

# Clarion

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## *Canadian Reformed Church, Dunnville, Ontario*



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- What is Human Dignity?
- Sacrificial Love Proves Genuine Faith
- New Perspectives on the Church and Charismatic Gifts?



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# What is Human Dignity?

## *Human dignity has its origin in God*

A central concept in current discussions on the legalization of euthanasia is human dignity. However, our definition of human dignity will determine not only how we deal with the problem of “mercy” killing, but with a host of other issues as well, such as abortion. So, what is human dignity and how should it be defined?

We are in the happy situation that Mark Penninga, director of the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA), has popularized his Master’s thesis on this topic and published it with the title, *Building on Sand: Human Dignity in Canadian Law and Society* (2009). In this editorial I wish to pass on some of the results of his work and thereby hopefully encourage you to buy and read this important book. References to this book are indicated by page numbers in parentheses.

### **Human dignity as defined in Canada**

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the topic of human dignity within our Canadian context. After all, the Supreme Court of Canada has said over and over again that the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is inextricably bound to concepts of human dignity (9). Although the term dignity is not even mentioned in the Charter, the concept has become a central principle in Canadian case law. So, how does the Supreme Court perceive human dignity and use it in their decisions?

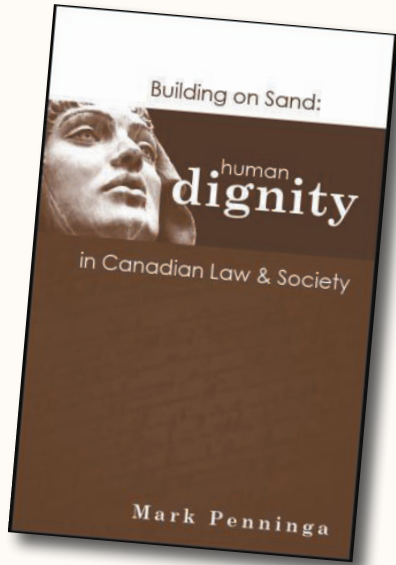
In an important 1999 clarification of human dignity (in *Law v. Canada*), the Supreme Court of Canada defined the concept as follows.

Human dignity means that an individual or group feels self-respect and self-worth. It is concerned with physical and psychological integrity and empowerment. Human dignity is harmed by

unfair treatment premised upon personal traits or circumstances which do not relate to individual needs, capacities, or merits. It is enhanced by laws which are sensitive to the needs, capacities, and merits of different individuals, taking into account the context underlying their differences. Human dignity is harmed when individuals and groups are marginalized, ignored, or devalued, and is enhanced when laws recognize the full place of all individuals and groups within Canadian society. Human dignity within the meaning of the equality guarantee does not relate to the status or position of an individual in society per se, but rather concerns the manner in which a person legitimately feels when confronted with a particular law (20).

Penninga shows that when all has been said and done it is clear that the concept of human dignity has been reduced to an affirmation of individual autonomy and human equality. In effect, the freedom of the individual to do what he or she wishes and the right of an individual to feel good have become central. Since human beings and their desires are fickle and ever changing, they are a very subjective foundation on which to rest human dignity and judicial decisions. As a result contradictions and controversy on matters relating to human dignity plague Canadian constitutional law (29).

Some reflection on the secular humanist approach shows that only those people who are able to assert their autonomy benefit from such a subjective understanding of human dignity. If human dignity is not intrinsic to our humanity but is a function of



our choice-making, then only those who are able to make choices can be considered to have dignity and be worth protecting (24). This means that the unborn, the disabled, and the elderly are the first to be discriminated against as the legalization of abortion and the growing support for euthanasia indicate. In other words, in the view of the Supreme Court, human dignity is not really inherent in being human, but it is for autonomous agents who basically define what they want human dignity to mean (24).

All of this illustrates the utter subjectivity of modern legal thinking about human dignity. To base jurisprudence on such a foundation is indeed building on sand, as the title of Penninga's book underlines. What is needed is an explanation of human dignity that is objective and above all normative. For that Penninga turns to God's Word.

### Human dignity according to Scripture

Historically western culture has been influenced by the Bible for its understanding of human dignity. According to Scripture, human dignity is based not on man, but on God, the Creator. He gave humans dignity by creating male and female after his own image (Gen 1:27). This means that human dignity has its origin in God. He has set the human race apart from the rest of his creation to be the crown of his handiwork with the mandate to love God and to care for and rule over this world on God's behalf.

This God-given identity has all sorts of real life repercussions. To be human is to be above and separate from the animal world. As our culture turns



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its back to God and embraces evolutionary worldviews the distinction between the life of humans and animals is blurring. People often get more upset about killing seals or culling rabbits than killing the unborn.

Since being human means being made in the image of God, human dignity is inherent in our very creation. It's not about something that has been added to our being; rather, it is at the core of what it means to be human. Although we have been made after God's image, the distinction between God and man, the Creator and creation, must nevertheless be maintained. Being an image of God speaks of the calling God has given us to exercise dominion over the earth for God (57f.). Man has responsibilities and is answerable to God.

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### *Contradictions and controversy on matters relating to human dignity plague Canadian constitutional law*

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There is also a darker side to being human. It means being a participant in the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They fell because they believed Satan's claim that they could be autonomous and only answerable to themselves. Since the fall, the image of God in the human race has been marred, although not absent (cf. Gen 9:6).

This truth has several implications. Because being human means that one is made after God's image, God still holds man accountable for the original task which God has called him to, namely to rule the earth for God and represent the Creator's interests (also cf. Rom 1:18-21). Also, because to be human is to be made after God's image, human life is precious in God's sight and the violation of human life calls for just punishment (Gen 9:6). Furthermore, since all humans have been made in God's image, they should all be treated as being of equal worth and dignity. There should be complete equality among humans from a legal and political perspective, regardless whether one is a Christian or an unbeliever (67).

However, to do full justice to human dignity as grounded in being in God's image one needs to recognize that man has been made with a divine

purpose. God did not create man after his image for man's sake, but for the sake of his glory so that his creation would serve Him. And therefore a Christian understanding of the dignity of man as rooted in God's creation work in paradise and renewed in the second Adam, Jesus Christ, is the only sound way of speaking of human dignity.

### **The main consequence**

There are many consequences of a biblical view of human dignity, but perhaps the most basic and overarching one is the need for society and the courts to see people not as free autonomous agents who determine what their rights are, but as those who have responsibilities to God and their fellow citizens in accord with God's designs for his creation work. The dignity with which God endowed humans by virtue of making them in his image entails enormous responsibilities to God and the neighbour. These responsibilities include the need to protect life as God gave it, whether it be the life of one newly conceived, or mentally or physically disabled, or on the life of one terminally ill. Penninga helpfully goes through several important Canadian court cases involving abortion, euthanasia, and equality rights and evaluates the judicial rulings in the light of God's Word (83-91).

In chapter 5, Penninga shows that the Christian view of human dignity is both legitimate and necessary for Canada. Christian principles are good for the nation! They foster true freedom and human worth. This is not to suggest that Christianity must be forced on the population, rather it is to recognize that applying biblical principles to public life, culture, and the courts will yield great blessings for these principles are consistent with God's design for his creation.

In conclusion, visit the website <http://arpa.canada.ca/> and get a copy of Penninga's book, *Building on Sand*. And while you're at it, if you have not yet done so, why not become a supporter of ARPA or at least sign up for their free newsletter? This organization is working hard "to educate, equip, and encourage Reformed Christians to political action and to shine the light of God's Word to Canada's municipal, provincial, and federal governments."





