

# Clarion

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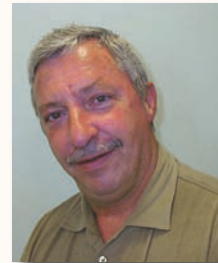


## *Thirty-Sixth Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary*



### **Inside this issue**

- Did the Sun Really Stand Still in the Valley of Aijalon?
- "Do This in Remembrance of Me"
- Their Name Liveth Forevermore



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# Did the Sun Really Stand Still in the Valley of Aijalon?

*If an important passage in Joshua 10 is not really true, what does this say about other parts of Scripture?*

Sometimes we are faced with the question whether the Bible is correct in stating that both the sun and moon stood still. How can this ever be true? We all know that the sun is constantly still as the centre of our universe.

From human viewpoint you might say (if you are bold) that the *earth* stopped rotating on its axis, but that would have led to a catastrophic collapse of our universe. It simply could not happen and therefore many conclude that it probably did not happen.

Let's look closer at the passage in Scripture where this is described, Joshua 10: 12-15.

On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel, "Oh sun stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the valley of Aijalon." So the sun stood still and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel! Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

## Fact or fiction?

Please note already now that the Bible presents this event as something that really happened. It is also clearly specified that such an event never happened before or after that day. According to the text, the event is real, and it is unique. Whatever else we might say

about this event, we must accept that the biblical account is true. *The text presents a fact.*

There is a special reason for me to touch on this text of Scripture. On March 18, 2010, Dr. Koert van Bekkum, co-editor of a Dutch Christian daily newspaper and member of our Dutch sister-churches, defended a dissertation on his understanding of Joshua 6:1-13:7. This dissertation was written in English and was published under the title *From Conquest to Co-existence*.

In this scholarly interpretation Dr. van Bekkum states that the miracle of the sun standing still did not really happen as described in the Bible. More items that are stated in the book of Joshua are simply impossible, but the one about the sun standing still is definitely out of the question.

If the event did not happen as it is described in Joshua 10, we must find another way to properly appreciate this text. Van Bekkum wants us to believe that the miracle did not really happen as described, but that the author uses a *literary device*, an emphatic way of bringing a message without necessarily giving a historical event. The message is clear, even though the sun never stood still. The point is simply *that* God gave to Israel a major victory. We should not argue about *how* God gave this victory. The fictionalized event still packs a powerful punch, according to Van Bekkum.

The battle between Israel and the Canaanites probably took a few days. I recall that even Nazi Germany needed *three* days to subdue The Netherlands! But not to worry, by pressing a longer event into one day, the importance of the victory is



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**In This Issue**

Editorial – Did the Sun Really Stand Still in the Valley of Aijalon?— K. Stam ..... 570

Treasures, New and Old – “Do This is Remembrance of Me”  
— D. Vandeburgt..... 573

Their Name Liveth Forevermore — R. Bredenhof..... 574

Report of the Forty-First Anniversary Meeting and the  
Thirty-Sixth Convocation of the Canadian Reformed  
Churches — R. Aasman..... 576

Principal’s Report 2010 — G.H. Visscher..... 578

Teaching Sound Doctrine as Redeemed Servants  
— J. Van Vliet..... 581

Presentation of the Women’s Savings Action  
— D. Gootjes, C. Nienhuis, J. Van Dam ..... 585

Letters to the Editor ..... 586

Book Review — reviewed by W. Bredenhof ..... 587

emphasized. The text does not give a factual or literal account but embellishes the story to make it sound impressive.

**The Bible speaks the truth**

Now I am sure that Van Bekkum wishes to uphold scriptural truth. But the result of this study is that things did not happen as the Bible says. We’ve read this kind of stuff before. But the bottom line is that the Bible does not really (in some instances, especially) tell the truth. *It does not say what it says.* Well, you know what Klaas thinks of that approach.

If an important passage in Joshua 10 is not really true, what does this say about other parts of Scripture? Was *Jonah* really swallowed up by a giant fish and later spit out alive on the beach? Must be another literary device. . . for it is rather incredible as described. Who can survive a three-day sojourn in the digestive tract of a monstrous fish?

*Why is it hard to accept the historical-literal interpretation?*

The distinction between the manner and the message is Scripture-critical in nature. Some German theologians used to speak about “form” and “geschichte.” Scholars had to separate the history from its form to find the real message. This, really, is nothing new. What is new is that this kind of approach is now accepted and defended at a Reformed Theological University of Kampen. This is a serious matter.

**Back to the text**

Klaas quickly scuttled back to the safety of the text. The text in Joshua 10 tells us that Joshua and Israel had to face a tremendous threat: the united kings of Canaan. This was the *key battle* of the campaign to conquer Canaan. The emphasis lies not on what Joshua and Israel can do, but on what *God did*. It is a miracle and it happened exactly as described. We are faced here with divinely-given revelation and not a humanly-crafted narrative.

The whole point of the text is that time *really* stopped. It is a miracle, indeed, that goes far beyond our understanding. But it happened just as it is written. It could happen only because God is the Creator and

King of all creation. He is able to do this mighty work for the sake of his promise to his people. Why is it hard to accept the historical-literal interpretation?

There are some other elements in this history that are worth noting. First, in verse 10 we read that the Lord threw the Canaanites into *confusion*. This coincided with the arrival of the Israelites on the battle scene. Before the first shot was fired, the Canaanites were already on the run. This is a miracle, too.

Second, in verse 11 we read that as the Canaanites were fleeing before Israel's fierce onslaught, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky. This is not your average-every-day event. It is another miracle on that day. The effect of the hailstone storm is that "more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites." Who would dare call this a literary device?

*The beautiful thing is that  
I do not have to explain miracles.  
I must simply believe them.*

Once you start down this path of form-and-fact, you are principally on a path that leads to Scripture criticism. I am sure that is not the intent, but that is how I read it. Our last Synod appointed a special committee to investigate the teachings of Dr. Harinck and Dr. Paas (See Press Release). Maybe they should add Dr. Van Bakkum to their list.

### Sun stand still over Gibeon

When we examine the heart of this text, the crux of the matter, it says that the sun and the moon stood still. What else can this mean than that *time was stopped*. The clock was stopped. It says in verse 13 that the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down *about a full day*. The Lord explains his own miracle: time stood still.

To accept the miracle, you must accept it *the way it is written*. Distinctions between fact and form do not help us. God tells it like it is. So that we may believe exactly what it says! This God is our God sovereign, almighty, and awesome.

The text further indicates that this earth-stopping event was *the answer to a prayer*. Don't overlook this. It was a unique event in this way that there never was a day like it before or after, *a day when the Lord listened to a man!* A public petition was heard in a very distinct

## Church News

Declined the call to the Smithville Canadian Reformed Church:

**Rev. J. Louwerse**

of Neerlandia, Alberta.

Declined the call to the American Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI:

**Candidate Ryan Kampen**

Accepted the call to the Emmanuel American Reformed Church, Denver, CO:

**Candidate Ryan Kampen**

and literal manner. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel! Never did this so clearly come into focus as on that day.

