

Clarion



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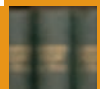


First Annual Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary Lecture Series



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- Submitting to God





Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is professor of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
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Was Adam the First Human?

Evangelical organizations are getting into the act of convincing their fellow believers to accept evolution

Under the pressure of scientism – the exaltation of scientific theory to scientific fact, in particular the theory of evolution – Christian scholars and churches are more and more caving in to the pressure to accept evolution (as used by God) to bring about the present creation. During the past year, well-known evangelical Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke resigned from the conservative seminary at which he had been teaching because of his acceptance of evolution.

One of the current consequences of accepting evolution to explain the origins of creation is to assume that Adam had ancestors with probable animal ancestry. In other words, he was not the first human after all.

Biblical support?

Scholars believing in theistic evolution see proof for the existence of pre-Adamite primates in the Bible. Typical are two arguments from Genesis 4 (as given, for example, by Peter Enns at the BioLogos website). The first goes something like this. After hearing God's judgment on his murder of his brother Abel, Cain was afraid that "whoever finds me will kill me" (Gen 4:14). This suggests other people on earth. Could these be pre-Adamite primates? The second argument asks: where did Cain get his wife from (Gen 4:17)? It must have been someone unrelated to Adam and Eve. So, there were obviously others on earth of whom

Scripture does not explicitly speak. Again, could they have been pre-Adamite primates?

It should be noted that Scripture gives a selective history. God's revelation is concerned with the main line of promise and the challenges that line faced from the evil one. Much history is therefore left unrecorded and our human curiosity must recognize the limitations of the account that Scripture gives. However, the Bible tells us enough to be sure of the following.

First, God did not create pre-Adamite primates who were human or who developed into human beings. God stresses in his Word the vast difference between humans and animals. Adam and Eve were the crown of creation, created after God's image and in his likeness (Gen 1:26-27). When God brought all the animals to Adam so he could name them, Adam found no suitable partner among them (Gen 2:19-20).

Second, all humans are descended from Adam and Eve. "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). In his speech before pagan philosophers on the Areopagus, the Apostle Paul said: "From one man God made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26). Clearly all humans trace their ancestry back to Adam and Eve. Paleoanthropological evidence needs to be interpreted in the light of this biblical truth.

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Third, Adam and Eve had other children besides the ones specifically mentioned in Scripture. "After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters" (Gen 5:4). Although not all details are clear, it is obvious that there must have been quite a few people on earth directly descended from Adam and Eve. After all, they had been told to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). With Adam and Eve's long lifespan a considerable number of offspring could be expected and each subsequent generation would in turn have more children.

Answering the objections

Scripture does not explicitly state when Cain killed Abel. However, there are some indications that this was not right at the beginning of their lives on earth. Some time had passed. It was "in the course of time" that the events took place (Gen 4:3). Seth replaced Abel as the line of promise

What's Inside

This issue's editorial is from the hand of Dr. Cornelis Van Dam. He writes about the growing trend among Christian scholars and churches to accept evolution to explain the origins of creation. Dr. Van Dam is also mentioned elsewhere in the issue, as the Seminary Corner column reports on the recent conference held last month to honour his work at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary before Dr. Van Dam's upcoming retirement.

Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer concludes his series of articles on stewardship of the body, now focusing on exercise. What prevents us from keeping active and thus healthy? In connection with this article, we also include a book review by his wife, Erica Holtvliuwer.

Issue 5 includes regular columns: Treasures New and Old, Education Matters, and Ray of Sunshine. We also have a letter regarding election of office bearers and a response from our editor.

Laura Veenendaal

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(Gen 4:25). This replacement happened when Adam was 130 years old (Gen 5:3). This suggests a considerable passage of time from creation to the death of Abel. In other words, there was plenty of time for several generations of people to be born and to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen 1:28). Considering all of this, Calvin’s suggestion is reasonable when he speculates that Cain was probably already married at the time of the murder. After all, who would want to marry someone who murdered his brother? Whatever the situation may have been, it is obvious that more people were around and that they were all related since all humans come from Adam and Eve. Cain must therefore have married his sister or a close relative. This is the understanding demanded by the biblical text and not surprisingly is therefore the traditional interpretation going right back to Jewish tradition.

Now we recoil at the thought of marrying a brother or sister. But there was no other way for mankind to multiply after the creation of the first humans. And the Lord God made this manner of increasing the population possible without negative effects. One needs to realize that in Adam and Eve’s time, so soon after the fall into sin, the genetics of those first people on earth had not yet been subjected to a long history of slow degeneration and the chances of producing deformed offspring was therefore minimal. After all, God had made everything perfectly and the effect of the curse on the genetic structure of mankind was just beginning. So God saw to it that one could marry his sister or another close relative with no risk to producing deformed children. As time went on and the necessity for such marriages disappeared, they were forbidden (cf. Lev 18:9).

The above answers the objection as to whom Cain could have married. The other objection lodged against Scripture as to whom Cain

could fear for his life is hereby also answered. The people who would likely be the most upset at Cain’s murder of Abel would be the closest relatives. At that point of history there would have been plenty of those around to make Cain fearful for his life.