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MATTHEW 13:52

# Sacrificial Love Proves Genuine Faith (Part 1 of 3)

## Edify One Another

*“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”*

Romans 14:19

In this series of meditations, we'll be pondering sacrificial love. We often talk about that sort of love being a necessary part of our Christian walk. But what actually is sacrificial love? The best way to learn what sacrificial love looks like is by considering what sacrificial love does.

One way to learn this is by surveying the “one anothers” in the New Testament. The first one we will consider is: “Edify one another.” As Paul tells us in Romans 14:19, “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.” Another translation puts it this way: “So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.”

What Paul is doing here is painting a picture of a building – a house, let's say. Peter too uses this image of a spiritual house when he writes, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5).

What this essentially means is that as members of Christ, we're all involved in a massive and very important building project. God is the architect and master builder. And as Paul says elsewhere, we ourselves are God's building, God's construction project (1 Cor 3:9).

The main building material, Paul tells us in Ephesians 4, is love – the love of Christ in particular: “From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up *in love*, as each part does its work” (v 16).

In Romans, Paul gives this exhortation to build one another in love – to edify one another – in the context of a particular controversy that was threatening to break apart the church at Rome. Church members were having differences with one another. Such differences, for example, concerned what a person may or may not eat or drink.

Paul tells them not to allow the differences that they encounter with one another to break things apart in the church. Rather, when they encounter differences with one another, they need to make every effort to keep on building.

May we also remember that when we encounter differences with one another within the church. The church is a construction project, not a demolition crew. Indeed, it is God's construction project, his building. And you dare not demolish God's building.

Remember what happened when Satan tried that. It didn't work

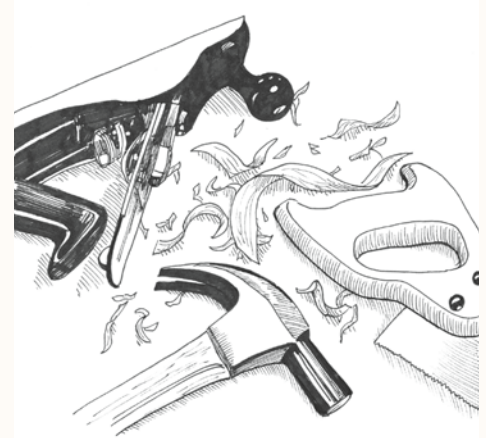


Illustration by Sheila Van Delft

– and he will suffer eternally for it. And remember what Jesus said to those who sought to destroy the work that God was doing through Him. He said: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (John 2:19), by which He meant his body.

God's building work will proceed, as surely as Jesus Christ is risen. His building work will proceed, no matter who tries to stop it or destroy it. Let's put away the wrecking bars then, and let's get working. Let's make sure that we're using the right building material – that is, love – from the right supplier, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. Through love, let us edify and build up one another.



# New Perspectives on the Church and Charismatic Gifts? (Part 1 of 2)

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*This article was originally a public lecture at the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, October 16, 2008.*

## Introduction

During the last ten years or so there has been a flood of books, articles, conferences and the like, in which recipes are offered that promise a richer spiritual life than the church of the Reformation ever knew. The church has lived too long in a situation of forgetting the Holy Spirit and the time has come for new experiences of the Spirit.

In itself this wish is not new. In the second century this focus on extra experience by the Holy Spirit was present in the Montanist movement. In the Middle Ages the monk Joachim of Fiore cried out: "The age of the Father and the Son is over, the time of the Spirit has come!" Spiritualistic Anabaptist preachers in the time of the Reformation – and in opposition to it – stressed the same thing. It was said that hearing the direct voice of God, by inspiration of the Spirit, means much more than such created, earthly means as the Bible and the church.

Time and again we hear such claims anew. They are presented as a prophetic witness against the spiritual decline of the present church, calling on the church to submit to the Spirit of God and to open itself up to the charismatic gifts that are available.

This description of the church as being halfhearted and in decline should not be dismissed too hastily. But how are we to react, then, to such appeals, suggesting that, like in the days of Joachim of Fiore, "now again is the time of the Spirit"?<sup>1</sup> You might even conclude that the church has for too long only concentrated on Christ as the foundation of its spiritual life.

A century ago in 1906 the Pentecostal Movement started its triumphal march from Los Angeles and went world-wide. In the sixties of the last century the

charismatic movement brought the same spirit into the churches – first the Protestant churches, then the Roman Catholic Church. But now in The Netherlands, during the last couple of years, the charismatic movement has begun to make an entry into Orthodox-Reformed denominations. Representatives from a diversity of churches in that country who are genuinely Reformed find each other in making a plea for more openness to the Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Among such pleas there is certainly no intention of exchanging the central place of Christ with that of the Spirit. It also is admitted that there is reason to be on guard against excesses. Nevertheless, at the heart of such messages lies the conviction that a greater openness to the Spirit, and especially to the gifts of the Spirit, is of the highest urgency in order to be healed from an underdeveloped spiritual life.

Needless to say, all of this is reason enough to reflect more deeply on the biblical relationship that exists between the church and the charismata.

## I. Necessary basic thoughts on the church and the charismata

If we want to reflect on the relationship between the church and spiritual gifts, we must start with something more fundamental. We have to ask: "Who is God and who is man?" From there we will see light thrown upon the Person of the Holy Spirit, and then we may discover what the goal is as God's Spirit's works in the church. Therefore, we must first deal with the relationship between the Triune God and us.

### 1.1 The Triune God and us

Scripture reveals that we cannot say a thing about man that makes sense, if we do not at the same moment speak about God.<sup>3</sup> When God created man, He revealed something essential about Himself. God said: "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Gen 1:26). This shows man's place in God's creation.

Man, the only one of all creatures who is in the likeness of God, must subdue the earth and rule over all living creatures. In the exercise of this royal responsibility he shows that he is man, and that he belongs to God. Although he is a creature himself, he is placed on God's side rather than on the side of creation.

God meant man to mirror the fullness of his own being. God wanted a creature who would answer and be held answerable or responsible. That we are estranged, however, from this high position is a daily reality in the lives of sinful people. Yet we are reminded of our high position. In the Bible we find God Himself looking back with grief and pain upon man as He had made him. In Psalm 8 we hear a man, by inspiration of God's Spirit, saying "God made him little lower than divine." This not only indicates the paradise that was lost, it also reminds us of a way back. Did God Himself not open up a perspective on the restoration of man in Genesis 3:15 – that mother of all promises?

We are reminded of our origin and of the fact that it used to be normal for the Lord God to come to man in the Garden of Eden. Man heard God's footsteps and was very close to God. We hear that in the words God spoke at the very moment when man became disobedient. As man hides in the garden, God says: "Where are you?" (Gen 3:8-10). Indeed, being intimate with God belongs to the very nature of man. Even when that intimacy is ruined by sin, God still aims at it. All that follows in the Bible fits into this framework.

So we meet Abraham, the friend of God (2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; James 2:23). And with him all the peoples of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3). The covenant of God with his people is directed to that blessing which implies intimate fellowship. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps 25:14 KJV).

It is very meaningful that God's Son came to this world, that He became *man*, and that He addressed sinful people as his friends (Luke 12:4; John 11:1-3, 11; 15:14-15). In his high-priestly prayer He pleaded with his Father, that God's love for such people should mean as much as the love of the Father for his only-begotten Son (John 17:23-24, 26).