I cannot explain miracles. Many have tried to explain this, more or less, and we have not the space to consider all these explanations. The beautiful thing is that I do not have to explain miracles. I must simply believe them. I have experienced some miracles myself in my life. We may say it as we witnessed it: the sun that rises and sets, stood still for about one day. We don't have to go down to the minute or the second, it was *about* one day. God reveals his glory to the nations and his love for his people.

### The book of Jashar

It is important to note that the text also says, "It is written in the book of Jashar." This book is mentioned in 2 Samuel 1:17, David's lament over Saul and his son Jonathan. We do not have the book of Jashar. This does not take away the importance of this reference. It is mentioned here to underscore that there is *another written source* that attests to the same miraculous event. The book of Jashar probably contains a poetic compilation of Israel's battles and victories. The fact that we do not have the book of Jashar does not take away the truth that it *existed* and also contained an account of the miraculous victory at Gibeon. It fits in that book especially, because it is one of God's greatest battles and Israel's most memorable victories.

The same sovereign and almighty God caused darkness to fall over Egypt. Later still he causes darkness to fall at mid-day. The sun stopped shining. Darkness came over the entire land. When the light came back again, the great sacrifice had been given. God never has deserted his people in their great need. He certainly will not fail us now. Let us always call upon him in faith expecting the best.







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MATTHEW 13:52

# “Do This in Remembrance of Me”

*“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”*

1 Corinthians 11:24

As you read this meditation it is close to Remembrance Day. On this day our nation remembers the many who gave their lives in the two great wars of the last century. With the passing of the years, and with the passing away of veterans of those wars, the question is sometimes raised: Will our nation continue to remember? The encouragement from the veterans is “Lest We Forget.” But when the veterans are gone, will a nation forget?

Such a question brings us to a consideration of what it means to remember. What is remembering? Is it simply about personal memory? Or is there such a thing as a collective memory? Can a nation remember? Can later generations remember?

With such questions in mind we meditate for a few moments on the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:23-24, where he writes: “The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, ‘This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ These words were spoken at Jesus’ last Passover.

Concerning the Passover the LORD states in Exodus 12:14, “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD – a lasting ordinance.” The ESV translates the first part as, “This day shall be for you a memorial day. . . .” A memorial day is a day to remember.

Now for those who were part of the LORD’s exodus from Egypt, one can only imagine that such a moment was unforgettable. How could one forget that night in Egypt when the LORD spared the homes of the Israelites, while striking down the firstborn among the Egyptians? But what about those “generations to come” which the Lord speaks of? How can they remember something they were not a part of, something they did not witness? The Lord says that they can remember by participating in the Passover. They can remember through the rituals of the Passover sacrifice.

Fast forward many years to the Upper Room where Jesus institutes a new memorial day. The rituals of the Passover take on new meaning in him. The bread signifies his body given for his people. The wine signifies his blood given for his people. And he says to his disciples, “Do this in remembrance of me.” But he does not just speak those words to his disciples. He also speaks them to the generations to come, for this too is a lasting ordinance.

To participate in this ordinance is to remember that Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice. When we speak about “the ultimate sacrifice” around Remembrance Day, then we speak of those who gave their life to secure peace and freedom. But this peace and freedom are not forever. When we say Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice, we mean he gave his life

in securing for us life, peace, and freedom that are everlasting.

He gave his life not just for those disciples who were present when he spoke the words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” but he gave his life for all those in later generations who in faith would eat his body and drink his blood. We stand together as one people of God through the generations. As one people of God we have a collective memory of that mighty act of redemption which he accomplished in Jesus Christ.

It is striking how in later Israelite generations the people who were not part of the Exodus would say with the words of Deuteronomy 6:21, “We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.” Why? Because God’s people are one and together they share in his redeeming work. Likewise today when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we do so as that one holy catholic church which together participates in the Lord’s saving work. As one body we remember how we have been saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

With the passage of time it could well be that the sacrifices made in the great wars of the last century will pass from a nation’s collective memory, despite those words “Lest We Forget.” But as the people of God we shall never forget the death of Jesus Christ. Instead, we will continue to proclaim his death until he comes.





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# Their Name Liveth Forevermore

## Gathered at the cenotaph

In so many towns and cities across our country, cenotaphs have been set up. In parks, next to city halls, at major intersections, and elsewhere, you come across these large monuments of stone or bronze. And around them every Remembrance Day a crowd gathers: to sing, to pray, to listen to speeches, to lay down flowers and wreaths, and to be silent.

As is well-known, these monuments have been erected to preserve the memory of those men and women who fought and died in the various wars during Canada's history. More specifically, a cenotaph honours those whose remains are in another place, whether lost on some distant battlefield, or interred in a military cemetery or other graveyard. According to the Greek origins of the word, a "cenotaph" is literally "an empty tomb." There is no body here, but a memory.

## Reading the stones

Should you ever take the time to read the inscriptions on a cenotaph, you'd probably see a number of different features. There is typically a listing of the wars that Canada has been involved in, such as the Boer War, the Great War (or World War I), World War II, and the Korean War. There might also be a record of those soldiers, sailors, and airmen from the area who gave their lives in battle. And there is sometimes a short statement speaking of the importance of these sacrifices for the cause of freedom and peace.

Besides the other inscriptions, many cenotaphs feature a prominent phrase, one that can be taken in with a passing glance. It might be those well-known words, "Lest we Forget." Alternately you might find, "For God and Country." But on many other cenotaphs here in Canada, as well as in the United Kingdom and the Allied graveyards on continental Europe, you can read the striking words, "Their Name Liveth Forevermore."

## Kipling's contribution

There are a couple layers of history behind this phrase. The first concerns how it has come to be inscribed on so many cenotaphs. Over in England, there's an organization called the Commonwealth War

Graves Commission, which is given the task of setting up and tending to the various cemeteries for British soldiers around the world.

Shortly after the conclusion of World War I, the author and poet Rudyard Kipling joined the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Kipling, author of such works as *The Jungle Book* and known for his staunch support of British imperialism, happened to make quite a significant contribution to the work of the Commission. For it was his suggestion that the phrase "Their Name Liveth Forevermore" be inscribed on the stones of remembrance placed in large military cemeteries. So it was done, a practice that was continued to some extent on the cenotaphs in Canada as well.

## A text without a context. . .

A second layer of history behind the phrase relates to its original setting. Kipling's source for the quotation was the book of Ecclesiasticus, chapter 44:14. Not to be confused with the canonical book of Ecclesiastes, the book of Ecclesiasticus is numbered among the apocrypha – books that, while not belonging to the canon of Scripture, may be read by us and used for our instruction (see Belgic Confession, Article 6). It's also commonly referred to as the Wisdom of Ben Sira (or Sirach). As with the other apocryphal books, Ecclesiasticus is not found in the Hebrew Bible, and it's included only in some modern English translations such as the Jerusalem Bible, in use in the Roman Catholic Church.