The need to be vigilant

The pressure of evolutionism on Christians to make their understanding of Scripture shaped by the current scientific theory is greater than ever. Atheists such as Richard Dawkins openly mock the biblical account of creation and push evolution. Even evangelical organizations are getting into the act of convincing their fellow believers to accept evolution. The organization BioLogos (with which Peter Enns and Bruce Waltke are now associated) is committed to making evolution acceptable to the average evangelical. Their website raises the type of objections dealt with in this editorial and pushes evolution. So successful has this organization been that the periodical *Christianity Today* and The Gospel Coalition, a fellowship of evangelical churches, have judged the BioLogos’ impact on the evangelical scene to be one of the top ten stories in 2010.

The effect of all this pressure is starting to show. Just last year, the Christian Reformed Synod opened the door to accepting the theory that Adam had ancestors. It did this by removing from the church guidelines a 1991 declaration which opposed any theory that “posits the reality of evolutionary forebears of the human race” (*Acts of Synod 2010*, Art. 53). The pressure to accept evolutionary forebears does not stop at the Christian Reformed Church.

We need to be vigilant and oppose the widening trend to accept evolution as a fact. The clear teaching of Scripture must remain the first authority by which standard the conclusions of science are to be evaluated.





MATTHEW 13:52

Submitting to God

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"Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise – why destroy yourself?"

Ecclesiastes 7:16

This advice of the Preacher has to be seen against the background of what is outlined in the preceding verses. The theme he has been developing is that we do not know all God's ways with man. We cannot determine the reason for every setback, trial, or hardship. Already in chapter six, we are told that we cannot contend with God who is mightier than we are: "Who knows what is good for man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow?" (v. 12).

It is God who sends us riches and poverty, health and sickness, children and barrenness. Everything happens to us according to the will of our heavenly Father. He not only *knows* what will befall us in this vale of tears, but he also has *determined* it. Does that give us the right to criticize God? May we question him if he allows a just man to perish in his righteousness? No. God is sovereign and perfectly wise. To debate with him about what he sends upon his people is to overstep our limitation as creature.

"Patience is better than pride," we are told in verse eight. That contrast "patient-proud" suggests that patience is an aspect of humility and impatience is a proud irritation at God's ways with men. Someone who is patient quietly gives the matter over to the Lord and waits for his time. He does not ask, "Why were the old days better

than these?" (v. 10). We cannot face the difficulties of the age in which we live by pining for the past. Instead of always talking about and longing for a return of the "good old days," we must look ahead. We believe that God is pressing on toward the restoration of all things, but at the same time we confess that God's path toward the Last Day sometimes goes right through the deepest valleys of affliction, injustice, and misery.

Life remains as God intended it for you. No one can change that. We cannot improve on any of God's dealings with us or with the world. Do not find fault with God when he takes away a righteous man in the prime of his life, but lets a wicked one live beyond eighty. We cannot harmonize everything that God has decreed. The church acknowledges that in Article 13 of the Belgic Confession, "God's power and goodness are so great and beyond understanding that he ordains and executes his work in the most excellent and just manner, even when devils and wicked men act unjustly. And as to his actions surpassing human understanding, we will not curiously inquire farther than our capacity allows us."

No calling God to account if he allows the righteous to perish and the wicked to flourish. No trying to straighten the crooked lines that he has purposely laid. If he sends us prosperity we give him thanks,

knowing that he is the Fountain of all good. If he sends us adversity then we do not rebel against him. We humble ourselves before God, confessing his sovereignty, his right to do with us and to us what he desires. In good days we rejoice in God. In bad days we hope in God. Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other. But this Sovereign God is also our covenant God. His promises are trustworthy and true. His steadfast love endures forever.

That is the context in which we have to read the Preacher's advice about not being overly righteous and wise. We may not act as if we know better than God, telling him that brother Joe is so God-fearing that he doesn't deserve the sickness, or the handicap, or the poverty, that he is enduring. Simon Peter thought that about the Lord Jesus. His Master did not deserve to be arrested and killed. He had done nothing wrong; in fact, he had done a world of good. So when Judas and his gang came to arrest Jesus in the garden, Peter tried to prevent that from happening. He attempted to straighten what God had made crooked. He drew his sword and slashed off the ear of the high-priest's servant: "Nobody's going to crucify My Lord and Saviour."

With that act Peter opposed God. Jesus understood that. He lived according to the entire Word of God, also that which is revealed

Church News

Called by the Church at
Grand Rapids, MI, USA:

Rev. C. Bouwman
of Yarrow, British Columbia

Called by the Canadian
Reformed Church at Carman
East, Manitoba:

Rev. R.J. Eikelboom
of the Free Reformed Church
at Launceston, Tasmania, AU

in Ecclesiastes 7. That's why he rebuked Peter, saying, as it were, "It is God's will that I, a just man, should perish in my righteousness. Through my death you and all those who believe in me receive everlasting life. This crooked way, this sin of Judas and the leaders of Israel, is part of God's plan. They intend it for evil; but he will use it for good, to fulfil his plan of salvation. So put away your sword. How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must happen in this way?"

The godly suffer. Do not act wiser than God, opposing the affliction that God has given them to bear. The ungodly prosper. Do not be exceedingly righteous, scolding God for giving them health, long life, and wealth. In short, do not try to climb into the judgment seat of

God and dish out what you think the righteous and the wicked ought to have.