This all is related to the deep mystery of God's Trinity. I can only point to a few things.<sup>4</sup> The Bible gives ample proof how the Father, Son, and Spirit in their entire divine existence are perfectly one. We meet the Father sending his Son for the atonement of our

guilt. We meet the Son who made Himself nothing and who went in obedience (Phil 2:5-8), even on the road of suffering and death, a road on which He learned obedience from what He suffered (Heb 5:8). Then there is the Spirit, poured out by the Son, from the Father (Acts 2:33; 15:8). The richness of God's Trinity opens itself up to us as soon as we discover redemption. How near the Lord God is to us when the Spirit of God is poured upon men! At Pentecost the Spirit of God came to dwell among and in people. Sinners, coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, receive the Holy Spirit as the seal of the renewal of their hearts (Eph 1:13; 4:30). He never draws our minds exclusively to Himself.

Especially the congregation of the Lord must be aware of that. The congregation is called a temple of the Holy Spirit, or described more fully as "a place where God dwells through his Spirit" (Eph 2:22). The temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:15; Eph 2:21) is also the people of God (2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10; 1 Pet 2:9-10) and at the same time the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:23; 4:12-16; 5:30; Col 1:18). So the work of the Spirit is always full of Christ and full of intimate knowledge of the Father. The congregation is connected to the Triune God. And when the Spirit dwells in the congregation, He – to use the words of Augustine – is the gift and at the same time the love (*donum et caritas*) of the Father and the Son.

How does the work of the Spirit of God stand for the restoration of intimacy between God and man? I said earlier: "God meant for man to mirror the fullness of his own Being." The relationship of intimacy between God and man fits into this intention of the Lord. Here we are at the very heart of the spirituality that we must know about, namely, the *relationship*, that is, the restored relationship, between God and man.

When we now focus on the significance of the charismata, the spiritual gifts for the church, and we ask what these mean for the spiritual experience of believers, then we must keep this aspect of the *relationship* between God and man in mind. This perhaps is the most important benchmark when Reformed and charismatic spirituality meet each other. Being Reformed means that everything is directed towards our *relationship* with the Lord. The alternative would be a focus on the experience of man in deeper and higher dimensions.



## 1.2. The relation is recognized in faith and grace

An attractive aspect of the new attention given to the charismata is its man-focused message. Man is approached from the point of view of experience. And that must not immediately be rejected! Not at all! All the aspects of our being are "antennas" in feeling, thinking, and willing, with the faculties of our senses around them, and they are all God-given. It is all a part of man.

However, when we try to find the biblical connections of God's contact with man, and from there look at the desire for experience that exists among Christians – or among men – then we discover a passion for experience that since the Fall is not attuned any more to our relationship with God, but to the fulfillment of our own possibilities; to the importance of our own personality.

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*At the heart of such messages lies the conviction that a greater openness to the Spirit, and especially to the gifts of the Spirit, is of the highest urgency in order to be healed from an underdeveloped spiritual life*

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If you are more or less familiar with the literature produced by charismatic Christians, then you may know that a charismatic spirituality exists that hardly deals with the sinfulness of man, that never quotes the publican's prayer (Luke 18:13), and that omits the use of Psalms 32 or 51. Spiritual life is then most of all about you being important to God and about you being allowed to experience glorious living. The steps that you take on the Jesus way produce great things. Demonstrations of glossolalia and prophesying will teach you how such experiences can be reached. If you just start and try, the Holy Spirit will take over.<sup>5</sup>

It is not difficult to see the sort of character this gives to our religious experiences and how the charismata fit into that. The spiritual gifts of glossolalia and prophesy, and of healing, on the basis of the great experience of Spirit-baptism, stand for an enormous amount of extra experience. Of course this is attractive!

There is a charismatic spirituality that is full of experiences, but in which there is not a trace of the

*relationship* that I spoke about. For that reason I do not intend to focus on the extremes of charismatic spirituality. Such extremes need to be warned against lest we lose our footing. Instead, I will stress the biblical *standards* that are to be characteristic for our spiritual life. These standards have everything to do with the relationship between God and man. Of course that relationship has an experiential aspect! The Bible does not present a *theory* of the knowledge of God! It is about real men. And it is about the living God! But, we do have biblical identification marks.

### Faith

The first mark, already clearly present in the Old Testament in the language of the covenant, lies in the word to *believe*. Between Abraham and the Lord it was his believing God's Word that counted for righteousness (Gen 15:6). Between Israel and the Lord also God's promise was decisive. The people were not told to seek security in an image or in a sign, but in the given promise. And of course that was followed by proof of God's faithfulness, as it appeared at the exodus.

In the New Testament, it is no different. It has once been said that faith in the gospel is the central experience of a Christian (Jan Veenhof). We might wonder if we need to call it a "central experience," but that faith is central in the NT is something about which I need not elaborate.

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*The richness of God's Trinity opens itself up to us as soon as we discover redemption*

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Indeed *faith* indicates what is central to a Christian. In the gospel of John we repeatedly hear Jesus say that whoever believes in Him will be saved and have eternal life (John 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29, 35, 40, 47). "Believing" means to receive admission to the fullness of salvation. In Acts we find the same. There too faith is the connection to a complete salvation (Acts 8:7; 10:43; 13:48; 16:31). Paul's letters describe the same picture. Indeed, Romans 1:16-17 played an important role in Luther's reformation. There in one breath Paul mentions *gospel, faith, as well as life*. The expression "from faith to faith" means "the all-embracing meaning of faith as the way to exist for the new man" (Herman Ridderbos).



In short, we can say that faith contains *the nucleus of the Christian life*. Explaining spiritual life is not possible without pointing to faith as the very heart of it. And faith does not correspond with just some part of what it means to be a Christian – no, faith is about the *fullness of salvation*.

What kind of life is that? The Apostle Paul says some peculiar things when he emphasizes to the Corinthians: “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). Faith lives exactly by what is not within the reach of our experience. Faith is in what is outside of us – it is in the promises of God, in the Word of God.

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### *Explaining spiritual life is not possible without pointing to faith as the very heart of it*

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Christians can recognize this. You might even call it a common experience! But it is an experience that does not rest on our experience! In the middle of it is not our own life but the Lord Jesus Christ. That is absolutely recognizable for a Christian! It is part of the richness of his life to say: “not I, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20; cf. Phil 1:21), “For me to live is Christ” (Col 3:4), “Christ who is our life” (1 Cor 2:2), “nothing but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” This biblical – and Reformed – thinking is different from the stream of charismatic experience. The question is this: is our faith about knowing the Lord and his trustworthiness, or is it about the spiritual quality of our own life in which a range of experiences relating to abundance, to miracles, to a higher existence, is brought within our reach?

If indeed Christ is our life, then by faith we do not just have something but everything. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps 23). It is this relationship of faith, of trust, that exists between a sheep and the shepherd that gives such certainty. Faith is the connection to the fullness of salvation. That is what the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, causes a man to share in by grace.

### **Grace**

Since the days of Luther and Calvin we have been taught to speak in terms of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*. We know that these two aspects of the gospel go together, just as they also are not without *sola Scriptura* and *solo Christo*. In the relationship of man with the Triune God, grace is essential, because having such a relationship

is undeserved. Moreover – God is the initiator. We don’t seek Him. He seeks us, sinners. The gospel comes from Him (cf. 2 Cor 4:15). It is his good pleasure (2 Cor 6:1-2). Being called to glory means to boast about grace – and then only the name of Christ is glorified by the believers (2 Thess 1:12). All the time it is about Him. Grace is “grace in Christ” (Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 1:4; Gal 2:20-21; Eph 1:6-7; 2 Tim 1:9).