The full quotation from the verse reads: "Their bodies are buried in peace, but their name liveth forevermore." Apparently, it was decided not to use the first part of the verse, as it was considered unsuitable for soldiers of every religious tradition. However, the second half was thought to contain a noble sentiment, that those who'd laid down their lives would not be forgotten because their names and reputations would "live on." In death, their enduring legacy was the blessings of freedom and peace that others would enjoy.

It could be wondered, of course, whether Kipling ignored the original context of the passage – he certainly wouldn't be the first to have done such a thing! The book of Ecclesiasticus is a compilation of ethical teachings, said to be from the hand of a certain

Ben Sira, from around the second century before Christ. The teachings address numerous aspects of daily life, and much like the biblical book of Proverbs, promote the fear of God as the source of all true wisdom.

## A hymn to the fathers

Beginning with chapter 44, and continuing into chapter 50, Ben Sira shares what is sometimes entitled "A Hymn to the Fathers." After the opening words, "Let us now praise famous men and our fathers by descent" (44:1), he goes on to speak at length about the great things that God accomplished for his people Israel through various figures in her history – something akin to what we find in Hebrews 11. These men ruled kingdoms, became powerful, gave wise counsel, spoke prophecies, composed music, set out verse, and more. Of these men, "some. . . left behind a name, so that their praises might be told in detail" (v. 8), and the author tells us whom he's thinking of in the rest of the chapter and into the next few: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, and so on.

We know a good many of these "heroes of the faith" by name. But the names of a myriad more were not recorded for posterity; the author laments, "Of others there is no memorial, and they perished as though they had not existed" (v. 9). Yet according to Ben Sira, this doesn't mean they should be forgotten, for these too were men of compassion and righteous deeds, and men who likewise had a lasting influence on their families and nation. So it is that the author concludes, "Forever will their seed remain, and their glory will not be blotted out" (v. 13).

Then comes the passage singled out by Kipling. In another translation: "Their bodies were laid to rest, but their reputations will live forever. Nations will tell about the wisdom of these men, and God's people will praise them" (vv. 14-15). Even if nothing is left of them, not even a name, their praiseworthy contributions will endure.

## Lest We Forget

It isn't hard to see why Kipling was drawn to this passage. For thinking of the task he was involved in – setting up cemeteries for the hundreds of thousands of British war dead – it would seem true that the names and accomplishments of so many soldiers were in real danger of being forgotten. People name streets and schools after the generals who drew up the winning strategies and they hail the heroes who performed incredible feats of daring on the battlefield. People don't always think of the ones who toiled in the trenches and who died in obscurity during some gas attack or artillery barrage.

And Kipling knew well about the horrors of World War I, how the bodies of countless men were never recovered from amidst the mud and carnage of the Western Front. But even these, who "perished as though they had not existed," made important contributions. Collectively, their accomplishments live on in the independence and prosperity that many enjoy today.

## Do their names really live forever?

But is it really true that their name will live forevermore? It's "only" an apocryphal text, but can Ecclesiasticus 44:14 be applied rightly to the men and women who've made the ultimate sacrifice for their country?

To be sure, their names and reputations live on for a time, in the memories of families and friends and fellow citizens. And as we said, their accomplishments endure in the form of that precious thing called liberty, a liberty preserved for our nation and restored for others. Indeed, it's fitting that today we remember the great sacrifices that have been made for us by previous generations and it's appropriate that we often give thanks to God for our country's peace.

Yet we realize that even the names inscribed in stone on cenotaphs and monuments will ultimately be forgotten – just as any human name and reputation and accomplishment will wither away with time. For decades will pass. More wars will be fought. Memories will fade. As Isaiah has told us, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field" (40:6). It's only those who have put their trust in the one true God who will live forever.

## Written in the book of life

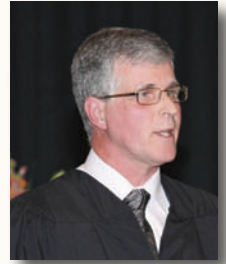
In this connection, Scripture says that the people of God will have their names inscribed in heaven. Like in Malachi 3, where the prophet speaks of how a "scroll of remembrance was written in God's presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name" (v. 16). Those with their names recorded on that scroll would be remembered and claimed by the LORD when the time came for judgment.

We find a similar image in Revelation, where those people whose names were "not found written in the book of life," were thrown into the lake of fire (20:15). But as for the person who by God's grace is faithful and who overcomes in this wicked age, Christ promises, "I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels" (Rev 3:5). Not blotted out, nor forgotten, but acknowledged!

Perhaps we as Christians and church seem pretty insignificant today. The godless appear to be very successful, the false religions seem to thrive, and among the greatest celebrities of the day are those who openly scorn God's law – all while Christians are increasingly pushed into a place of obscurity and insignificance. We need to push back, of course, and fight the good fight of faith. But far more important than being honoured and remembered by men is being honoured and remembered by God. That is God's promise, that he'll never forget those who are his own in Jesus Christ. Our names are written in heaven. And united by faith to Christ, our names will live forevermore!







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# Report of the Forty-First Anniversary Meeting and Thirty-Sixth Convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

It was a full house on September 10, 2010 when people assembled at Redeemer University College for the forty-first anniversary meeting and thirty-sixth convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario. Some people started arriving shortly after 7 pm and some would not leave until an hour and a half after the program was over. It was a long evening but the joy and excitement was palpable. Clearly there is a real love for the theological training at our seminary.

Dr. Peter Buist was the evening's organist. His style of playing contributed to the lively, joyful spirit that evening. After the processional and singing of Psalm 47:1, 2, and 3, the chairman of the Board, Rev. Richard Aasman opened with the reading of 2 Timothy 3:10-4:5 and prayer. The prayer also remembered the unique situations of the J. DeJong, J. Geertsema, and N. Gootjes families, along with sister K. Deddens in The Netherlands and sister W. Faber in Hamilton.

A special welcome was given to Dr. Albert Pietersma and his wife: Dr. Pietersma was Dr.

Smith's doctoral supervisor at the University of Toronto. Excerpts were read from letters of our churches in Australia and Canada. These letters reminded us of what a blessing our seminary has been for churches in North America and abroad, supplying churches with men trained for the ministry.

One highlight of the evening was the installation of Dr. Jason Philip Van Vliet as Professor of Dogmatics and Dr. Jannes Smith as Professor of Old Testament. The Form for the Installation

of Professors was read by the chairman and both newly appointed professors responded in the affirmative. It is such a blessing for our seminary and the churches to receive faithful men as professors. God is good to us and we wish to give him all praise and glory.

The principal of the seminary, Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher presented an interesting principal's report. You can read the entire report elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. Dr. Visscher mentioned one item



Dr. C. Van Dam presenting book to Dr. N. Gootjes, with Mrs. Gootjes looking on



that we thankfully take note of: "While six students have completed their work and are moving on, we are happy to report that we have six new students to take their place." Afterwards Dr. Jason Van Vliet presented the keynote speech for the evening, entitled, "Teaching Sound Doctrine as Redeemed Servants." You can also read this speech elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*. The audience appreciated the clear manner in which Dr. Van Vliet presented his topic. It is wonderful when our professors can speak about their field of expertise in a way that everyone can understand.

