an unwavering reliance on biblical guidance in all aspects of one's life." Bonhoeffer, in fact, denied verbal-plenary inspiration and explained that the Bible becomes the "Word of God" when it is existentially experienced. To Bonhoeffer, the Bible was meant "to be expounded as a witness, not as a book of wisdom, a teaching book, a book of eternal truth" (*No Rusty Swords*), and he believed that miracles like the creation, incarnation, resurrection, and ascension are mythological concepts, not actual historical events (*Christ the Centre, Creation and Fall, Christology, Act and Being*).

What Bonhoeffer refers to as Christocentrism is also derived from Barth. Barth taught that Christ was an "Event" in his spiritual realm which he calls "Geschichte." Christ was, for Barth, not historical, not born in space and time. He remains in a realm similar to that of Kant's "noumenal," that is, the unknowable spiritual world, not the physical world. Barth's Christocentrism also led him to teach universalism; that all people are saved in Christ. While I cannot determine Bonhoeffer's position on universalism, Cornelius Van Til, who taught at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, says that "the theological positions of Bonhoeffer and Calvin are diametrically opposed to one another. . . The Christ of Bonhoeffer is not the Christ of the scriptures. . .



JV

Bonhoeffer's Christ existing as community differs only in detail from the 'Christ Event' of Barth" (*Westminster Theological Review* 34:2 May 1972). The term "Christocentric" might sound like a good thing in our Reformed ears, however coming from Bonhoeffer's mouth, it had an entirely different meaning.

There is much we can learn from a man like Bonhoeffer and I have definitely enjoyed reading my copy of *Life Together*. He encouraged us to be active, working, "doing" Christians, concerned with the well being of our fellow man. However, we must exercise caution when promoting his theology. We need to continue in the rich heritage of biblical, Reformed theology, humbly thanking God who has created us to think his thoughts after him! Let us rejoice in the fact that our Creator God has revealed himself in special and general revelation and that to restore us to a real and living relationship with him, he sent Christ in space and time to take on our human nature and suffer on our behalf, so that we can be called, with Christ, sons of God.

*In Christ,
Will Dokter*

Response

Thank you for interacting with my review. In it I refer to an earlier series I published on Bonhoeffer, which should answer several of your questions. So should, of course, the Metaxas biography. These sources show that until about the 1980s the accusations you raise were quite common among orthodox Christians; they describe how this could happen and, not in the last place, they give the reasons why orthodox Christians, including Reformed ones, have since changed course and accepted Bonhoeffer as a brother in Christ – as a theologian who not only proclaimed the gospel but indeed lived it. At the end of this response I will list a few titles. For the rest I restrict myself to the following points:

(1) Bonhoeffer was indeed taught by Bible-critical theologians and he spoke well of them, even of Bultmann. In practice, however, he departed from their teachings. His life and writings and testimony make that so abundantly clear that it surprises me that the contrary view is still being proclaimed. It just won't do to blame, in spite of the evidence, a student for the heresies of his mentors. I think we can compare Bonhoeffer's attitude to that of Reformed theologians who openly admit that the school of historical criticism has given us a number of worthwhile insights, but who do so without accepting its theology. (For specific evidence of Bonhoeffer's rejection of the Bible-critical tradition see his letter of

April 1936 to his brother-in-law, which I quoted in the second article of my earlier series.)

- (2) Bonhoeffer was a friend of Karl Barth and agreed with him on a number of issues. With Barth he rejected the reigning theological liberalism as well as the arid theology and fortress mentality of the official church and, with him, he reclaimed the O.T. as the Word of God in a time when Nazism denied this. He also cooperated with Barth, Niemoeller, and others, in attacking the Nazi system, in issuing the Barmen Declaration, and in establishing the Confessing Lutheran Church. He further supported Barth in his attack on the prevailing Pelagianism, pointing out that we can't climb up to God; that the gift of faith is a gift of grace. But Bonhoeffer strenuously opposed Barth's teaching that faith only occurs when God speaks personally to our hearts, and I very much doubt that he subscribed to the Barthian distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie*. The Christian faith for Bonhoeffer is evident in discipleship, in a daily following of the *historical, personal, present Christ*. (See on his objections to Barth, *inter alia*, Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*, especially the letters of April 30, 1944, May 5, 1944, June 8, 1944.)
- (3) Bonhoeffer's style was paradoxical, he used hyperbole, he wrote in a personal and political and church situation so extreme that we can hardly imagine it. These factors are in part to blame for the misunderstandings that have arisen. And questions can indeed be asked about certain aspects of his theology. Among sympathetic Reformed theologians Dr. Barend Kamphuis especially has pointed this out (see below).*
- (4) For further reading I recommend, for a start, the following Reformed authors: George Huntemann, *The Other Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (1993), B. Kamphuis, "Een andere Bonhoeffer?" in *Radix*, 17, 1991, pp. 171-185, and the articles by B. Kamphuis, C.C. den Hertog, J.W. Maris, and G.C. den Hertog, in G.C. den Hertog and B. Kamphuis, eds., *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: De uitdaging van zijn leven en werk voor nu* (2006).
- Frederika Oosterhoff*
- (5) *Regarding the critical remarks by Dr. Barend Kamphuis and my response, see again my earlier series, especially article no. 3. These earlier articles contain responses also to several of the questions that have recently been raised about Bonhoeffer's orthodoxy (in connections with the Metaxas biography).



*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.*