God opens his doors towards us, but not to glorify us, not to make something impressive out of us. Here we learn to understand John the Baptist who said: “He must become greater, I must become less” (John 3:30). This is how faith works and how grace bears fruit through the Holy Spirit. It is not man who becomes important with his new spiritual qualities. The Lord Jesus, and his Father, become the most important to us. His undeserved grace to sinners causes them to join Paul, who could only boast in the cross of Calvary. At the same time there is this unbreakable relationship: life to me is Christ (Phil 1:21). Nothing that Paul himself or that in the eyes of men could be counted as gain, is worthy of being cherished. Rather, it all has become loss “compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (see Phil 3:7-11). For this reason he could wish that King Agrippa, and that governor Festus too, would become what he was because of his testimony of Jesus, except for his chains (Acts 26:29).

*Part 2 will address the meaning of charismata as well as new insights.*


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<sup>1</sup> This appeal is made in M. Parmentier, *Spiritus donorum, Spiritus ministeriorum. Over de werkingen en de werken van de Heilige Geest en over de mensen die daarin werkzaam zijn*. Inaugurele rede VU 1993, 37, 42.

<sup>2</sup> In The Netherlands such examples can be found in the magazine *CV-Koers*. Among the names to be mentioned are J. Hoek and C. van der Kooi, generally considered to be sound and responsible Reformed theologians.

<sup>3</sup> See the very opening of Calvin’s *Institutes*, I,1.

<sup>4</sup> I dealt somewhat broader with this aspect in ‘De drie-enige God in gemeenschap met ons’ in H. ten Brinke, J.W. Maris e.a., *Geestrijk leven*, Barneveld 2006, 14-27.

<sup>5</sup> You can find this in the instructions related to the ‘experience’ of spirit-baptism. Our steps are regarded as necessary to reach the experience. For examples see my: *Geloof en ervaring (Faith and experience. From Wesley to the Pentecostal Movement)*, Leiden 1992, 153-161. 



# A Heart for You

Kaitlyn VanderDeen

*Life can be overburdened  
With sins so far from few.  
It is a constant struggle  
Between the old man and the new.*

*The guilt is often so blinding  
I miss the promise that's in sight:  
"My yoke for you is easy  
My burden is always light."*

*How great is Your love and mercy  
To adopt me as Your own!  
Clothe me with humility  
To kneel before Your Throne.*

*Make my spirit ever willing  
To be clay in Your skillful Hand.  
Father, change my burdened heart  
To follow Your beautiful plan.*



# You are God's Field, God's Building: Completion of a Church Building

Since its institution in 2003, the congregation of Dunnville/Wainfleet has been patiently and excitedly working towards its own church building. Our mother congregation, Attercliffe, had graciously accommodated our congregation and shared its building with us. However, while sharing a building with another congregation may be efficient, it was far from ideal. This constantly highlighted the need for our congregation to have its own building.

On Labour Day of 2006 the congregation learned the exciting news. A property within the preferred building area had been donated to the congregation. The caveat at the time of purchase was that this property did not have the zoning required to allow for a church building. This meant that there was a significant amount of uncertainty regarding the property since rezoning a property from agricultural to institutional is no small feat.

The Building Committee diligently worked on the project and the congregation was blessed when this second hurdle was cleared and the property was rezoned to allow for a church building. Inevitably this led to the next step of the process, the decision to actually build. While the world's central bankers worked to "save the world" from financial ruin by spending money, the congregation was faced with its own decision whether to spend a large amount of money. In the end, the decision was "yes, let's build" a building to worship God and to hear his saving gospel.

Plans were formalized, tradesmen were lined up, and on Saturday, May 2, 2009, the congregation held the groundbreaking ceremony. Soon groundbreaking became breathtaking. Located on a hill on the east side of Dunnville on the main highway, the congregation and town were able to watch a church building rise from the ground. The work continued quickly and

safely. As the summer ended the building was closed up and the work continued inside.

On Sunday, January 24, 2010, the days of sojourn in Attercliffe's building ended. The congregation of Dunnville (the Wainfleet part being dropped because the building is in Dunnville!) held its first worship service in the new building. Our minister, Rev. D. DeBoer, who was admittedly excited, led this first worship service. With a sermon themed "You are God's field, God's building" we as congregation were taught how the Church is not a human work and that it is built on a solid foundation. This was a very important reminder for us as congregation now that we began to use this new building that we are blessed with. The building is not about what the congregation could do, but about what the God of the congregation did. It was God, not man, who did the work of putting a second "beacon" in the town of Dunnville. The purpose of this physical building is to serve the spiritual building (the church) which serves God and gives Him all of the glory.





## Church opening

Following this, the congregation organized three different opening occasions. Saturday, March 27 was an open house for the town of Dunnville. Fliers were sent out throughout the town inviting all to see what this new building was all about. A steady flow of locals took the opportunity to see the inside of the church building and the displays chronicling building progress and what the Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church is all about. This came a month after the February 27 open house for the local Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches. The biggest day for the congregation itself was the official opening on the church building, which was held the evening of Friday, February 26.

This evening was a festive occasion dampened only because all the snow that we had missed this winter seemed to arrive that night. The program was a mix of singing, piano music, reminiscing, and congratulations. As Master of Ceremonies for the evening, Br. H. Homan opened this festive occasion and welcomed all. Rev. DeBoer then followed with a meditation on the words of Psalm 78:4b. We were urged not to forget to tell the next generation of the wonderful deeds of the Lord. This included not only the great acts recorded in the Bible, the forgiveness of sins and the church gathering work, but also the local acts here in Dunnville. This building, built for God, serves as a reminder to us and our children that when the intent is to serve God, and not ourselves, God blesses.

Br. E. Feenstra, chairman of the Building Committee, gave a short summary of the building project from start to finish. One of the highlights of working at the building site turned out to have been the 9:30 coffee run enthusiastically supplied by a congregational member for the duration of the entire project. This coffee was good enough so that even some tradesmen who regularly showed up at 10:30 made a point of coming early for the coffee! He ended his presentation with the ceremonial "handing over the key" of the building. However, in a day and age where keys are obsolete, and a code is needed to unlock the building, it was decided that a key would be better substituted with something else. Rev. DeBoer, representing the congregation, and Br. VanAmerongen, representing the Building Committee, were called for the unveiling of a memorial plaque. It read, "You are God's field, God's building," from 1 Corinthians 3:9b, and had the date 2010. This plaque is now mounted beside the entrance to the church building. It serves as



a witness and reminder that this building and the work that comes from it are not from man, but God. At this time, Rev. DeBoer also took the time to thank the entire Building Committee for their hard work on a project well done (including chairs in the council room with many levers and exciting functions)!

Br. M. VanderVelde, another Building Committee member, gave a photo summary of the project. At the beginning of the presentation he noted the persistence of certain members in photos. Reminiscent of the "Where's Waldo" books, he encouraged us to "look for Bill." Yes, we saw him, and many other volunteers. The audience was also treated to a piano improvisation on Psalm 110 by one of our church pianists, Br. Jonathan Kingma. Congratulations and words of encouragement then followed from all of the Canadian and United Reformed congregations in the Niagara Region. Congratulations were also given by the mayor of Dunnville and the Member of Provincial Parliament. Both marvelled at the wood work that accompanied the used organ (dated 1867) that will be used to lead worship services. The mayor went so far as to request an invitation for the opening concert for this organ when it will finally be completed.

As the evening ended, we prayed, thanking the Lord for the many things He has done. We then concluded with the national anthem, including a not often sung verse with the words "Ruler Supreme, who hearest humble prayer, hold our Dominion in thy loving care; help us to find, O God in Thee, a lasting rich reward, as waiting for a better day we stand on guard." As we now go on with this new building, the task for our congregation is to use this God given gift to further his kingdom, be a beacon on a hill until all God's work is completed and we reach the better day. C



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# Peregrine Survey, May 2010

The school year is drawing to a close. In this survey we look back, and conclude that there were many blessings, and many reasons for gratitude. We have also seen the need to address controversy – some concerning practical matters, and some concerning fundamental issues. Our schools relied on teachers to help parents in their mandates regarding raising their children and one topic that arose frequently concerns how both schools and teachers can be best prepared and continue to grow in the delivery of Reformed education. Professional development helps prevent atrophy and even veteran teachers can remain fresh and challenged. Thankfulness, controversy, preparations for next year, and professional development are the themes for this Peregrine Survey.