Ultimately what our seminary is about is preparing men to serve in the church-gathering work of Jesus Christ. It was, therefore, with great gratitude to God that we witnessed the conferring of the degree of Master of Divinity on Ryan Kampen, Anthony Roukema, Tim Sikkema, Jason Van de Burgt, Sean Wagenaar (in absentia), and Arend Witten. The assembly responded with a rousing singing of Psalm 134:1 and 3. A word of thanks was expressed by one of the graduating students, Tim Sikkema.

The Women's Savings Action, represented by Joanne Van Dam, Dinie Gootjes, and Chris Nienhuis, presented a pledge for \$35,000. This brought the total amount of support given over the last forty-one years to \$828,035. Some of that money was used for the construction of the library but most was used to buy books and periodicals. This work of the Women's Savings Action is



*Left to right: Mrs. HyungSoon Choi and Dr. Deung Young Choi, Mr. JungHo Kim and Dr. and Mrs. Gootjes, Grace Choi, and Mrs. HyeWon Kim*

a real blessing to the library of the seminary.

A collection was held for Information Technology. This was followed by a beautiful musical interlude by the Sursum Corda Choir. The choir sang "The Lord is My Shepherd" by Bruce Metcalfe, "Jehovah from his Throne on High" by Carl F. Mueller, and "O All ye Nations" by Heinrich Schutz.

After the singing of Hymn 6:1, Rev. J. Van Woudenberg led in closing prayer. In his prayer he made special mention of the graduates, giving thanks to God for his blessings. As is customary, the assembly concluded with the singing of "O Canada." The program was completed around 10 pm which gave the audience ample opportunity to congratulate the new professors and graduates afterwards. It was also a time of good fellowship, renewing friendships and acquaintances. You are welcome to view a video version of the College evening at [www.canadianreformedseminary.ca](http://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca).

We experienced a wonderful anniversary meeting and

convocation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. The next afternoon there was an open house at the Ancaster church building celebrating the teaching of Dr. N.H. Gootjes at our Theological Seminary. Dr. D.Y. Choi, on behalf of the Independent Reformed Churches in Korea, presented to Dr. Gootjes a new book, *Confessing Christ*, in which a number of Dr. Gootjes' articles have been translated into Korean. Also Dr. C. Van Dam presented *Teaching and Preaching the Word: Studies in Dogmatic and Homiletics*, a collection of Dr. Gootjes' writings. It was clear that Dr. Gootjes and his wife were deeply moved by these gifts. We are grateful for the faithful teaching of Dr. Gootjes and we wish him and his wife the blessings of the Lord.

It is our hope and prayer that the Lord will bless the professors, students, and supporting staff of the seminary with health and wisdom as they work together for the glory of God and his church during the 2010/2011 academic year.





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# Principal's Report 2010

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Board, brothers and sisters, as we have come tonight to the forty-first anniversary meeting, we are overjoyed with the fact that the Lord continues to provide for us. He is truly "the Father of the heavenly lights" from whom every good and perfect gift flows (James 1:17).

## Faculty

We thank him for leading the lives of both Dr. Jannes Smith and Dr. Jason Van Vliet in such a way that they have been found willing and able to take up the charge laid upon their shoulders. May the name of this gracious God be daily blessed because of their labours.

The entrance of some into the offices of the seminary means the exit of others. While Dr. Van Dam will still be teaching one course this fall, he will be mostly enjoying a well-deserved sabbatical from now until May. May 2011 will, D.V., also be marked by his thirtieth anniversary at the seminary – a tremendous milestone, under God's blessing. Tomorrow afternoon, we hope to commemorate also the nineteen years that Dr. Niek Gootjes taught at the seminary. We thank these brothers for their commitment to good scholarship, attention to detail, compassion for students, and collegiality with fellow faculty. Ultimate commendations of course come from the Head of the Church, but yet as fellow laborers we can express gratitude for work well done. May the Lord bless the DeJong, Geertsema, Gootjes, and Van Dam families at this stage in their sojourns.

We were also disappointed in the past year when Rev. J. DeGelder needed to resign his task as instructor in church polity because of his pastoral workload. Our students appreciated his work and we know that he enjoyed it as well. Also from this place we thank him for seven years of faithful service in this field. We are thankful that an able replacement, at least for this year, has been found in Dr. Nelson Kloosterman of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Dr. Kloosterman has taught church polity there for some time, has been a significant member of the Joint Church Order Committee; we are happy he is willing to come out this

winter for a number of weeks to give instruction in this subject.

When we think about faculty and the past year, we thank the Lord also for the work of Rev. Jason Van Vliet whose labor of many years was crowned last October with a doctorate through the Theologische Universiteit of Apeldoorn. His dissertation and subsequent publication is entitled *Children of God: The Imago Dei in John Calvin and his Context* (Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 2009). We congratulate our brother. We are proud to have a distinguished Calvin scholar on our faculty, just as we are proud to have a distinguished Septuagint scholar and linguist added to our faculty in the person of Dr. Smith.

There are also a couple of other noteworthy matters that could be mentioned this evening. This is by the way the first time that all our faculty members are in possession of doctorate degrees. And yet another, it is also the first time that a professor's wife is also a graduate of the seminary. A hearty welcome to Mrs. Darlene Smith, who is a graduate of the Diploma program, and to Mrs. Janet Van Vliet. May the Lord bless you and your families as you seek to assist your respective husbands. We admit that we do not adequately consider what effect it has on families when we snatch men from the other side of the country or the world to serve at the seminary. We are deeply grateful that you recognize the importance of the work sufficiently to make this possible. Similarly, we are very grateful to both the Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey, B.C. and the Free Reformed Church of Albany, Australia for being willing to part with their ministers for the larger cause of the training for the ministry.

## Students

At the previous convocation, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on three students. (Mr. Ken Bergsma has become a teacher at John Calvin School in Smithville, Mr. Ryan DeJonge is now a co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, B.C., and Mr. Rodney Vermeulen is the pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook, ON.)



Tonight we may present you with six more students for the Master of Divinity degree. Mr. Ryan Kampen, who is eligible for call and awaiting the same; Mr. Tony Roukema, who has accepted a call to the church at St. Albert; Mr. Tim Sikkema, who has accepted a call to serve as missionary in Lae, Papua New Guinea; Mr. Jason VandeBurgt, who is yet exploring other possible ways to serve in the Kingdom; Mr. Sean Wagenaar, who has returned to Australia, is also yet exploring options before him, and whose degree will be conferred in absentia this evening, and Mr. Arend Witten who has accepted a call to the church at Vernon, B.C.