The Preacher even warns us what will happen if we attempt to do that. There will be repercussions: "Why destroy yourself?" It can indeed be translated in that way of bringing ruin and destruction upon oneself. It can also be rendered, "Why should you be distressed or bewildered?" You will be totally overwhelmed, confused, and perplexed. You will not be able to alter God's dealings with either the righteous or the wicked. Anyone who tries to grapple with things like this will eventually sink into a pool of bitterness and exasperation. If you let that get the better of you, then eventually you will bring upon yourself ruin. You will not be able

to cope with any trial or tribulation that God sends upon you or your loved ones.

Do not be overly righteous or wise. Since we cannot mend God's work, let us attend to the duties to which he has called us. Let us be good students of Jesus Christ and busy ourselves with the things that he revealed. They belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of his law (Deut 29:29).

C





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Exercising Stewardship

In the last article I spoke in-depth about the sinful motives which often lie behind our choices to over-eat or eat unhealthy foods. But a healthy body requires more than eating a balanced diet – it also requires a certain amount of exercise. What prevents me from exercising enough?

I don't have time

This has been one of my favourite excuses. Most of us recognize that good health requires a certain amount of exercise, of physical movement. It does not have to be overly-rigorous but the body is designed so that on a regular basis muscles need a little workout, the heart needs to pump a little more, the blood needs to flow a little faster. Expert opinions vary as to how much is enough but the accepted range seems to be that even as little as 20-30 minutes per day of walking, running, swimming, biking, skating, or the like will make a huge improvement in our health. *But I haven't got time!*

That's what we tell ourselves when work commitments swarm our desks and our minds. It's not that we are lazy or trying to slough off our obligations but we just can't shake the impression that there are so many more important obligations ahead of exercise. Wrong. Taking care of our God-given bodies for the honour of the Lord is no less important than fulfilling the duties of our daily job or functioning as a parent in our home. God gave us all these obligations and expects us to meet them all. Thus we have to *make* time. And if we see it as a priority, time can always be made – just look at your other top priorities and how time always gets made for them.

The other thing is, when we take the time to exercise our bodies we will soon find more energy and ability to fulfill our other tasks. It will actually help us function better and be more productive in those other areas. What we need to do is repent from a careless attitude toward the body God has given and ask the Lord for a renewed commitment to stewardship over his creation – me!

I don't enjoy it

This excuse applies to many things we resist by nature: obedience to authority, paying taxes, budgeting my finances so as to stay in the black to name a few. What we have to realize is that behind this excuse is the god of our personal pleasure which we've run into already. This god teaches us to choose and do only those things we like to do and leave the rest aside. The Bible teaches us to choose and do only those things which God likes, to bend our wills to his and to find pleasure in pleasing him, not ourselves. If, "I don't enjoy it" is our excuse, once again repentance is the solution because it pleases God when we manage our bodies in a healthy manner.

Many things that are good for us we do not enjoy – at first. But like most of them, once we give exercise a try, we will find it is better than we thought. Try something easy and work your way up. A short swim, a ten minute walk around the block, a bike-ride to the post office and back. Exercise helps strengthen muscles, build lung capacity, keep down excess weight and, once the pattern has taken hold, will leave you with a fit feeling.

Ongoing renewal

It's important in all this talk of sins of the heart to remember that repentance is an ongoing thing in our lives. The Lord Jesus has broken the power of sin so that it no longer is our master but until he returns, sin remains a mighty influence in our lives. Every day is a battle. We should not expect to beat our particular struggle in a snap – or in a day or a week or a month. There will be stops and starts, failures and successes, requiring daily repentance and daily renewal by the Holy Spirit. But don't give up! Don't get discouraged. As we live out of God's grace in this area of life and as the Lord Jesus works his benefits in us, a new pattern of healthy eating and exercising will emerge but for most of us it will be a fight (sometimes easier, sometimes harder) for the rest of our lives. We fight as victors but fight we must.

Lifestyle vs. diet

So, now that I've repented from the desires of my heart, what next? Practically speaking, how do I lose weight so as to become healthier and exercise stewardship over God's creation?

I recognize that there are oodles of ways to lose weight through diets of various sorts. In our home over the years we've tried all the main-line ones and not a few of the fringe ones. Pounds can fall off, even quite quickly, but in every case it proved to be temporary. Ask around and you'll discover that this is the experience of most others. The reason is simple: a diet is designed as a *temporary tool* to take off weight, not as a permanent tool to keep the weight off. Usually we abandon the diet because we find it too hard to maintain but even if we stick with it, eventually we have to quit it and return to some kind of "normal" eating. No one can lose weight forever. But at the point of leaving the diet is precisely when the weight begins to come back on simply because we return to our old habits. We haven't learned new ones. A diet by itself does not address the heart issues nor does it establish a new, permanent routine of healthy living.

God gave us all these obligations and expects us to meet them all

Diets have their place, particularly for those with certain medical conditions. And diets can help get a person's weight down faster. But better still is, from the beginning, to embark on a slow-but-steady overall lifestyle change that is designed to last. With the help of a doctor or some good nutrition advice, go through your current eating habits and assess what you eat, how much, and how often. Do the same for exercise. Then formulate a new plan for both, making incremental changes over time, changes which will be permanent.