## Thankfulness

Several school bulletins express thankfulness because of preservation and restoration of life and health. Others also make mention of lives being promoted to glory, miscarriages, and other health concerns. In all things we acknowledge the hand of our heavenly Father, the almighty Creator of heaven and earth, who continues to govern all things for our good. "For our good," because we are not our own, but belong to Jesus Christ, and are precious to Him. As Carman's chairman points out, to know that we are not our own is the "basis of why we do what we do and why we think what we think. These few words especially give much purpose and meaning to the reason we are passionate about serving our God, passionate about education, passionate about life, and passionate to protect our reformed values and beliefs. . . ." In the vein of passion about various careers, including teaching, Neerlandia's principal muses that "our society needs Christian doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, and so on to act as leaven in these areas as well as in construction, agriculture, mechanics and merchandising. We need young men and women in all walks of life, and sometimes we need to encourage people to step outside their comfort zone in service to our Father."

## Controversy

Some of our academia in post-secondary education have taken steps to help young people expand their comfort zone and more vigorously seek a career in the sciences. They observed a reluctance about entering fields in which confrontation with evolutionism is inevitable, thought long and hard about it, wrestled amongst each other with issues of tradition and hermeneutics, and invited interaction with their findings on [www.reformedacademics.blogspot.com](http://www.reformedacademics.blogspot.com) about a year ago. The venture affected Ontario schools at last fall's CRTA-East convention with a presentation (available on the blog) about the how and why of teaching evolution in our schools. It evoked a wave of controversy.

Peregrine surveys do not pretend or intend to present final answers to controversy, but rather seek to inform – and may offer some food for thought. In this case, an attempt is made to fairly highlight aspects of what was actually presented, and to identify a number of serious concerns. Among others, the presentation questioned claims for common ancestry (as based on DNA research presented elsewhere on the blog); it also pointed to the failure of the mechanism for evolution, the lack of evidence for evolutionary development prior to the "Cambrian explosion" of new species, and the provisional nature of scientific theories; and it maintained the need for teaching the straightforward biblical account of creation in Genesis 1. It cautioned against Young-Earth Creationism (YEC) (as opposed to Old Earth Creationism, OEC); it questioned whether Intelligent Design (ID) should be adopted as the Christian position in science; it warned against evolutionism as an overall anti-Christian worldview; and it called for courses in apologetics and philosophy in our secondary schools. However, it also noted strong evidence for evolution throughout creation and the explanatory and predictive power of evolution theory. It advocated teaching older university-bound high school students about this so they would be well-informed and

not have to depend on less-than-reliable YEC literature and their “simplistic” ways of reading Scripture. This would include reading Genesis 1 for its major message – which would not be that God created everything in six days.

The potential implications of a shift from YEC to OEC are significant. Consider the following items. Can we take Genesis 1 seriously, as a trustworthy and dependable account of how God created everything in merely six days? If we must read it differently, is it right to wait with introducing our students to it until they are in Grade 11 or 12, or in university? Would we not confuse them by telling them for fifteen years that Genesis 1 must be read as it presents itself, and then introduce different ways of reading it? If we accommodate OEC, and change our hermeneutic, are we not on a slippery down-slope towards a framework hypothesis, theistic evolution, or outright evolutionism, and are we not going to end up with a critical view of Scripture as a whole? I share those concerns: should we not consider that, despite its persuasive claims, the findings of science are always tentative, and accept in faith what Scripture tells us about origins—or risk losing everything else Scripture tells us about our salvation? The fact that several respected Reformed theologians made allowances for OEC, as pointed out more than once by the workshop presenter, does not make it any simpler.

Considering the implications, it is understandable that some responses to the presentation had an emotional element. The organizers received several letters questioning the wisdom and appropriateness of having a presentation such as this, some schools asked teachers not to teach OEC, and both *Clarion* and *Christian Renewal* devoted space to the issue. Perhaps some have not listened to each other with sufficient charity; perhaps some have not taken their opponents’ honesty seriously; perhaps some have not protected their neighbours’ reputation as they ought to; perhaps some have assumed implications that were never intended; perhaps the whole topic could have remained contained among academia; perhaps some just over-reacted. People on both sides of the controversy are prone to such things. Whatever the case may be, our communities and our teachers would be well-served by a continued focus on Scripture as the rule for life and faith, and a realization that we know God even better from his Word than from his Creation (BC, Article 2). Controversies have a knack for distracting us from gratitude to and dependence on the almighty Creator of heaven and earth.

Meanwhile, *Creation Ministries International* reports that, in the state of South Australia, The Non-Government Schools Registration Board adopted a policy “to effectively ban the teaching of creationism.” The policy stated that the Board required “teaching of science as an empirical discipline, focusing on inquiry, hypothesis, investigation, experimentation, observation and evidential analysis.” So far, so good. But it also said that it “does not accept as satisfactory a science curriculum in a non-government school which is based on, espouses or reflects the literal interpretation of a religious text in its treatment of either creationism or intelligent design.” If a Christian school has its registration withdrawn, it means that parents who continue to send their children to that school would be in breach of truancy laws. In effect, it would shut down the school.

Some other Australian states lean in the same direction, but it does not currently seem to affect our schools in Tasmania or Western Australia.

## Preparations

Preparations for next school year are a theme in the early months of every calendar year. Principals and boards consider school population projections, look at staff-intentions, and determine the need for advertising and interviewing. Big items, such as staffing (and recruitment) and available facilities (as well as required updates and land-acquisition) are addressed first, and when the school year winds down, the focus shifts to the need for such things as desks, textbooks, and notebooks. Several schools are making progress with funding and building expansions to accommodate increased numbers, or to improve facilities. For Cornerstone Christian School in Guelph, many of these processes are firsts. The community has been working hard to not only get their building well-prepared for an enrolment of about one hundred students, but also hired staff, found furniture, and selected curriculum and resources to set the school up for a good start in September. May the Lord continue to bless all these efforts!

Some schools, including Neerlandia and Smithers, have had to deal with the question when a class is too large for a single teacher. Is it when the class has thirty or more students? If it is a combined class, how much lower should that number be? How much room should each student have, how does reality compare to the recommended thirty-five to fifty-four square feet



of classroom space per student, and how is learning affected if that amount of space is just not there?

To have space is one thing; to have teachers remains another. In Ontario, it appears that the teacher shortage has generally been easing of late – but some schools across the country did have to wait longer for applicants than others. One principal even spoke of the competition being “fierce for the few individuals completing their education degree this year.” *Clarion* continued to run advertisements well into spring. Factors that affect teacher availability include the funding-related requirement for certified staff in some provinces, and perhaps the perceived lack of appeal of some localities. Between *Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College* and a variety of other teacher-preparation programmes, however, the need is actually reduced by many fresh recruits.

*In the end, the purpose is to improve student learning, but also to enhance the delivery of a distinctly Christian perspective to our schools’ entire operation*

In BC, our communities were forced to consider a new government initiative; the government is offering full-day Kindergarten as a new requirement for funding Kindergarten. Ontario has also introduced full-day Kindergarten in some public schools, but, unlike in BC, Christian schools are unfunded and hardly affected. While some countries have had full-day kindergarten for many years (I attended one about half a century ago), ARPA issued a newsletter raising several concerns. Among others, it questions the positive impact on later success in school, especially for boys, and it notes the significant decrease in child to adult ratio and how the plan jeopardizes existing daycare at the public expense. In both BC and Ontario, it is a program driven by a Liberal government. In any case, our BC schools are looking at ways to implement the new requirements without jeopardizing their unique character.