While six students have completed their work and are moving on, we are happy to report that we have six new students to take their place. We welcome Rob Bonefaas from Hamilton, ON, Gerrit Brintjes from Denver, CO, Jeff Poort from Tintern, ON, Derek TenHaaf from Grand Rapids, MI, and Tyler Vandergaag from Aldergrove, BC. We also welcome Rob Van Middelkoop who returns to us after taking a year off after his first year.

Nam Tuck Chong, from Singapore, and Rev. Dongsup Song, from Korea, are returning for another semester of auditing. For a second year in a row, we have been disappointed with respect to admitting foreign students; this time our attempt to admit a brother from Nepal was denied by Canadian immigration authorities. One of the difficulties appears to be that such persons must adequately prove to the government that they will also return to their country of origin – something which we too desire of such students.

## Staff

During the past year we were again blessed with the services of our staff members, Ms. Catharine Mechelse and Ms. Margaret VanderVelde. We are happy that we could add to our numbers, Ms. Rose Vermeulen who originates in Australia and assists us with archiving and many other administrative tasks which professors are too often busy with. Welcome, Rose! We truly appreciate also the work of our volunteers, Mrs. Harmina Vanderbrugghen and Mrs. Dinie Gootjes, who help with the library, and Mrs. Bonita Van Popta, who has taken an interest in our interior decorating.

## Leading and being led

During the past year, members of the faculty travelled for the purpose of either giving leadership or having their own skills honed so that their leadership roles can continue. The following can be mentioned.



*Students, seated L to R:  
Anthony Roukema, Arend Witten, Jason VandeBurgt.  
Standing L to R: Ryan Kampen and Tim Sikkema*

- Dr. DeVisser attended a World Missions consultation of representatives of NAPARC churches, held in Philadelphia, September 15 – 16, 2009
- Dr. DeVisser spoke at the Mission Aid Conference in the Fraser Valley, B.C. in August 2010
- Drs. Van Dam and Visscher travelled to New Orleans, Louisiana to attend the 61st Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society
- Dr. Van Dam was interviewed by three American radio stations in connection with his new book, *The Elder*
- Dr. Van Dam spoke for law students at the 2010 Christian Legal Fellowship's National Law Student Conference in Ottawa
- Dr. Van Dam spoke at McMaster Divinity College on "My Vocational Story"
- Dr. Van Dam travelled to Singapore and Australia, lecturing and preaching in many places
- Dr. Visscher travelled throughout Alberta, visited the churches, and spoke on the topic "Forgiveness and Reconciliation"
- Dr. Visscher travelled to Montreal for the Biennial Meeting of the Association of Theological Schools, where we were welcome as Associate Members
- Dr. Visscher travelled to Wheaton, Illinois, for a conference analyzing the work of N. T. Wright
- Dr. Visscher spoke at the Synod of the United Reformed Churches
- Drs. Van Vliet and Visscher travelled to California to speak at the Classis Southwest of the URCNA and to London to speak at the Synod of the URCNA.



*Faculty, L to R:  
Dr. A.J. DeVisser, Dr. J. Van Vliet,  
Dr. G.H. Visscher, Dr. C. Van Dam,  
Dr. J. Smith*

### The next forty

At this our Forty-first Annual Meeting, there is most certainly a sense that some change is in the air. In a very short period of time fifty percent of the faculty is new. It is also noteworthy that over the last ten years and with the upcoming retirement of Dr. Van Dam, we have had a complete changeover in faculty. And yet, who would charge us with changing direction to any significant degree? This is precisely because we have been so blessed as to be able to replace faculty with our own graduates. It is a critical moment in the history of every seminary when new faculty is appointed. Will they stay the course? Will new men mean new directions? But in the first forty years the Lord has so blessed us with a high number of men who studied on as they served the churches so that some of them can again serve to pass on the tradition (2 Tim.2:2). May that too continue in the next forty.

But there are other changes in the works. While our legal name remains the same, our new operating name continues to display our involvement with the federation of Canadian Reformed churches while at the same time saying to other citizens of this country who we are – a Reformed seminary in Canada. While we certainly acknowledge our sister institution in Montreal, Farel Reformed Theological Seminary, we consider it pretty unique to be able to offer such to our nation.

Montreal was also the place last June where the seminary was granted Associate Membership status at the Biennial meeting of the Association of Theological Schools. This is a significant step towards an extensive self-study and review and eventual full accreditation. It is, in short, a step in the direction of becoming more professional about the manner in which we operate. Among other things, it means also a new context in which to discuss aspects of our theological

training; online education and degree standards, for example, are matters that can now be discussed in the larger context of other theological seminaries and their accrediting association. And with eventual full accreditation it will be even easier for our students to go on for doctoral studies.

2010 has been a year in which some significant events have happened. Whatever our assessment may be of two recent synods, both our general synod and the synod of the URCNA have made it quite clear that this federational seminary is here to stay. Ours is the challenge then to continue to make it apparent that a federational seminary is still the best way to train future pastors. We live on a continent where seminary education has been left to free enterprising boards that have no direct connection with the churches. It means, for instance, that very often the decisive votes are not given to the most respected office bearers of the church but rather to the wealthiest donors of the community. Does it not make obvious sense that the training of ministers is a task of the churches in common? John Calvin certainly thought so, as did the churches of the Secession.<sup>1</sup> Even when seminaries go astray, either because of faculty that will not be supervised or because of ecclesiastical assemblies that will not do their supervisory work according to the Word of God, the principle is clear. It is in the best interests of the churches to see to it that young men are well trained in the Scriptures and confessions and develop the necessary expertise, qualities, and gifts to proclaim God's good tidings to his people for his glory. May God continue to bless us as we again set ourselves to this task in the year of our Lord 2010 and 2011.

<sup>1</sup> See "Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches have their Own Seminary?" on [http://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/pdf/reasons\\_for\\_crc\\_seminary.pdf](http://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/pdf/reasons_for_crc_seminary.pdf).







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# Teaching Sound Doctrine as Redeemed Servants

*This is the abridged version of a speech that was given at the Convocation evening of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, September 10, 2010.*

The following is a true story. Back on December 29, 2008, our family moved into the Burlington-Waterdown manse for a few months because I had been asked to teach at our seminary. However, there was one problem. Library cards. For our children. Because they are avid readers.

So, off we went to the Brant Hills Public Library. We took along a letter, officially signed by Catharine, our administrative assistant. That letter stated that yes, indeed, I was employed by the seminary as a "Temporary Instructor in Dogmatics." You see, we needed proof of local employment in order to obtain some library cards. With her precise, professional eye, the librarian looked, first down at the letter and then up at me. "So, I see that you are an instructor in dogmatics?" she said. "Does that mean you teach students how to be narrow-minded?"

Somewhat shocked, I glanced back at the librarian. No, she was not joking; she was genuinely curious. To her mind, dogmatic people are the kind of folk who only see two colours: black and white. And if it isn't white, then it's most certainly black! Well, to cut the story short, I gave the librarian a quick description of what I really did as an instructor in dogmatics. And our family returned to the Burlington manse with shiny, new library cards and a few bags of good books.