Slow but sure

The idea is that we slowly reduce our food intake (adjusting also its quality, i.e. healthier foods) and slowly increase our exercise output. It will be a learning process, figuring out what to trim out of the daily menu (and what to exchange) and what to add to the exercise routine. It will take time to find a new rhythm to your daily habits that is effective and sustainable. To lose weight we will need to burn off

more energy than we take in but once we have lost the weight we need to lose (again, it's worthwhile to consult a doctor about a weight range target), then it will not be as difficult to switch over to maintenance mode. What will be required is a comparatively slight adjustment to the amount of exercise and/or food intake so that we begin to maintain our new weight (instead of losing more).

A "change your lifestyle" approach will be slower than a diet but it will be longer lasting too

Of course, based on what we've discovered in the first two articles, all of these new choices and new patterns need to be rooted in the daily (or better: constant!) prayer that God will give me the grace to honour him this day in caring for and nurturing the body he gave me.

The long-term

What I am advocating here is a long-term approach to glorifying God through the stewardship of your body. Diets often have a short-term goal of losing so many pounds in so many weeks. And behind that goal often lies other reasons: *I have to lose fifteen pounds before I'll be seen in my bathing suit; I must lose twenty pounds to fit into my suit or dress.* But if our focus every day is to show respect to our Creator and please him, then we'll enjoy "success" every day, regardless of whether we've dropped a certain number of pounds or can fit into a certain piece of clothing. The fruit of a lighter, healthier body is a blessing to be sought but our main goal remains to treat our body in a responsible, stewardly manner each day in order to honour God. This we can do as we depend on Christ's blood for forgiveness and on his Spirit for renewal and transformation.

Such a goal helps us to avoid short-term anxiety when things don't change fast enough, according to our initial expectations. A "change your lifestyle" approach will be slower than a diet but it will be longer lasting too. We should free ourselves from the pressure (found all around us) to "get into shape" in a matter of months to a more realistic time frame of two-to-three years. The spiritual battles take time to get on top of and learning new ways of eating and exercising take time too. Of course, there should be results for our efforts earlier and along the way but – depending on how far we

have to go – the end goal of arriving at a body weight and health regimen that is healthy and sustainable could take quite a while. That’s not a problem or a discouragement if our driving thought each day is to honour God.

Helping hearts

One of the greatest blessings we’ve found (my wife and I) is to undertake this lifestyle change with the encouragement and help of a friend. It could be your spouse or a close friend or maybe a small group of friends who have similar struggles. But to have someone who understands the struggles – spiritual and physical – someone who will pray for you and even with you for the Lord’s help, someone to go along with you and even make these same changes in their own lives, a partner who can encourage you and vice-versa, that ally is a precious blessing from the Lord and not to be underestimated. Ecclesiastes 4:9 says it well, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; if one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the

man who fall and has no one to help him up.” You can help each other in the fight, you can be each other’s accountability partner, you can phone and text each other for encouragement and even admonition. When one falls, the other is there to pick up and gently restore.

In this respect, our local church families can be a huge help. Why not start an “Encouragement Club” or something like it in your local church, for people struggling with issues like this and needing the boost of support that a brother or sister in Christ can provide? A weekly gathering to hear each other, open Scripture together to address the spiritual struggles, to pray with and for each other – would that not be a blessing for us and glorifying to our Saviour? After meeting for thirty minutes the group could walk for thirty minutes and immediately put into practice the godly principles that have been discussed.

Food, health, and our bodies are good gifts from God and together we can help each other make changes so that the Giver is honoured in how we handle the gifts.

C





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Living Waters from Ancient Springs

First Annual Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary Lecture Series

How do you honour someone who retires from thirty years of teaching seminary students, almost forty years of ministry?

First, you organize a conference where some of his colleagues and students speak, and he just enjoys the privilege of listening. That's what happened on Friday, January 7. On the premises of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, more than ninety people gathered together at a conference for the primary purpose of honouring Dr. Cornelis Van Dam and the secondary intent of gaining some knowledge about four subjects that would be presented throughout the day.

Second, you publish a book wherein those speeches and many more will be published. That is in the process of happening. A committee composed of three of Dr. Van Dam's former students (Rev. John Van Popta, Dr. Jason Van Vliet, and Rev. S. Carl Van Dam) have been busy organizing a festschrift of fifteen papers written by students and colleagues of our esteemed Old Testament professor (see the list elsewhere in this issue). Of those fifteen articles that are to be published, four were asked to present their talk on the occasion of the conference.

Dr. Gert Kwakkel, professor of Old Testament at the Theological University at Kampen, was first and delivered an address entitled "Exodus Narrative and Sinaitic Covenant." Therein he paid careful attention to the differences between the covenant in Exodus 19, 24, and 34, and discussed the unique place of the covenant described in Exodus 34 compared to that of Exodus 19. Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher, our New Testament professor, responded with some questions that helped to place this speech in the context of North American discussions about conditionality and the covenant.