A unique aspect of preparation was mentioned in *The Eagle*, the monthly newsletter of John Calvin School in Yarrow, BC: The Ladies’ Aid purchased a container to store materials needed to handle the aftermath of an earthquake: bags of non-perishable snacks, water, toiletries, blankets, changes of clothing etc for each child. Should hurricane-prone, tornado-prone, flood-prone, blizzard-prone, and heat-prone schools consider taking similar preventive measures?

The League of Canadian Reformed School Societies (LCRSS) is happy with its newly prepared website ( [www.lcrss.net](http://www.lcrss.net) ), which features an effective content management system. The various committees of the LCRSS each manage their own portion on the site, and people can access the material that is intended for them – but not the pages that are meant for others. As the website is developed further, it should enhance communications between the LCRSS and its stakeholders.

## Professional development

At the time of writing, preparations also continue apace for ICRE-III, the Third International Conference for Reformed Education. As ICRE-I, this conference will take place in The Netherlands, with some fifteen to twenty Canadian educators attending. The focus of the conference is on Faith in Education, and how this affects professional learning of teachers both outside and inside the classroom. In the end, the purpose is to improve student learning, but also to enhance the delivery of a distinctly Christian perspective to our schools’ entire operation. *Education Matters* will report on the conference.

Further to professional development, Ontario’s Professional Development Committee has been drafting a new model for professional development. It links to the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies’ newly adopted vision for professional development, as expressed in its Personnel Manual. Guido de Brès Christian High School (Hamilton) has used its October R&D sessions (two hours each Wednesday from October to December, and from March to May) to balance theoretical and practical aspects of Reformed education. Focal areas included using and applying computer technology by students as well as teachers; effective instruction for changing needs and different learning styles, integration of faith and learning, literacy, and student evaluation. The R&D program makes a conscious link between professional learning and student learning, between the introduction of a topic and its pursuit, and between personal learning and collaboration.

Gratitude, controversy, preparation, and professional development are all part of our daily lives. This also rings true for our schools. Let us continue to support and uphold the schools, the teachers, the parents, and the students in our prayers, as the dedicated commitment of the covenant community helps us to carry on and to see the blessings the Lord gives us in one another.



# Further Discussion

## Testing?

Rev. Holtvlüwer again tried with many words to defend an illegitimate and indefensible practice of "testing" non-synodically approved rhymings during the worship services. From what I learned from the *Manitoba Church News* it was not so much testing as substituting non-synodically approved rhymings for the ones that have been adopted.

In Abbotsford we test. Before the services the stanzas are several times shown one by one on a screen and then we sing a few of them to get the "feel" of them.

Our patient editor requested me to make it short. Hence a few points.

- 1a) No Dutch Synod, including Middelburg, ever adopted the rhyming in use in 1933.
- 1b) Thus factually it is impossible to understand "as adopted by the Synod of Middelburg 1933" as referring to the rhyming of the Psalms.
- 1c) Middelburg 1933 did add to the Dutch hymn section. That's what the addition "as adopted. . . etc." refers to.
- 1d) It is immaterial whether any church in The Netherlands ever used a different rhyming.

Abstractly speaking they would have had the right to do so.

- 2) When we switched from Dutch to English in the worship services we also had to have songs rhymed in English. Or would anyone claim that we should have used "Middelburg" (which means: songs in Dutch) in worship services conducted in English? Or that we violated our promise in Art. 69 C.O.??
- 3) There was no provision in the Church Order that covered which songs in English rhymings should be used. Art. 69 C.O. could not apply to services conducted in English. We were in a transition period.
- 4) That Synod 1983 adopted the present version of Art.55 C.O. was also to prevent that rhymings from the Psalter Hymnal should be used, of which some were in favour.
- 5) A synod which would dare to suggest or even allow (brrrr!) the churches to deviate from what has been agreed upon in the Church Order renders *ipso facto* (by that very fact) such a decision illegal and thus nul and void.
- 6) The house of cards Rev. Holtvlüwer tried to build up again still lies flattened. C



## Letter to the Editor

In his article, "Women's Voting Rights?" (*Clarion* Volume 59, No. 9, April 23, 2010), Rev. Clarence Bouwman seems to extrapolate the biblical view of headship to include all social settings. "It is understood in our churches that the Lord would have the man to be the head of his wife and so of his family... It is also understood in our churches that the Lord has limited office holders in the church to the male portion of the human race. But here's the question: does the man's God-given headship pertain only to marriage and the church and not to society in general?" He then cites a few examples of whether it would follow biblical norms for women to become CEOs, principals, or presidents. He wonders whether it would have been pleasing to the Lord for one of Adam's granddaughters to become a Chief Executive Officer. Might she have been the "virtuous wife" of Proverbs 31?

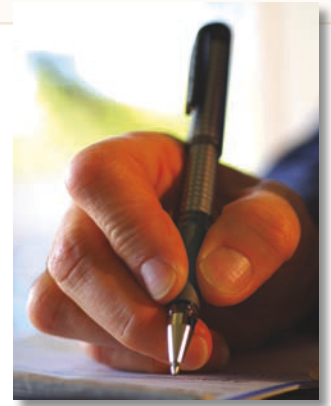
Isn't headship designed for certain relationships (Eph 5:22)? The wife is to be subject to "her own husband," not to all men in general. It seems to me that any teaching that men are automatically in authority over women (e.g., work-place) seems to exceed the biblical position. A brief sampling of the Bible's teaching about headship seems to consistently place it in the context of male leadership in the home.

- Titus 2:4-5 - Train the younger women... to be *subject to their husbands...*
- 1 Peter 3:1 - *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands...*
- 1 Peter 3:5-6a - For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were *submissive to their own husbands*, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master.
- Colossians 3:18 - *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*
- Ephesians 5:22-23 - *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church...*
- Ephesians 5:24 - Now as the church submits to Christ, so also *wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*
- Ephesians 5:33, - ...and the wife see that she *reverence her husband.*
- 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9 - Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.... For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but *woman for man.*

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 8, 9, I don't think that Paul is making a blanket statement that every man is the

head of every woman. The context from which he draws to substantiate verses 8-9 is the creation account and the establishment of marriage between the first husband (Adam) and his wife (Eve).

Respectfully,  
Ben Harsevoort  
Hamilton, ON



## Response

Thank you, Br. Harsevoort, for your response to my submission. I offer two points in reply.

1. You quote me as writing, "[CB] wonders whether it would have been pleasing to the Lord for one of Adam's granddaughters to become a Chief Executive Officer." Actually, I wrote, "Had the fall not happened and generations of children been born to Adam and Eve in Paradise, would it have been pleasing to the Lord for one of Adam's granddaughters one day to become Chief Executive Officer of Paradisial Mining Inc?" Note the references to *before* the fall into sin. I would welcome someone to demonstrate from God's revelation about male/female relations in Genesis 2 that the answer to the above question is Yes.
2. Br. Harsevoort writes that "a brief sampling of the Bible's teaching about headship seems to consistently place it in the context of male leadership in the home," and provides a row of texts to support his point. I find it striking that all his quotes come from the letters of Paul and Peter. But the New Testament epistles are built on earlier parts of God's revelation and so must be read in the light of what God has said before. How, then, do the passages Br. Harsevoort quotes arise out of Genesis 2 – not to mention Genesis 3, as well as the entire pattern of male/female relations as revealed in the Law of Moses, the Old Testament prophets and the example of Jesus Christ? In my submission I pleaded for more study on male/female roles, and it's precisely this line-through-Scripture that I would wish to see explored – in contrast to quoting Paul-by-himself (or Peter).