*Dogmatics.* For the librarian at Brant Hills, that word had a decidedly negative ring to it. But what about us? Words like "dogmatics" or "theology" or even "creeds": do those words have a positive. . . or negative ring in your ears? Once there was a Scottish professor who quipped, "Let prideful priests do battle about creeds / The church is mine that does most Christ-like deeds."<sup>1</sup> Do you agree with him? Only substituting in "pastors" for "priests"? Or what about a leading

Christian philosopher who wrote, "Theology, once acclaimed 'the Queen of the Sciences,' today hardly rises to the rank of a scullery maid; it is often held in contempt, regarded with suspicion, or. . . just ignored."<sup>2</sup> Doesn't sound very promising, does it?

Well, if those who teach theology are nothing more than kitchen servants, they can at least console themselves with the following facts found in Scripture. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are called *servants* of God (Deut 9:27). So were Moses (Num 12:7), Joshua (Judges 2:8), Samuel (1 Sam 3:10), and David (2 Sam 7:25). This pattern continues in the New Testament. Paul and Timothy, as well as James and Peter, all called themselves servants, literally slaves, of the Lord (Phil 1:1, Jam 1:1, 2 Pet 1:1). And last, but definitely not least, God's only-begotten Son, "Made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil 2:6-7). Considering that long list of names, maybe being a servant is more honourable than it seems at first glance.

## The definition

But before we go any further, we should define what dogmatics is. Dogmatics comes from a Greek word, *δογμα*, which can refer to an official, public decision or decree. For example, shortly after our Lord ascended into heaven, the church really wrestled with questions such as, "Do new converts have to be circumcised? Do they have to follow all the clean and unclean food laws?" Eventually, the apostles and the elders gathered in Jerusalem. Guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28), they weighed these matters carefully and they made some official decisions, or dogmas. Then, men like Paul and Timothy went travelling around from town to town, teaching new converts about these dogmas which had been agreed upon in Jerusalem (Acts 16:4). And please note: in Acts 16:5 this same Holy Spirit informs us that teaching these dogmas certainly did not narrow the minds of the recent converts; on the contrary, it strengthened them in their faith.

Now, to be sure, that special, apostolic era is over. Still, when clarity is required on a certain question, the bride of Christ actively searches the Scriptures and, if needed, the church officially summarizes her findings in writing, so that it can be used for teaching.

*Teaching.* That's another important word. Our Saviour walked throughout Galilee and Judea teaching in the synagogues and temple courts (Matt 4:23, 26:55). Actually, and originally, that is what the word *doctrine* means. It simply means *teaching* or *instruction*. Therefore, just before he returned to his Father in heaven, our Lord charged his disciples to concentrate on doctrine when he said, "Therefore go and make *disciples* [that is, students] of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching* them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). This great commission from Christ has nothing to do with making people narrow-minded. Rather, it has a manifestly broad, yes even global, perspective in view.

So, in short, what is dogmatics? It is *the study of the doctrines of the holy gospel, as summarized by the Bride of Christ, which need to be taught to all nations and all generations.*

## The source

This leads us to our next question: where do we go to find our teaching material? Well, instinctively we answer: go to the Word of God! Yes! But will Scripture be the only, the sole source of our doctrine, or will there be other sources *in addition to Scripture*? You see, there's the rub.

The Roman Catholic Church promotes two sources: written Scripture *plus* oral tradition. Back in 1546 the Council of Trent even made an official declaration, a dogma, that Rome accepts both Scripture and oral tradition with "equal affection of piety and reverence."<sup>3</sup> In 1965 Vatican II reaffirmed that dogma.

Then, there are also those who build their theology on the twin pillars of Scripture *plus* philosophy. Thomas Aquinas tried this in the thirteenth century and others are still trying it in the twenty-first century.

However, there are many more who, perhaps unwittingly, adopt a two-source approach which could be called: Scripture *plus* itchosophy. You will not find that word, *itchosophy*, in the dictionary. But it captures what the Apostle Paul is warning against in 2 Tim 4:3, namely, itchy ears. Some of us have emotional itches, others have intellectual itches. Some have conservative itches, others have progressive itches. And still others have hey-that's-cool itches.

Every abiding itch craves an alleviating scratch. And, without a doubt, there are a "great number of

teachers" (2 Tim 4:3) out there who are sufficiently skilled at wooing the masses and scratching the itches. And when an ear is all  $\alpha$ -tingling, a soothing scratch from one of those teachers, well, it's like the balm of Gilead on an irritated earlobe.

But the Apostle Paul warns, "Watch out!" Why are people flocking to these teachers? Is it merely because their dialogue is a cozy match for our desires? Or is it because these teachers are carefully dispensing the sound doctrine which comes purely from the God-breathed Scriptures which are useful, in the first place, for teaching (2 Tim 3:16)? That is the critical question! If we start embracing certain teachings simply because they do such a marvellous job of alleviating our itches, then we are well on our way to adopting a two-source theology. Then, it will be what God reveals *plus* what we desire. Or, in other words, Scripture *plus* itchosophy.

However, it cannot be, and it must not be, Scripture *plus* anything else. Why? Simply put, because neither oral tradition, nor philosophy, nor itchosophy ever redeemed anyone from slavery to sin. The LORD, and the LORD *alone*, is our Redeemer (Isa 44:6). Therefore, he, and he *alone*, is the one who reveals the way of salvation. And Scripture, and Scripture *alone*, is his inspired Word (2 Tim 3:16). And therefore, it is *the* source for our doctrinal teaching.

Yet, you may ask, "Why, then, do the confessions play such an important role in our teaching, also at the seminary?" Good question. And the answer is this: the confessions do not add anything new or extra to Scripture. They only summarize what our Redeemer has already revealed. And whenever you are busy teaching, a summary is a most helpful pedagogical tool. That is why we make ample use of the confessions.





## The motivation

Still, even if we go to the correct source for sound doctrine, there is still the matter of motivation. Is sound doctrine something that stirs up our passion? Today, when people hear the phrase “sound doctrine,” more often than not it generates a glaze on their eyes rather than fire in their bones (Jer 20:9).

However, one servant of our Lord, the Apostle Paul, saw it differently. When the church at Galatia was beginning to embrace unsound doctrine, he quickly became all fired up. Full of vigour, he exclaimed, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all” (Gal 1:6-7). To which he later added, “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (3:1). That is hardly a dispassionate discourse!

Why is the Apostle Paul so passionate about doctrine? In the first place, as he writes in 1 Tim 6:3, sound doctrine is “the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, sound doctrine belongs to, and it focuses upon, Christ. And if we, the servants, are not passionate about protecting and proclaiming the pure teachings of our beloved Master Jesus Christ, well, then we are nothing more than wicked and lazy servants (Matt 25:26).