Dr. Al Wolters, emeritus professor of Redeemer University College, presented a talk on "Wordplay and History in Daniel 5." Having learned his Aramaic

from Dr. Van Dam some years ago and having read Daniel 5 with him in class, Dr. Wolters thought it would be appropriate to take a detailed look at this passage and make some exegetical suggestions. Among other things, he examined the inscription in 5:5, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin," explored the levels of meaning here, and proposed an alternate translation of 5:26-28. It was rewarding to note how repeatedly Dr. Wolters' drew out aspects that underlined the historicity of the book of Daniel. Dr. Jannes Smith, our new Old Testament professor, successor to Dr. Van Dam, responded with some pertinent questions.

After lunch, Dr. James Visscher, pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church of Langley, presented a paper on "Bavinck on Creation." It became clear in this presentation that Bavinck, in the face of Darwin and geological science, affirmed creation as existing for the glory of God, defended its historicity, acknowledged creation days as extraordinary while at the same time departing from those who would make a creation "day" equal to thousands or millions of years. Dr. Jason Van Vliet, dogmatics professor, responded asking for more detail on the relationship between science and theology, as well as a clarification on what Bavinck meant by "extraordinary days."

Lastly, Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, former professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary and presently visiting professor at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, spoke on "The Old Testament, Ethics, and Preaching: Letting Confessional Light Dispel a Hermeneutical Shadow." In this address, Dr. Kloosterman critiqued the longstanding distinction between moral, civil, and ceremonial laws and suggested that Article 25 of the Belgic Confession would be a better model for teaching and preaching on matters pertaining to the Old Testament law. Dr. Arjan DeVisser, professor of Diaconology, by way of



some practical questions directed the audience to think about the consequences of this approach.

In each case, an engaged audience ensured that a lively discussion followed. While the meeting took place in the chapel, a brown bag lunch was provided for all as they disseminated throughout the building for lunch.

At the end of the day, Dr. C. Van Dam spoke some words of appreciation.

Visitors often note that the seminary is a quiet place – not surprising considering it is a place of study. On this day, however, it was a beehive of activity not only because of the academic discussions, but also because people met others whom they had not seen in years. In all of this, there was a sense of deep gratitude to God for what we have in the Seminary and in the men who teach there.

Besides teaching a whole generation of preachers, Dr. Van Dam has also published significant books and articles. He is recognized around the globe as the authority on the Urim and Thummim. He has even contributed significant articles to various journals. (You can find the titles here: http://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/faculty/c_vandam.html). Gratitude for his teaching is all the more in order since qualified Old Testament professors are few and far between. And gratitude to God for providing yet another man in his place is appropriate as well. It is only because of God's blessing that Dr. Jannes Smith, a recognized scholar in Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) studies, has been found ready and able to take on the task of succeeding Dr. Van Dam.

Also from this place, it's my pleasure to congratulate my colleague and friend, Cornelis Van Dam. Like not a few others, it has been my pleasure to be both a student and colleague of our brother. Some years before he was a seminary professor and before I was a seminary student, I learned my first Hebrew from him. Which of us would have imagined that later we would serve side by side as professors of Old and New Testaments? It has been a pleasure, brother. And we all wish you and your dear wife, Joanne, the Lord's blessing as you enter those well deserved retirement years.

If you missed the conference, it does not mean you have to miss out on its benefits. Audio recordings of the speeches can be found here: http://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/general/conference_2011.html. And the book with all the speeches plus many more will be published this



summer by Pickwick Publications (Wipf & Stock) under the title *Living Waters from Ancient Springs*.

And do note this aspect of the conference title. It has been billed as the "First Annual. . ." The Lord willing, there is more to come. May our gracious God continue to bless us in obedience and gratitude to him.

Book Notice

Living Waters from Ancient Springs: Essays in Honour of Cornelis Van Dam

Editor: J. Van Vliet

Publisher: Pickwick Publications, Eugene, OR;
forthcoming summer 2011

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Geertsema, Jakob – *The Lamb's Scroll of Life in Revelation 5*

Janssen, R.C. (Karlo) – *Springs of the Offices*

Kloosterman, Nelson D. – *The Old Testament, Ethics, and Preaching: Letting Confessional Light Dispel A Hermeneutical Shadow*

Kwakkel, Gert – *The Sinaitic Covenant in the Narrative of the Book of Exodus*

Rose, Wolter – *How Will God Deal With Children of Parents Who Have Committed Idolatry?*

Smith, Jannes – *Social Injustice and the Existence of God: A Commentary on the Old Greek Text of Psalm 57*

Van Dam, S. Carl – *Call Me Father! The Grief and Desire of a Loving Father*

Van Vliet, Jason – *Specious Pacification and Pleasant Consensus: Calvin's Ecumenical Efforts in 1549*

VanGemeren, Willem A. – *Our Missional God: Redemptive-Historical Preaching and the Missio Dei*

Visscher, Gerhard H. – *The Epistle of James: Justification or Sanctification?*

Visscher, James – *Bavinck on Creation*

Wolters, Al – *Wordplay and History in Daniel 5*

*alphabetically arranged here, but will be topically arranged in the final publication



Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I have been watching the development of the new doctrine of election of office bearers in the CanRC with sadness. In particular the capitulation of *all* to the notion that voting is not a matter of authority. This was again highlighted in the year-end review in *Clarion* by Dr. J. Visscher. This capitulation by *all* dooms any appeal of the women's voting decision of the last synod, 2010. This change is a serious error.

When God calls, he calls with authority!