C. Bouwman

## Letter to the Editor

### Once More: Teaching Evolution

I am sorry to have to come back to what has become a divisive debate in *Clarion*. It is necessary, however, because of misquotes and misrepresentations by some of my critics which have caused much confusion and concern among



our readers. The most recent incident (as of the time of writing) is a letter by Dr. John Eikelboom in the issue of April 23, 2010. I will concentrate on the following statement, which I think is central to his letter: "Dr. Oosterhoff believes that we should teach the theory of evolution in our Christian schools and refrain from telling our children that it is unbiblical." The implication is that I am a dyed-in-the-wool, unrepentant evolutionist.

Now, I admit that I believe, and have more than once stated, that we should teach about evolution in our schools. But I don't think that I am stating anything outrageous here. In fact, evolution *is* being taught. As the impeccably young-earth-creationist magazine *Reformed Perspective* (April 2010) points out in an editorial by Dave Dykstra, a science teacher at Guido, it *has* to be taught. Not only, Dykstra says, because the government requires it, but also because it is important "to know your enemy, because knowledge can win war." Dykstra admits that evolution has been "tweaked by some of the most brilliant minds...and could easily overwhelm the curious and unwary with its logic." Later he adds that "much of the theory of evolution makes a lot of sense." Solid preparation is therefore definitely needed. At least in this case, ignorance is not bliss.

Those are exactly my arguments. True, Mr. Dykstra states right at the start that the theory is false, whereas I believe that that is too fast a way out. Some of the evidence, as he himself admits, is quite compelling. But he is absolutely right that we must prepare our students for the challenges they will have to confront later. We do that best by honestly outlining on the one hand the scientific evidence, and on the other the biblical and scientific factors that go against the theory. Throughout my career as a teacher and writer I have stressed the latter factors, and I still do that. In spite of concerted attempts by my critics to prove the contrary, I am not and never have been an evolutionist, nor have I ever promoted evolution or taught it, nor have I ever said that it was biblical. I always maintained that I myself cannot reconcile it with Genesis 1, although I know that some orthodox Christians can.

None of these orthodox Christians, incidentally, tries to reconcile his or her faith by rejecting scriptural truths concerning the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection and the Trinity – and I am disturbed by Dr. Eikelboom's statement that, if they did so, they "would be in keeping with Dr. Oosterhoff's proposal." The statement also ignores the fact that, as my critics ought to know, scientific findings have affected the interpretation of Scripture in the past, ever since the time of John Calvin,

without such a slippery-slope effect. The acceptance in Reformed churches of the theory of a moving earth, for example, in spite of the apparently contrary messages of Scripture, is a case in point. There are more.

But what about my advice "that we refrain from telling our children that [the theory of evolution] is unbiblical"? Although he footnotes most of his statements, Dr. Eikelboom does not tell his readers where he found these words. Neither did another critic, one of our Canadian Reformed ministers, who earlier quoted the same words in an issue of *Christian Renewal* (Feb. 24, 2010), also in order to prove my culpability. Subsequent critics, including Dr. Eikelboom, could have known that it was a misquote if they had read my response in *Christian Renewal* (March 24, 2010). Here is the source of the quotation: It is taken from an entry on the blog *Reformed Academic*, posted on November 2, 2009, at 9:20 a.m. I answer there a comment by Rev. George van Popta, who asked me if he should be telling his students that "the theory of evolution is unbiblical." I answered, "I don't think we should state that evolution is unbiblical, and certainly not in the elementary grades. If we do, we have to justify the statement, and that would imply the discussion of a lot of scientific information for which these students are not ready... There is too much to show and tell them in science and Bible classes about the greatness and majesty of God's creation to bother with issues Christians are still debating today, as they have done in the past."

In short, I did not say that evolution is biblical. What I did say was that evolution should not be addressed at the elementary level, that it should not even be mentioned at that level, and that therefore teachers should not state that it is unbiblical, since the mentioning of the term is to be avoided. I do believe, however, with Mr. Dave Dykstra, that we should teach about evolution at the secondary level, so that students are better prepared to deal with the relevant issues when they encounter them in a post-secondary setting. This is made clear in my answer to the Rev. van Popta. Both my critics, however, took an isolated phrase out of context, ignored the rest of the answer, and used the phrase as "proof" of my apostasy.

To summarize: I stated and continue to believe that evolution should not even be mentioned in the elementary grades; that it should be accurately *but also critically* addressed at the secondary level, and that it does not really imply "teaching evolution," but "teaching about evolution." All that is common sense and in accordance with the practice at most of our schools.

*Frederika Oosterhoff, Hamilton, ON.*

*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.*

reviewed by Gerhard H. Visscher

**Unpacking Forgiveness:  
biblical answers for complex questions and  
deep wounds, by Chris Brauns.  
Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2008**

**Additional Information: 235 pages, \$17.99 U.S.**

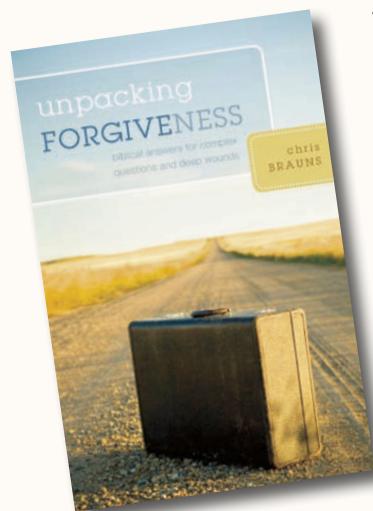
On numerous occasions and in various places during the past years, I have done a PowerPoint presentation on the subject of "forgiveness." Part of my motivation in doing so was a conviction that there is widespread confusion about this subject within Christian circles and that this confusion only multiplies the pain and the problems for which forgiveness and reconciliation is needed. Many times I have been requested to provide a copy of my talk, to which I have always had to respond that, because of its PowerPoint nature, there was no such copy.

However, just as I sat down to write out the text of what I said, this book came to my attention and it said pretty much everything that I said and did so in a more extensive and comprehensive way. One should not be entirely surprised, of course, as Chris Brauns has the same guide and goal as I have – enriching the people of God through faithfulness to the Word of God. This book is a true delight which can be a real blessing to those who read it carefully. In lieu of an article then, I pass on this review which urges you to get and read this book.

Essentially, Chris Brauns outlines the position of what is called "conditional forgiveness." Some of the principles which he defends and explains are as follows.

- *Christians are not called to forgive everyone at all times.* Our forgiveness of each other is modelled after God's forgiveness of us. Just as God only forgives the repentant, we should do likewise.
- *Christians must forgive those who are repentant and ask for such forgiveness.* To fail to do so, is contrary to Christ's command (Matt 6:14-15). "Saying, 'I cannot or will not forgive' is essentially another way of saying, 'I am thinking about going to hell'"(p.128).
- *Christians are called to be charitable and ready to forgive those who have offended them and are unrepentant.* Revenge is always forbidden and the command to love is always present.
- *Christians should learn how to "drop" insignificant disagreements.* Interestingly, he reckons disputes about the exact ways in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated as among those matters that are less significant (p.100).

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- *In a loving and humble manner, Christians should confront those who have sinned against them in any significant way.* The principles of Matthew 18 are worked out in a clear and helpful manner, outlining the various steps that ought to be followed. The necessity of church discipline is stressed.
- *There is never a time when one needs to "forgive God."* Such language, frequently used, presumes that God does wrong, and puts man in a position of judgement overagainst Him.
- *Language about "forgiving oneself" is also inappropriate.* Forgiveness is about a relationship with someone else. One does not forgive oneself anymore than one shakes hands with oneself.