Still, there is another aspect of sound doctrine which should prevent us from ever becoming blasé about it. In his first letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul reminds him that “sound doctrine” is something that “conforms to the glorious gospel” (1 Tim 1:10-11). This glorious gospel is the “power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). This glorious gospel announces, “In Christ you are freed! Freed from slavery to sin! Freed from slavery to Satan!” And therefore, “do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).

Redeemed servants of our Deliverer. Or re-shackled slaves of our depravity (2 Pet 2:19). Those are the two options. And those are the only two options. So we still appreciate the liberating redemption we have received in Christ? If so, then we had better be passionate about sound doctrine. Because without sound doctrine we will become re-enslaved to sin and to Satan!

## The manner and method

So, practically speaking, how do we do maintain sound doctrine? To begin with, all teachers of doctrine should strive to be filled with humility. It is striking how often the Holy Spirit associates false teachers

with conceit, pride, and boastful words (Gal 6:13, 1 Tim 6:3-4, 2 Pet 2:18, Jude 16, Rev 13:5). A servant who knows himself to be precisely that – a servant – has no basis for boasting in himself.

Second, earlier we heard the suggestion that theology is no more than a scullery maid, a kitchen servant. That description may be more accurate than its author realized. In his letters, the Apostle Paul speaks about “sound doctrine” no less than eight times.<sup>4</sup> And each time he uses a word which has to do with being healthy. Sound doctrine is healthy doctrine. That is to say, it does not contain the virus of works-righteousness or the cancer of antinomianism, or any other kind of doctrinal disease. Rather, as we digest healthy dogma, we ourselves will become spiritually healthy.

## *Teaching sound doctrine is all about preparing this bride for her wedding day*

Healthy food must also be properly prepared. And here is where those kitchen servants – both preachers and professors – have a duty to fulfill. First, the doctrinal meals must be *balanced*. You cannot always eat bread and never eat vegetables. Likewise, if there is too much emphasis on God the Spirit at the expense of speaking about God the Son, or vice-versa, then the household will be malnourished. If there is too much emphasis on covenant promises and not enough on covenant obligations, or vice-versa, the family of God will not receive the nutrients it needs.

Second, doctrinal meals must also be *well-organized*. Just as surely as strawberry ice cream does not belong on top of mashed potatoes, so certainly sanctification should not be blanderized into justification. As the Apostle Paul urges his “dear son,” Timothy, “Keep the pattern of sound teaching” (2 Tim 1:13). A pattern has a clear and obvious arrangement to it. Thus, sound teaching is organized teaching.

Finally, sound doctrine is never detached from daily living. After all, why do we eat? Is it not so that we have energy to live and work? Likewise, we ingest healthy doctrine so that we can live holy lives. Of the eight times that the Apostle Paul speaks about sound doctrine, five of the eight speak about godly lifestyles in the immediate context. That fact alone should convince us that healthy doctrine is not merely a cerebral exercise, but it is an impetus to walk a sanctified life.

## The goal

Finally, in any given task, it helps to keep one eye firmly focused on the end goal. Those who do not know where they are going tend to get lost somewhere along the way.

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*Dogmatics is the study of the doctrines of the holy gospel, as summarized by the Bride of Christ, which need to be taught to all nations and all generations*

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So it is also with dogmatics. The goal of dogmatics is not to build an impressive, imposing, intellectual edifice before which the masses will assemble to admire. No, in the end, it's not about a building; it's about a Bride. Undoubtedly, the debate will continue as to whether theology is the Queen of the Sciences or the maid of the scullery. But one thing is certain: since Christ is King over all creation (Rev 1:5), his Bride, the church, is Queen over all creation (2 Tim 2:12). True, her regal majesty is not so evident right now. She is still more "sore oppressed" than she is "with glory crowned" (Hymn 40). But we are speaking here of the goal, the

destination. And one day the church will appear, as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Teaching sound doctrine is all about preparing this bride for her wedding day. Pastors and professors, ministers and missionaries, indeed all of us, need to keep that in mind and in heart.

Moreover, preparing the Bride for her wedding day is part and parcel of an even grander objective. Since Christ "has ransomed us, body and soul, from all our sins, not with silver or gold but with his precious blood" (LD 13), we call him our Lord, our Majestic and Merciful Master. And therefore, we, as his redeemed servants, strive to remain loyal to him in all that we teach. For in this way, the Son who redeemed us, the Spirit who sanctifies us, and the Father who created us, the one true and Triune God receives all the honour and glory. And ultimately, that is what teaching sound doctrine is all about.

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<sup>1</sup> John Stuart Blackie as quoted in Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Right of Systematic Theology* (1987), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon H. Clark as quoted in Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (1998), xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, translated by H. J. Schroeder (1978), 17.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Tim 1:10, 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13, 4:3, Titus 1:9, 1:13, 2:1, 2:8.



*Sursum Corda choir from  
Hamilton/Ancaster Canadian  
Reformed Churches*

# Presentation of the Women's Savings Action at the College Evening, September 10, 2010

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduates, Brothers and Sisters, tonight we would like to begin by asking you a question. Only one question. But an interesting question: how much money do you think the Women's Savings Action has contributed to the library of the Seminary over the years? How much money has the Women's Savings Action given to the library from the time that it was established up to and including this evening?

Of course, no one can be expected to know something like that without a little help. So, we will give you some pointers. After that, it will be a cinch.

Hint # 1: If the Women's Savings Action had kept all that money, we would be able to roll out a carpet every time the Seminary receives a guest. A pinkish purple carpet made up of \$1,000 bills. A carpet one meter wide and nine meters long. And we would still have \$2,035 left in change. That beats a red carpet any day. Of course this information narrows down the field considerably. To make it even clearer, we will go to:

Hint # 2: If we had all that money in \$20 bills, and we stacked those really tightly on top of each other, the stack would be as high as the three of us standing on top of each other. It is almost too easy now, but still, we will go to:

Hint # 3: If the Women's Saving Action had kept the whole amount in loonies, we would be able to pave sixty-three meters of the street in front of the College with those dollars. Now to make it possible for everybody to double check what you already know by now, of course, we go to our last hint:

Hint # 4: If the Women's Savings Action had kept all that money in pennies, we would have a stack almost two hundred seventeen times the height of the CN



Tower. Two hundred seventeen CN Towers in pennies! Just add them all up. . . .

Now make up your minds. If you are very sure, you can tell your neighbour how much you think the amount is. We will now pause for a moment, to give everyone the opportunity to do just that. Then, after we tell you the total amount of money collected over all those forty-one years, you can brag about your insight. Or hide under the chairs, of course.

The total amount (and we should add that this amount does not include inflation) is: \$828,035. Of course, it was good fun to count up all that money, and it would be easy to brag, or even to wonder whether all that money was necessary. Part of it was used in the construction of the library and some other special donations, but most was used to buy the books and periodicals the seminary needs as tools for students, professors, and ministers.





All this money has been collected over forty-one years by many Women's Savings Action representatives and their helpers. Many of them do that work for a few years, others for a few decades, and a very few have been with the Women's Savings Action from the very beginning until now. Each representative has

freedom in her way of contacting people and her way of organizing the counting. But each in her own way has contributed to the grand total.