In the past the CanRC acknowledged that it is God who called his office bearers to serve. Upon installation, elected office bearers were asked to acknowledge God's call through the congregation. Therefore the voting of new office bearers is rightly viewed as a joint exercise in authoritative calling. Those elected to positions of elder and deacon must have legitimate reasons to refuse to be installed. There also has to be weighty reasons to release a minister of the Word or any elder or deacon from his call. I have read instances where ministers in other churches "resign" and advertise for a new position as if their calling was just another job. Have we arrived

at the point that we view our office bearers in this way? Who can safely resist God's call?

The churches have acknowledged the role of the congregation in the Church Order Article 3. The body of elders that govern the church are not allowed to bypass the congregation in the selection of new office bearers. Their authority is limited in that respect. In both the Old and New Testament the men of the congregation were commanded to choose elders, deacons, and on one occasion an apostle. In all instances those charged with responsibility of oversight appointed those selected by the assembled congregation and not someone else of their own choosing. This would demonstrate that subject to limiting qualifications, the men of the congregation were charged with the selection of the individuals who would be the new office bearers. Those choosing office bearers are involved in God's authoritative calling of office bearers for *his* church. To characterise this work as



simply indicating a preference is wrong and loses sight of the significance of the calling attached to these offices.

The body of elders is *not* charged with the responsibility to choose office bearers for the congregation. They are to ensure that those selected are qualified and that all things are done in a lawful, Godly, orderly way and appoint those selected by the congregation.

The way forward for the CanRC is for all to rediscover that it is God who calls his elders and deacons authoritatively and for that task he uses the choice of his congregation.

*Thank you,
Bert Nieuwenhuis*

Response

Dear Brother,

In your letter you make a number of assertions:

1. "The voting of new office bearers is rightly viewed as a joint exercise in authoritative voting."

Comment: I am not sure where this language comes from; however, it is not the language of the Church Order which states in Article 3 that "the election to any office shall take place with the cooperation of the congregation. . . ." Note that while the congregation is being asked to cooperate, the Church Order does not speak about either a "joint exercise" or about "authoritative voting."

2. "In both the Old and New Testament the men of the congregation were commanded to choose elders, deacons, and on one occasion an apostle."

Comment: It would have been helpful if you had supplied biblical references for this statement. Where in the OT were the men of the congregation commanded to choose elders or deacons? As for the NT, you cite the matter of an apostle being chosen and no doubt have Acts 1 in mind. The problem is, however, that Acts 1 is not at all clear as to who precisely is being addressed or who did the voting or the casting of lots. Some commentators are of the opinion that when Peter refers to "Brothers" (literally "Men and Brothers"), he is addressing the apostles only, or the apostles

and the males present, or the apostles and the entire body of 120 believers, male and female.

3. "The men of the congregation were charged with the selection of the individuals who would be the new office bearers. Those choosing office bearers *are* involved in God's authoritative calling of office bearers for *his* church."

Comment: Again, can you prove that the "men" of the congregation were involved in an "authoritative" manner? Does this view not undermine the Reformed principle that the elders rule the church? Since when is ruling in the church a matter of a combined rule of elders and male members?

On the matter of congregational involvement, it would be good for all of us to read carefully Article 3 of the Church Order. This article specifies that the congregation should be involved in the election of office bearers by way of nomination and approbation.

As for the matter of election, the consistory is free to appoint directly (it can present "as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled") or it can involve the congregation and ask it to choose (it can present "at the most twice as many, from which number the congregation shall choose as many as are needed").

Nowhere does it limit the matter of election to male members only. Such has been the practice, and it may well continue to be the practice in most of the churches; however, it is not, nor has it ever been, a requirement of the Church Order of Dort.

Finally, you assert that voting is a matter of authority and that Synod by saying it is not so committed "a serious error." Years ago when I wrote most of the Report on Women's Voting that was submitted to Synod Smithville 1980 I would have agreed with you, but the arguments presented at that synod to the contrary, the subsequent input of my senior colleagues, as well as further prayerful reflection on the matter convinced me that if voting is authoritative, it is and must be contrary to the principles of Reformed church government. In and through voting the congregation indicates to the consistory who it deems to be the most suitable among the suitable. It is being asked to declare its preference and not to exercise its authority for it has none to exercise.

JV

*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.*



Jason Heemsker is the principal at the John Calvin Christian School in Burlington, Ontario

How Beneficial are Educational Traditions?

Every once in a while, an educator looks back at the day and asks, "Why?" This question can be directed at the image of a student, it can be self-reflective, or it may be to challenge some of the time-honoured school traditions. For instance, why do we ask children to line up so often? Is it so that they know how to behave in the checkout line of the local supermarket, or is it simply organization? Why do we insist on teaching cursive writing in the elementary system? Is it truly of benefit for developing sophisticated thought processes in young writers, or is it simply an exercise used to torture young hands that have not developed the necessary gross motor skills to master the art at the age of nine (or thirty-five for that matter)? We do our educational system a disservice if we do not take the time to rethink some of the time-honoured and well-tested ways of doing things. One of the areas that we should be questioning, especially in the elementary system, is homework.