As the subtitle indicates ("biblical answers for complex questions and deep wounds"), Brauns is also very understanding of those who have suffered abuse and are overcoming deep emotional and psychological pain. With many examples and much pastoral sensitivity, he addresses such subjects as conquering bitterness, dealing with those with whom one cannot agree, responding to the unrepentant, and the like.

This is a book with which I so wholeheartedly agree. In the midst of the confusion, Brauns is to be congratulated for letting the truth of God's Word speak and presenting it to us so clearly. Only at one significant moment did I find myself wishing that Brauns went further, and that was in connection with his discussion about revenge. When he writes about leaving vengeance to the wrath of God (Romans 12:19), I believe it would have been helpful to discuss also Romans 13:4 ("God's servant, an agent of wrath") where Paul makes it apparent that the civil authorities are one way in which God displays his wrath also in our age.

This is important with a view to a biblical approach to the authorities. The church is not to work at cross purposes with the state, but recognize her role in the administration of justice.

The book is full of examples which serve to drive home its message. Every chapter also ends with a number of helpful discussion questions, making it very suitable for Bible Study groups and societies.

Individuals and families that are struggling with broken interpersonal relationships will be placed on the path of healing and reconciliations as they read this book carefully and prayerfully. And when groups discuss this book, they will be of great assistance to those who need such healing. In fact, all will benefit since in this broken world, no one is left unaffected. Heartily recommended!



## Book Review

reviewed by Wes Bredenhof

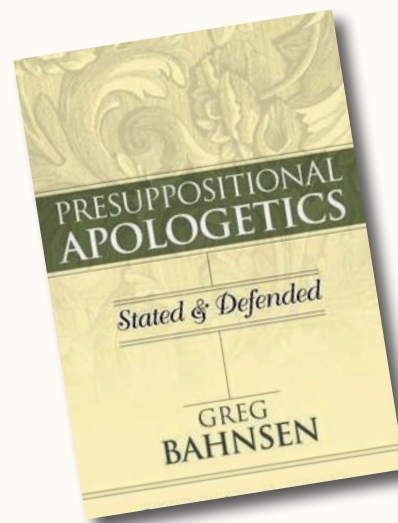
***Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, Greg L. Bahnsen (ed. Joel McDurmon), Powder Springs: American Vision Press, 2008**

**Additional Information: Hardcover, 296 pages, \$34.95 USD**

It was early December 1995, the early years of the Internet. Along with many others, I was prayerfully following the developments in a hospital in southern California. A well-known Orthodox Presbyterian pastor by the name of Dr. Greg Bahnsen had heart surgery on December 5. Soon afterwards life-threatening complications set in. Colleagues sent out regular e-mails informing everyone of what was happening. Then, on December 11, we received the news that Dr. Bahnsen had been promoted to glory. He was only forty-seven years old. In life, he had been a prodigious author of books and articles, scholarly and popular. However, it has only been since his death that we have seen the publication of his important works in the field of apologetics. The volume under review is described by the editor as being Bahnsen's magnum opus, his greatest work.

The book has a curious story behind it. It seems that Bahnsen wrote this volume back in the 1970s and it somehow ended up being lost. After his death, as his office was being cleaned out, an envelope was discovered behind one of his filing cabinets. In that envelope was the manuscript for this book. Thus it happens that we receive a brand "new" book from Bahnsen long after his departure.

*Presuppositional Apologetics* has two parts. In the first, Bahnsen makes the positive case for Reformed



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presuppositional apologetics. After an initial overview, he develops the contours first of all from Scripture. The third chapter is more philosophically oriented, though Bahnsen would say that the argumentative considerations here are "functionally equivalent to the viewpoint of God's Word or applications of its teachings that bear on knowledge, truth, etc." (36). In the second part, Bahnsen critiques the apologetics of three other figures who have sometimes been described as presuppositionalists: Gordon H. Clark, Edward J. Carnell, and Francis Schaeffer. While finding some elements of genuine commonality with Reformed presuppositionalism, Bahnsen argues that these men fail to consistently build their apologetics on the solid ground of God's Word. He summarizes his critique: "All three men fail to be presuppositional in their argumentative method, and the presuppositions they do utilize during the course of their defense are not biblical. . . . They have two final authorities: reason and the Bible; of the two, reason plays the paramount



role. . . . Where Scripture is introduced at the beginning of an argument it is presented merely as a hypothesis to be verified" (268).

In my view, the two major strengths of this work are its detailed presentation of the scriptural foundation for presuppositional apologetics and the extensive critique of Clark, Carnell, and Schaeffer. However, the book also has some weaknesses. There seems to be an inordinate amount of repetition. It could have been more tightly written and I suspect that the older and more mature Bahnsen would have written it and edited it differently. Also, there are a number of obvious typos remaining in the text and other editorial infelicities. There is also the fact that this volume was written in the 1970s and so Bahnsen is interacting with figures who dominated apologetics in a previous generation. At a certain point, Bahnsen brings in Antony Flew's refutation of Schaeffer (258-259). Of course, it would be unreasonable for us to expect Bahnsen to comment on this, but *the editor*

might have noted Flew's eventual abandonment of atheism and whether or not that changes the equation. Finally, some of the existing editorial notes are. . . well. . . odd. For instance, Bahnsen critiques Carnell for his "Christian hedonism," noting that this is a "sorry phrase" (229). However, in a footnote, the editor then extols Bahnsen for being "way ahead of his time," in coming up with this phrase before John Piper, although the editor admits that Piper was using it in a different sense (230).

*Presuppositional Apologetics* would be a good introduction to the subject for someone with some philosophical and theological training. It's an intermediate- to advanced-level book on the subject. It could be used for a seminary course or an advanced Bible college course. Is it Bahnsen's magnum opus? No, I'm not convinced that it is. I think that accolade still belongs to his monumental *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings & Analysis* (P&R, 1998). C



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## BIRTHDAYS

### 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday

1940 ~ July 9<sup>th</sup> ~ 2010

Rejoice in the LORD always. Again I will say, rejoice! *Philippians 4:4*

With thankfulness to our Father in heaven, we announce the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday of our wife, mother and grandmother

#### JOANNE BORK (nee Heyink)

- Watford, ON: John Bork  
                   Adrian and Michele Tamminga  
                   Denise, Alison and Chad
- Burlington, ON: Ian and Lori Hulzebosch  
                   Mackenzie, Madison and Megan
- Hamilton, ON: Mike and Janet Bork  
                   Kaley, Lucas and Cameron
- Watford, ON: Scott Bork
- Kerwood, ON: Mark and Tracy VanBerkel  
                   Ayva, Alex, Julia and Nadia

We pray the Lord will continue to bless her and make her a blessing to all who surround her.

John and Joanne Bork

7985 Confederation Lane, Watford, ON N0M 2S0

## WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES

1975 ~ June 7<sup>th</sup> ~ 2010

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:5, 6*

We joyfully announce the 35<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary of our parents and grandparents

#### JOHN and AUDREY TOET

As family we are thankful to our Heavenly Father for graciously guiding and keeping them in His loving care.

May the Lord continue to bless them richly with many more fruitful years and by His grace equip them to remain faithful in His service.

- Guelph, ON: Martin and Erica Toet  
                   Johnathan, Thomas, Sean and Davin
- Hamilton, ON: Amanda and Michael Nederveen  
                   Jayden
- Winnipeg, MB: Jolene Toet and Ivan Byl
- Langley, BC: Russell and Jocelyn Toet
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