And behind all the representatives are the donors, the people who freely give the money, every year again. We want to thank both the representatives and the givers. It has been great.

And then we come to the Lord, the great giver of all. And we most of all thank him for making this possible. Not because that is a formula with which it is customary to end a Christian presentation, but because we know that truly without the Lord this work would not have been possible.

We can tell you with thankfulness that this year an amount of \$34,021.28 was collected. Mr. Principal, it gives us great pleasure to present you with a pledge for \$35,000 for this coming year.



## Letter to the Editor

### Letter to the Editor

I would like to draw everyone's attention to the great work of Rev. Mark Still. In the *Clarion* of September 10, 2010, Dr. J. Visscher published an article regarding Technology and Ministry. I have found a very efficient and useful site to use technology in witnessing or evangelizing to people near and far, [www.carm.org](http://www.carm.org). This site has been pioneered by Rev. Mark Still, a Presbyterian minister in the USA.

He has plenty of icons to choose from to enlighten us about all aspects of religion. One can follow one of the three theological courses. The icons give you a chance to look at the three forms of unity under the Confessions. For instance, if one was to click on Confessions, the Early Christian creeds come up, such as the Credo. One can choose to look at the H.C., B.C., or C. of D. All the questions and answers and articles are there to read and study.

Next is the attention paid in each answer to scriptural references as proof texts. Click on a text in blue, and voila, that particular text appears on the screen. Click again on the text and that part of Scripture shows up with references to others Scripture passages. In short, it is a phenomenal tool to use. One can copy whatever you want to discuss with someone else and send it by email or Skype. To give an example, I am in contact with a Muslim person in Ghana via Skype. I can copy for instance L.D. 1 and paste it in the text section. Then I turn around and via the same Skype connection discuss with this person the text that just arrived at that computer screen. It is an absolutely marvelous way to discuss the passage that has just arrived. It is like teacher and pupil sitting in the same room.



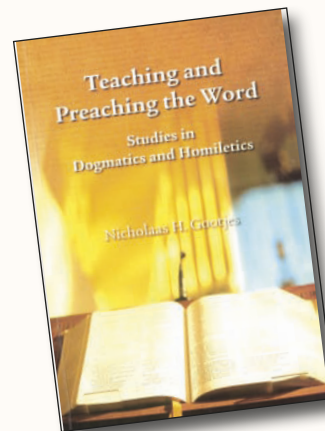
Cor Hoff

*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.*

Wes Bredenhof



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***Teaching and Preaching the Word: Studies in Dogmatics and Homiletics, Nicolaas H. Gootjes, Winnipeg: Premier, 2010***

**Additional Information: Soft cover, 420 pages, \$17.00**

For over twenty years, Dr. Nicolaas (Niek) Gootjes served the Canadian Reformed Churches as a professor of dogmatics at our seminary. In that time he trained over forty percent of currently serving Canadian Reformed ministers. This compilation of writings was assembled under the leadership of Dr. C. Van Dam as a token of gratitude for his faithful years of service. It was presented to Dr. Gootjes at a recent reception held to commemorate his retirement.

*Teaching and Preaching the Word* consists of a mixture of previously published articles in English and Dutch. Some of the articles are written a popular level, others on a more scholarly plane. Many have never appeared before in English. All of them together represent everything that was good, true, and beautiful about my seminary dogmatics training.

On a formal level, the book is generally well-written and well-edited. The editor has nicely collated the chapters under various headings: Revelation, The Birth and Work of Christ, The Holy Spirit, The Sacraments, Other Dogmatic Studies, Reformed Confessions and Preaching. Unfortunately, in the process of scanning some of the articles, some typographical errors did creep in, but most readers will likely not catch them. What I appreciated most about *Teaching and Preaching the Word* was the fact that so many of the items included address contemporary problems. The editor made excellent choices.

Let me briefly mention some of the highlights. Controversies continue in the Canadian Reformed Churches about the relationship between science and Scripture. It's timely then that almost all of Dr. Gootjes' writings on that subject are republished in this volume. For instance, in chapters 1 and 2, he discusses the proper understanding of "general revelation" in Article 2 of the Belgic Confession. Later, in chapter 11, he takes on voices in the Christian Reformed Church which equated creation and providence in the interests of making room for evolutionary theories about origins.

Another contemporary debate concerns the imputation of the active obedience of Christ. This is the teaching that all of Christ's law-keeping is imputed to us as a part of our justification. Some figures associated with the Federal Vision movement have

denied this doctrine or minimized its importance. In chapter 4, Gootjes firmly outlines the development of this doctrine, its presence in the Belgic Confession, its biblical basis, and its importance for preaching and teaching.

Among Federal Vision proponents and sympathizers we also sometimes find the error that says that *all* baptized children receive not only the promises of God in baptism, but also the very things that are promised. Gootjes deals with the promises of baptism in chapter 9 and examines the promises of the Triune God that are outlined in the first part of our Form for Infant Baptism. He especially focuses on the promise that the Spirit will dwell in us. He asks, "Can these words be applied to all children that are baptized? Does the Spirit dwell in all of them?" (184). Carefully he works through the historical, confessional, and biblical data, coming to the conclusion that the Form does not assert an existing situation, but summarizes what is promised to the covenant people of God.

Other highlights include Gootjes' lengthy defence of catechism preaching (made at the ICRC in 1993) and his excellent chapter tracing the historical development of the concept of "stewardship" in the Reformed worldview. We also find some of his studies in the Belgic Confession, studies which laid the groundwork for his highly acclaimed book on that confession. Finally, there is a recent surge of interest in Herman Bavinck. PCA pastor Ron Gleason has a much anticipated biography coming out later this year – the first one in English. Moreover, a number of Bavinck's books have recently been translated including his landmark four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*. Appearing for the first time in English, Gootjes has a fascinating chapter on the structure and methodology of Bavinck's *Dogmatics*. It concludes with a précis of his own vision for theological method – something that will bring an "Ah-ha!" moment to all of his former students.

There are many more wonderful things that I could say about this book, but let me conclude by drawing attention to the care and precision of its author. As

a professor, Dr. Gootjes had a reputation for being meticulous. He was and is a much-beloved model of erudition, profundity, and piety. With him, everything has ultimately to be evaluated in the light of God's authoritative Word. God richly blessed us with Dr. Gootjes and we give thanks to him from whom all blessings flow. Sure, there are places where I've put question marks in this book. For instance, I'm not

convinced that Calvin was wrong about the sense of divinity (12). But there is no doubt that this book makes helpful contributions to the study of Reformed theology. It deserves a wide readership, not only in Canadian Reformed circles, but far beyond.

*Teaching and Preaching the Word* is available directly from Premier Publishing. E-mail them at [books@premierpublishing.ca](mailto:books@premierpublishing.ca).




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*Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His.*

*Jeremiah 1:5*

With joy and thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, we announce the birth of our daughter

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