Jack Prelutsky wrote a poem about homework which resonates with many children at most school levels. It speaks of all the things a child would like to do to his/her homework, if they had the power to do so: "They would explode it to bits because it is giving them fits, they would rather pet ten porcupines than tackle the homework that their teacher assigns," and "Homework stinks." These sentiments have a ring of truth to them, and not just for children. It is likely that parents often dread the work that their child's teacher assigns as much as, if not more than, the child. Perhaps surprisingly, teachers, at times, dread homework as well.

Homework debunked

At times, this dread is well founded. Alfie Kohn, a well-known lecturer and author in the field of education, has challenged many of the conventional methods of teaching and learning. Over the years, Kohn has challenged many practices that are common in schools, including grading students' work to assess their individual level of learning, as well as using school wide standardized testing as a way to evaluate the quality of a program. His recent book is entitled, *The Homework Myth: Why our Kids Get Too Much of*

a Bad Thing. In this work Kohn reflects on homework practices throughout North America. He challenges the premise that homework is beneficial to our children and education system. He argues that continuing the school day at home does no good: it burdens the parents who need to help and supervise and it adds undue stress in the lives of children who already take school seriously. You couple those two, he continues, and you end up with family conflict, especially if the child struggles in school. This results in less time for other non-academic family activities, since the child needs to be sure that the homework for the next day is finished. To cap it all, according to Kohn's research, homework results in less interest in learning, since students see learning as an unpleasant means to an end they may not understand.

As Alfie Kohn describes it, homework is truly a needless burden. The idea that after a lesson, a teacher will assign work for which there is not time given in class does not make much sense. That a child would be given the task of learning new concepts, in the way the teacher expects without the teacher present, can quickly lead to frustration by all the parties involved: students, parents, and teachers. Kohn also challenges the idea that more time on task will result in a better education for our children. Time is not the determining factor according to Kohn. He writes, "It turns out that *more hours are least likely to produce better outcomes when understanding or creativity is involved.*" (p.105)

Working with the evidence presented in many studies, Kohn comes to the conclusion that homework has destroyed many a child's interest in learning. Yet, he states, it persists in being the number one way that school boards, educators, and parents prove that a school is being effective. The following paragraph begins to explain why he feels this:

Although the evidence doesn't support the idea that homework leads to more effective learning or even higher test scores, that often does not seem to matter. No independent success is required because homework has symbolic value. Moreover, it's a popular way to demonstrate a commitment to that objective because it is cheap and asks almost

nothing of officials and relatively little of educators – at least compared to other, more meaningful changes that could be made. (p.130)

Kohn goes on to debunk another commonly accepted reason for assigning additional school work to be done at home. Let me cite one example from my own experience as a teacher to illustrate. It used to be that one of my most widely used excuses for adding to the work load of students was, “When you get to high school. . .” (I suppose a high school teacher would rephrase and say, “When you get to the *real* world. . .”) I remember a time when I was being particularly hardnosed with my class about the due date of an assignment, which, in my view, they had plenty of time to complete at home. I pulled out the highly polished excuse for being uncaring, as stated above, and this seemed to work fairly well to quiet the thirteen year old “rebels” that had tried to hijack my supreme command of due dates and scheduling. That night I had a phone call from a parent, asking why I was working so hard at ruining her child’s high hopes for actually enjoying school at the secondary level. An excellent question.

Kohn describes my folly as the “BGUTI grounds” for homework (p. 144). BGUTI stands for “Better Get Used To It.” In other words, the rationale for homework today is the fact that you are going to get more homework later on. This was my rationale with my grade eight class, and a parent’s comments made me reflect upon my practises. (It is interesting to note, though, that the complaint was not about the amount of homework assigned, but rather the reason for insisting it be done.) How many other practices do we adhere to in our educational system that are done simply because our children will be forced to do it in the real world? Let’s look at line-ups, cursive writing, maybe even jumping jacks? Are these truly valuable skills in our society today?

Kohn challenges the idea that homework prepares people for the real world of being workers in a global economy as well. Rather, he states, “education could be viewed as a way to do what is best for each child, as a way to create a just and democratic society,” or to put it in the terms of our schools, to help parents equip their children to be a light to the world and salt to the earth.

Kohn has many other valid points which educators should pay attention to. Sending new concepts home for students to learn, or assigning worksheets for extra practice of a skill that is not quite developed, may do more harm than good. To go even further, if a particular skill is well-developed, why should more time be spent on it at home? Kohn presents a compelling argument for ending the practice of sending home homework as a tool to enhance learning.

Education demands reflection

The question is, if one buys into his logic, what happens? Well, we reflect on our practices. Parents and teachers both need to think carefully about how our schools are set up. Do we blindly do what we have always done, or do we question our practices, to reaffirm that there is a purpose to them? In our schools, that purpose is much greater than developing good citizens. We need to be sure that all of our educational practices, from homework to discipline, are done to the glory of our Father. In order to make that call, as parents and educators, we need to keep the goal of our schools in mind. Look at the mission statement of your school. Does it say anywhere in that statement that the school’s purpose is to make good little economists, who will unthinkingly do whatever they are told? Is our mission to produce as much product from our students as possible, to get maximum output, with minimum input? Hopefully not! Instead, it should state something about how our schools are there to help parents teach their children all of the wonderful deeds of the Lord! We need to hold each other accountable to this mission. Our schools need to implement the best practises they can for attaining the school’s mission.

Does Alfie Kohn have all the answers? He seems to think he does. But even if he is wrong, and after reading some of his work, one cannot help but wonder at his ability to ask questions about areas where many others fear to tread. For this reason alone, *The Homework Myth* is a great read for educators and parents. We need to be continually asking questions about why we do what we do and how we can do it better. It will be beneficial to ask these questions about homework but also about all the other areas of education that we tend to take for granted. Do we do things in our schools that inadvertently hinder a love of learning?

Parents and teachers have a responsibility to guide the development of the gifts the Lord has given his children. All aspects of education can and should be used in a way that promotes the use of these talents to God’s glory. There are going to be assignments which need to be completed after school hours. Studying, reading, and completing unfinished work are all part of the task that the Lord has placed in front of our youth. Students are going to have to line up; it is part of our method of maintaining order. Cursive writing remains a skill that should be taught so that we can communicate effectively with one another. . . or is it? All three parties involved in education need to be sure that the time spent is on quality work, which will develop a love of learning, not a loathing of it.



Ray of Sunshine

Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

Waiting In Prayer

Help me, Father, again this day
Teach me patience to wait for You
Even though I may not understand
I'll trust in You and be faithful too.

Forgive me, Father, when I sin
I repent of all I've done wrong
Let Your will be known to me
When I am weak. . . You are strong.

Shelter me, Father, from life's storms
The clouds dim my vision as I go
When I falter, help me up again
Protect me while the wild tempests blow.

Guide me, Father, as I press on
Lead me with Your powerful hand
I know not where my path may lead
Yet, it is known in Your great plan.

Hold me, Father, in Your embrace
Surround me always with Your love
I try to follow and then stumble again
Direct me 'til I reach Heaven above.

Thank You, Father, for on this day
I will try to patiently follow your way
Giving You the glory in all I say;
For in the Name of Jesus this I pray.

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in this month of March. We hope and pray that you will have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. May we all continue to "be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to

the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His love" (HC, Q/A 28).

Birthdays in March

- 3 **TREVOR HOF SINK** will be 33
14407 McQueen Road
Edmonton, AB T5N 3L3
- 10 **JAMES BOONE** will be 15
c/o 2105 -17 Street North
Lethbridge, AB T1H 4W8
- 12 **GERRY EELHART** will be 49
10952- 125 Street
Edmonton, AB T5M 0L6
- 14 **LISA ALKEMA** will be 30
3217 Twin Oak Crescent
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8
- 15 **JIM VANDERHEIDEN** will be 52
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

"This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." With this we will sign off till the next month.

A note to all parents and caregivers

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

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms
8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
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Faithfully Fit: A 40-Day Devotional Plan to End the Yo-Yo Lifestyle of Chronic Dieting by Claire Cloniger and Laura Barr

(W Publishing Group, 1991)

Description

A highly recommended devotional plan! Each entry is approximately two to three pages in length, easily read in five to ten minutes at some point in your day. Included is a short commentary, a Scripture passage, a brief but beautiful and honest prayer, and a one or two line "Food for Thought" to consider. This is followed by two or three optional "assignments" ranging from a suggested new approach to exercise, a topic to explore in a reflective journal entry, or a recommendation to call a friend to discuss a particular aspect of your struggle.

Strengths

This devotional is very Christ-centred and written with a strong focus on the renewing power of the Holy Spirit. The authors clearly state that we are unable to help ourselves and that it is only through Christ that we can overcome the struggle with overeating. While they do not use the biblical term "sin" to describe overeating or the poor care of our bodies, they basically say the same thing with different words. They assess the core issue as a "spiritual" one that involves "guilt." They write that "the problem is us" and call for the need to "surrender" our bad habits, poor eating and our wills over to Christ. Similarly, the authors speak of "being healed and made whole" rather than specifically calling for "repentance." In the end, particularly with our Reformed understanding of original sin and total depravity, we can follow their biblical line of thought and fill in the blanks where necessary.

Cloniger and Barr clearly emphasize the need to be *what we are*, "a created being designed to walk in perfect harmony with [our] Creator." They do not encourage any radical solutions like foregoing all bread, or adding ninety minutes of running to your daily regimen, or cutting out all carbohydrates. They advocate just a simple, biblical solution, "[Lord], help me to choose healthy foods in moderate amounts to nourish this body of mine, remembering that you designed me in love."

These women know what they're talking about, having struggled personally with these issues. That empathy and example is so vital for the typical over-eater who feels like the only "loser" in the world who has this problem. These ladies get it! And they want to help!

Weaknesses

Sometimes what appears to be an Arminian perspective comes through. There is a repeated calling upon the reader to "allow" God to work in you, or to give "the Lord permission" to help us in our struggle. Of course, we don't "allow" or "permit" the Lord to do anything – he is Lord and will do as he pleases! And yet we certainly can (and often do) neglect our calling and obligation and even throw up resistance to the work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51) and so the authors are right to exhort us to change our ways – or better, to repent!

If we keep this weakness in mind and filter it out with a proper understanding of our place and calling before our sovereign God, this devotional has a great deal to offer us in the spiritual struggle which underlies the treatment of food and our health. I have personally found it very helpful to put food in proper perspective and keep me focused on Christ. I consider the greatest weakness of this devotional to be that it is only forty-two days long. It should be 365!

C

